

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the General Services Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 08 October 2024 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Richards (Chairman)
Councillors: Elugwu, Hodgson, and Strangwood.

Alternate
Members: Councillor Biegel (for Councillor Urwick).

Officers: Mark Hassall (Town Clerk & RFO)
Paul Almond (Director of Environment)

GS.16/24 Apologies for Absence
Councillor Urwick.

GS.17/24 Declarations of Interest
None.

GS.18/24 Minutes of the Last Meeting
IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 August 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

GS.19/24 Income & Expenditure Report
The Committee considered a report prepared by the Town Clerk & RFO comparing year-to-date income and expenditure with the projected annual budget for the financial year. The report showed all expenditure incurred up to 30 September 2024.

Officers responded to a range of questions from Members relating to various budget codes and financial procedures. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that overall the Committee's expenditure was within forecast versus the phased YTD budget.

General Services variances were principally:

- ◆ Staffing costs remained within budget, subject to central government annual salary increases agreed with trade unions.
- ◆ Planned roof repairs at Southam Road depot were completed and fibreglass burial chambers purchased. Offset by timing of headstone beam installation, annual BACS software license and tree works.
- ◆ Timing of invoicing for grounds maintenance works impacted by timing of September invoice across Parks. Replacement light columns had been installed in People Park, the beginning of a wider replacement programme across the estate.
- ◆ Tree works orders had largely been completed, balancing available resources with recommendations from scheduled independent arboriculture inspections over an ongoing three-year timeframe.
- ◆ Hanwell View MUGA and Public Open Space (POS) had been transferred, along with S106 contribution, to be recognised over the next 15 years of maintenance.
- ◆ The two-year lease of cricket pitch facilities at Hanwell Fields was underway, and associated additional investment in machinery had been undertaken. Pre-season works have been completed across the sports facilities.

IT WAS RESOLVED to receive and note the Income and Expenditure report.

GS.20/24 Revised & Draft Revenue Estimates

The Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk & RFO seeking approval of the revised estimates for 2024/25 and consideration of the draft estimates for 2025/26. The estimates included income from fees and charges, which for 2025/26 currently remained unchanged from the current year, subject to receipt of guidance from Members. The estimates for 2025/26 had been set based on a 2% rise in precept, and a rise of 2% in households in the town due to general housing growth. A 4.0% inflation rise in salaries and contract costs had been assumed, or greater where specified.

The following comments on the estimates as they related to this committee were materially relevant:

COST CENTRE 101 Litter Control & Cleansing

Contractual costs linked to inflation had risen higher than anticipated in the 24/25 budget.

Cost Centre 103 Southam & Hardwick Cemetery

Light column replacements in People's Park, tennis court refurbishment and increased capital costs associated with vehicle fleet replacement, funded through earmarked reserves in 24/25 and 25/26.

Cost Centre 110 Parks and Open Spaces

Grant funding of Tennis refurbishment in People's Park. Replacement of light columns in People's Park and Princess Diana Park across from 2024-2026. Replacement of ride on mowers and work on Longlandes retaining wall.

Cost Centre 114 Park Rangers

Vehicle fleet replacement from earmarked reserves in 25/26.

Cost Centre 120 Football Pitches & Horton View

Reduced cricket expenditure in 25/26 following the purchase of GM equipment in 24/25 aligned with Cricket pitch lease.

Cost Centre 160 Capital costs

Directing of play equipment replacement funds to revenue budget in line with General Services direction to focus on increasing play value across the estate.

RESOLVED

- (1) that the revised estimates for 2024/25, as now submitted, be approved and the draft estimates for 2025/26 be referred to the Grants and Budget Sub-Committee for further consideration; and
- (2) that an inflationary increase of all fees and charges to the nearest practicable amount for 2025/26 be agreed, in the light of any fee changes over the last two years.

GS.21/24 Parks and Cemeteries Service

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Environment providing an update for Members on:

Parks & Cemeteries Team.
4th Corner Landscape Contract.
Wild Flower Creation.

Ranger Service / Play Areas.
Cleansing Service.
Parks Lighting.
Tennis Court – Peoples Park.
PlayZone Schemes.

Parks & Cemeteries Team

The team were up to date with the scheduled work. The Cricket Square at Hanwell Fields Sports Ground and the bowling green at Horton View had received post season maintenance. The initial marking of the football pitches was undertaken and completed in readiness for the start of the season.

The annual beds had been stripped of the summer plants and prepared ready for planting the Spring Bedding. Burial duties in Cemeteries had been delivered in line with bookings, despite the problems experienced with the extreme inclement weather. The team had also been busy preparing vacant or surrendered allotment plots to enable them to be re-let to new tenants and preparing to undertake the winter prune of all shrubs and hedges.

4th Corner Landscape Contract

4th Corner had been experiencing some difficulties with staff resources, which had led to some of the scheduled work not been undertaken in-line with the schedules. The second weed treatment of roadside channels was delayed and was not completed until the beginning of September.

Delays were also experienced on the shrub and hedge works schedule and the monthly spiking of the sports pitches was also not undertaken in September. 4th Corner were focused on recovering the position on the shrub and hedge works, however, the opportunity for the third weed spray and the sports pitch spiking for September had now gone.

The sports ground reinstatement was successful and germination on the worn areas was good and mowing prior to the start of the season was undertaken, ensuring the facilities were presented well for hirers.

The Council's Landscape Officer continued to closely monitor operations and worked with the contractor to ensure services were delivered in line with the agreed programme of works.

Wild Flower Creation

The contractor was booked in to sow the yellow rattle seed at the start of September, in line with the best time recommended, but work had been delayed due to bad weather. A verbal update was given on progress, which indicated that all site preparation work was now completed and an alternative sowing method might need to be used. If no more rainfall occurred then the work should be completed during the week, but if not then it was unlikely that the work would be completed this year.

Ranger Service / Play Area Update

The Park Ranger Team continued to keep up to date with the weekly Health & Safety inspections. The independent Annual Inspections had been ordered and repairs to play areas based on inspection findings were ongoing. The Ranger team had assisted the events team in the preparation of and attendance at the Summer programme.

There had been further specialist repairs needed to the skate ramp at Spiceball Park, so far, this financial year the costs of repair to the riding surface had been £20,000, compared to £15,000 in 2023/24 financial year. These ongoing costs would continue and might increase as both the riding surface and the substrate were degrading due to age. Officers planned to bring back a report for the complete replacement of the riding surface and substrate on both the advanced and beginner's ramps, providing cost options for a birch timber riding surface and substrate (as originally fitted) or a Skatelite Pro riding surface (composite material) with a birch substrate. The aim was to complete this work in time for the next summer school holidays.

Cleansing Service Update

Facility Cleaning had been undertaken satisfactorily with no problems to report. The cleaning of the toilets and the pavilion at Hanwell Fields had continued, and deep cleaning of pavilions prior to the start of the football season had been completed. Weekly cleans following use was now in place.

The Parks & Open Spaces Cleansing service provided by Cherwell District Council was being delivered in line with the Service Level Agreement, with no issues to report.

Parks Lighting Update

The replacement of all columns at People's Park was due to be completed by the end of October. The condition survey report of all other lighting columns in parks had been now been received. This had highlighted that the next site requiring replacement columns was Princess Diana Park. Officers will get costs to replace the old columns and install new columns in preparation for the new PlayZone to be installed in 2025. The Town Clerk and the Director of Environment also responded in detail to a question from a member regarding lighting issues in Moorfields Park that had been flagged up in a recent public consultation exercise.

PlayZone Scheme Update

The timescales for construction of the PlayZones at Princess Diana Park and Chandos Recreation Ground was still on track for Spring of 2025

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

The meeting ended at 7.45pm