

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources Committee held at 6.30pm on Tuesday, 03 September 2024 in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Councillor Hussain (Chairman)
Councillors: Biegel, Mears and Viatkus.

Alternate Members: Councillor Richards (for Councillor Eaton) and Councillor Strangwood (for Councillor Mallon).

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

R.9/24 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Eaton and Mallon.

R.10/24 Declarations of Interest

None.

R.11/24 Minutes of the last Meeting

IT WAS RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 June 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

R.12/24 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 19 August 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 and points to note were principally:

- ◆ Staffing costs, which remained within budget, subject to central government annual salary increases agreed with trade unions.
- ◆ Planned roof repairs at Southam Road depot had been completed and fibreglass burial chambers purchased. Variances were offset by timing of headstone beam installation, annual BACS software license and tree works.
- ◆ Timing of invoicing for grounds maintenance works were impacted by timing of July invoice across Parks, including the second weed spray application to street edging. 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 and with the final few days currently being undertaken, 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.
- ◆ A Contract had been completed for a two-year lease of cricket pitch facilities at Hanwell Fields and associated additional investment in machinery has been undertaken.

Resources variances and points to note were principally:

- ◆ Corporate, Central Administration and Civic budgets continued to be well controlled, with vacancies in central administration contributing a £24k underspend.
- ◆ Town Council Events were currently within acceptable budget parameters given the progress currently being made through the annual events calendar. A long discussion took place about the events programme and it was felt that a meeting of the Events WG was needed to feed into the budget process.
- ◆ Town Hall – includes prepayment of wedding license (£3k) offset by seasonality of utility costs.
- ◆ Other services to the Public included timing of small grants (including Warm Welcome grant scheme).
- ◆ Other Costs & Income were in line with projected budget, with election costs reserve to be released from Earmark reserves and treasury management of reserve funds ongoing to achieve projected annual budgeted income.

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

R.13/24 Staff Handbook & Policy Changes Update

The Committee considered a report seeking approval to a new Employee Handbook, Model Employment Contract and associated policies for staff at Banbury Town Council.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that the Council had a wide range of staffing policies in place which had remained largely unchanged since they were adopted in 2006, with some revision in 2018 by our outsourced personnel advisers, Ellis Whittam, and brought together into a staff handbook. The handbook was largely reflective of existing policies.

This spring officers had worked with Stan Horlock of Shape HR Solutions and Worknest Law (previously Ellis Whittam) to update the Councils Staff Handbook and model Contract of Employment to reflect statutory requirements. This review involved updating the relevant policies to reflect the changes in the Handbook and good practice where the policies went wider than the Handbook. Key changes were summarised at Annex 1 to the Committee report (and this is reproduced as Appendix 1 to these Minutes). The individual policy documents were also further attached at **Appendix A-H** of the Committee report and these will be recirculated to all Members prior to their consideration at the Council Meeting. The updates to policies reflected statutory requirements and current best practice.

IT WAS RECOMMENDED to the Council that the Employee Handbook and under-mentioned policy documents be adopted, with or without any changes:

- Appendix A - Staff Handbook
- Appendix B - **Withdrawl** of Time Off For Dependants and Close Relatives Policy
- Appendix C - Grievance Procedure
- Appendix D - Disciplinary Policy & Procedure
- Appendix E - Parental Leave Scheme
- Appendix F - Maternity Leave Policy
- Appendix G - Flexible Working Policy
- Appendix H – Model Employment Contract

The meeting ended at 7.21pm

APPENDIX 1

Handbook & Policy Changes – Summary

This spring I worked with Worknest Law to update the Councils Staff Handbook after which I updated the relevant policies to reflect the changes in the Handbook and good practice where the policies went wider than the Handbook. This document is a summary of the key changes to enable Councillors to see them at a glance rather than ploughing through numerous documents.

Staff Handbook Changes by Paragraph

- 1.5 An Environmental Statement has been included
2. 'How we do things' has the following amendments:
 - 2.9 A new paragraph referring to the use of mobile phones when working (Page 13)
 - 2.15 A new section covering damage to Council property and other property (Page 21)
 - 2.16 A new section covering statements to the media, parking on council property and the use of CCTV (Page 22)
- 3.2 Under the Code of Conduct at Section 3, Gross Misconduct is more comprehensive to bring it more up to date with current misconduct behaviour (Page 23/24)
4. Absence has the following amendments:
 - 4.3 Adoption appointments are included (Statutory Responsibility) (Pages 26/27)
 - 4.4 Sickness absence has been updated to refer to fit notes (Pages 27/28)
 - 4.7 Parental Bereavement Leave included (Statutory Responsibility) (Pages 31/32)
 - 4.10 Carers Leave added (Statutory Responsibility) (Pages 34/35)
5. Flexible working and family leave - now includes a section in the introduction covering the wider redundancy protection when on family leave (Statutory Responsibility) (Page 36)
 - 5.1 Flexible Working is amended to reflect current legislation and Acas guidance (Statutory Responsibility) (Pages 36/37)
 - 5.7 Keeping in Touch Days is far wider than just maternity leave. (Statutory Responsibility) (Page 45)
6. How we resolve issues – now includes a paragraph in the introduction about the recording of meetings. (Page 48)
 - 6.2 Sickness absence now also includes a trigger of five days absence over five months. (Page 52)
(6.3 Bullying & Harassment has now been moved to 7.3)
 - 6.3 Disciplinary procedure has a new penultimate paragraph that deals with criminal allegations against staff. (Page 58)
 - 6.4 The grievance procedure is more comprehensive and includes a process for former employees in the final paragraph aimed at reducing the risk of an employment tribunal. (Page 60)

7. A totally new section entitled Equal Opportunities, Diversity and Inclusion and is necessary in order for the Council to comply with its 'public sector equality duty,' (Statutory Responsibility) and incorporates good practice.
 - 7.1 The Councils Equality Statement and Commitment (Page 61)
 - 7.2 Menopause Policy (Page 65)
 - 7.3 Bullying & Harassment (Pages 66-68)
 - 7.4 Monitoring equal opportunities and dignity at work (Pages 68/69)

Policy Changes

Policy - Time Off For Dependants and Close Relatives

Recommendation – Withdraw this policy as it is covered at length in the Staff Handbook

Policy – Grievance Procedure

Recommendation – Accept this new policy that reflects the Staff Handbook apart from last sentence in Paragraph 1.3 of the policy that refers to complaints against the Town Clerk as this is relevant to the policy.

Policy – Disciplinary Policy & Procedure

Recommendation – Accept this simplified policy that reflects the Staff Handbook and includes a simplified procedure that refers to 'hearings' rather than 'interviews' and removes the adversarial approach of calling witnesses and cross examining them - in effect creating a pseudo court scenario. This approach is somewhat outdated and is not conducive to people coming forward as witnesses and in cases of bullying and harassment will potentially lead to further victimisation. Thorough investigations and written notes of interviews negate the need for a pseudo court scenario at a disciplinary hearing.

Policy – Parental Leave Scheme

Recommendation – Accept this amended policy that reflects the Staff Handbook, The Green Book, Government Guidance and Acas.

Policy – Maternity Leave Policy

Recommendation - Accept this amended policy that reflects the Staff Handbook including the statutory change regarding redundancy in the second paragraph, and Green Book recommendations.

Policy – Flexible Working Policy

Recommendation – Accept this new policy that reflects the Staff Handbook and is fully compliant with current legislation introduced 6 April 2024.

Stan Horlock BA (Hons) FCIPD
HR Advisor