

Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting

held in the Council Chamber, Emersons Green Town Council,

1900hrs on Thursday 26th January 2023.

- Present:** Cllr James Hunt (Chair), Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), David Somers (Deputy Mayor), Colin Hunt, Caroline Johnson, and Christopher Edwardson.
- Absent:** None.
- In attendance:** Town Clerk, Ian Lyons.
- Apologies:** Cllr Richard Nichols.
- Public:** None.
- Notes:** The meeting began at 1900hrs. All resolutions are passed with a majority vote, by a show of hands, unless otherwise stated.

FIN_2022.99 Welcome and Introductions.

- Minutes:** Cllr James Hunt (Chair) welcomed everyone present at the meeting and explained the emergency procedures.

FIN_2022.100 Declaration of Interest – Localism Act 2011.

- Minutes:** Cllr James Hunt (Chair) reminded members of the requirement to declare an interest. No interests were declared.

FIN_2022.101 Public Participation.

- Minutes:** No members of the public were present.

COUNCIL ADMINISTRATION

FIN_2022.102 Minutes.

- Motion:** It was moved by Cllr James Hunt (Chair), supported by Cllr Colin Hunt, and resolved that:

- Resolved:** The Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on the 15th of December 2022, copies having been circulated, be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

Minutes: The minutes were signed at the meeting by Cllr James Hunt (Chair).

FIN_2022.103 Outstanding items from the previous minutes.

Minutes: At the invitation of Cllr James Hunt (Chair), the Town Clerk delivered a summary of the work undertaken as a result of the resolutions and action points from the previous meetings. As follows:

- The Worcester Boiler Maintenance Contract will begin in April 2023 when the warranty period expires.
- A suitable Roller Shutter Door (RSD) Service and Maintenance contract is proving difficult to find. Following due diligence, a one-off service was commissioned with Door Maintenance Co Ltd, for the 11 RSDs, on the 18th of December 2022. However, this did not prevent the failure of two RSDs on the 16th of January 2023, and an investigation was being conducted. The Town Clerk explained that other options were being explored.
- An update was provided on the progress of the Internal Audit, and the recommendation to update the procurement limits in the Financial Regulations.

FINANCE

FIN_2022.104 Bank Reconciliations.

Minutes: The committee read the circulated documents and they were signed by the Chair.

FIN_2022.105 Monthly Payments & Investments.

Minutes: Members examined the schedule, and the Town Clerk highlighted a payment of £1317.60, authorised by Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor and Chair of the Open Spaces Committee), which had been necessary to secure the allotment site with new planting.

Motion: It was moved by Cllr James Hunt (Chair), supported by Cllr Christopher Edwardson, and resolved that:

Resolved: The monthly payments list, copies having been circulated, be approved, and signed by the Chair.

Minutes: The Chair signed the payments list.

FIN_2022.106 Budget Monitoring.

Minutes: Members reviewed the circulated documents and had no questions.

FINANCIAL PLANNING

FC_2022.107 Citizens Advice.

Minutes: Members reviewed the circulated project report and business case, with several technical points discussed. After this, at the invitation of Cllr James Hunt (Chair), the Town Clerk provided the following summary and advice:

“On Thursday 27th October 2023, the Finance Committee resolved that “The Finance Committee provides Citizens Advice South Gloucestershire with a Grant of £1000 to provide residents of Emersons Green with a free advice service.” At the same meeting, the Town Clerk was instructed to write to the applicant to discuss providing an enhanced service for Emersons Green. On the 24th of November 2022, the Town Clerk delivered the response. As a result, Cllr Caroline Johnson and Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor) requested an agenda item to consider the business case for an enhanced service at the next opportunity.

LEGAL POWER OR DUTY TO ACT

- *Local Government Act 1972, s.142.*

RECOMMENDATIONS, CONDITIONS, AND OTHER CONTROLS

- *Decide on the merits of the enhanced service.*
- *If necessary:*
- *Resolve that: “The Finance Committee recommends that Full Council approve an additional Grant to Citizens Advice South Gloucestershire for £14,834.”*

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- *The merits of the enhanced service itself should be debated.*
- *The additional amount matches the ‘uplift’ requested in the proposal.*

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS & RISKS

If the Full Council approves this grant, it can be achieved within the current budget of £40,000, which includes £20,000 for s.137. The level of grants awarded year to date, including liabilities, is currently at £15,569, of which £3,400 is s.137 spending. Therefore, the remaining balance is £24,431 in total, £16,600 for s.137, and £7,831 for regular grants. Whilst this would mean that the budget for regular grants was exceeded, the overall level of grants and awards would remain under budget, with £9,597 available for the remainder of the financial year.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT

Citizens Advice provides people with the knowledge and confidence to make effective and efficient decisions, such as energy-saving measures, which are likely to reduce the environmental impact.

Motion: After this, it was moved by Cllr Caroline Johnson, supported by Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor), and resolved that:

Resolved: The Finance Committee recommends that Full Council approve an additional Grant to Citizens Advice South Gloucestershire for £14,834.

PROCUREMENT & CONTRACTS

FIN_2022.108 IT Hardware.

Minutes: At the invitation of Cllr James Hunt (Chair), the Town Clerk provided the following background, summary, and advice:

“On the 14th of July 2022, at Full Council, Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), supported by Cllr James Hunt (Chair of the Finance Committee), tabled a motion to Full Council “That Council delegates authority to the Town Clerk to replace the scheduled IT equipment as proposed, documents having been circulated.” After this, several Councillors questioned the accuracy and technical specifications listed in the circulated proposal and questioned the justification for early renewal.

For example, Cllr Simon Jones, suggested an alternative arrangement, with laptop docking stations, might be more suitable. In agreement, Cllr Christopher Edwardson, questioned if the current working practices could be adapted. After this, Cllr Richard Nichols argued that the Council is “not an emergency service”, suggesting that a short interruption of service, due to IT failure, could be tolerated.

At this point, Cllr James Hunt withdrew his support for the substantive motion, and instead it was moved by Cllr James Hunt, supported by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), and resolved that this item be deferred to a future meeting of the Full Council or Finance Committee.

Since then, Cllr James Hunt (Chair) and Cllr Christopher Edwardson have met with the Town Clerk and discussed alternative solutions. Furthermore, an appropriate budget and earmarked reserves have been agreed upon by the Full Council. This budget is already delegated to the Town Clerk, within the limits of the Scheme of Financial Delegation. However, given the background, clarification and endorsement is required.

LEGAL POWER OR DUTY TO ACT

- *Local Government Act 1972, s.111 & 133.*

RECOMMENDATION

- *Resolve that: “The Finance Committee approves the EGTC IT Procurement Strategy, example documents having been circulated”.*

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- *To provide employees with an efficient, reliable, and cost-effective IT solution.*
- *To meet the technical recommendations from the Council’s IT contractor.*

Almost everything the Council does relies on the use of IT equipment, and the reputation of the Council has been damaged when it does not function correctly, even for short periods. The Council’s IT contractor, Nebula IT, recommended replacing the equipment six months ago, before any failure. However, the option being presented is to replace old hardware with new, using the EGTC IT Procurement Strategy, as and when the need occurs.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has agreed on an IT budget of £20,000 for 2023/24, for routine costs, and an earmarked fund of £25,000 for IT Hardware, which should adequately cover our anticipated demand. However, the current budget for IT costs is £6,000, with current spending of £10,291,

partly due to significant 'ad-hoc' out-of-contract expenses at the start of the financial year, during the Town Clerk handover period, but also due to an increasingly active Council. In contrast, the Council has budgeted £6252 for communications, which is forecast to be significantly underspent, mainly due to the absence of a permanent clerk to write articles. Either way, the Council has substantial reserves held in General Contingency, earmarked reserves, with a year-end forecast of £237,772.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT

The new EGTC IT Procurement Strategy will attempt to reuse old IT equipment for a longer period of time, reducing the impact on the environment."

Minutes: After this, the Committee reviewed the IT Hardware Procurement Strategy document, and the Town Clerk delivered an explanation and clarification on the layout and scaling of each section. Alternative options were quickly explored but ultimately dismissed. However, there was an agreement that value for money should be a priority at all times. After this,

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Christopher Edwardson, supported by Cllr Colin Hunt, and resolved that:

Resolved: The Finance Committee approves the EGTC IT Procurement Strategy, example documents having been circulated.

FIN_2022.109 Procurement / Contract – Mobile Telephones.

Minutes: At the invitation of Cllr James Hunt (Chair), the Town Clerk provided the following background, summary, and advice:

"On the 14th of July 2022, the Full Council resolved that: "The Council delegates authority to the Town Clerk to switch the supplier of the broadband and telephone as proposed, documents having been circulated". In doing so, the Council avoided the renewal cost of £1,439.40 with British Telecom, and now has a Broadband and Landline service with Nebula IT at £576. However, we currently have only one handset, which is restricted to office use, between three members of staff. As an alternative to additional lines and handsets, the proposal is to issue members of staff with a mobile phone, in accordance with the EGTC IT Procurement Strategy.

LEGAL POWER OR DUTY TO ACT

- *Local Government Act 1972, s.111 & 133.*

RECOMMENDATION

- *Resolve that: "The Finance Committee delegates authority to the Town Clerk to commission mobile telephone, and related insurance, contracts at the Town Clerk's discretion, example copies having been circulated."*

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- *To provide employees with an efficient, robust, and reliable communication system, suitable for working outdoors.*
- *To provide mobile broadband for remote working on laptop computers.*
- *To provide a backup for office internet.*
- *To monitor social media accounts effectively and quickly moderate comments.*
- *To create and edit high-quality photos and videos for routine activities and events.*

- To meet the technical recommendations from the Council’s IT contractor.
- To provide an efficient security alarm cascade system.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has agreed on a £20,000 budget for IT and an £800 budget for Telephone in 2023/24, for routine costs, alongside an earmarked fund of £25,000 for IT Hardware, all of which should adequately cover our anticipated demand. However, the current budget for IT costs is £6,000, with current spending of £10,291, partly due to significant ‘ad-hoc’ out-of-contract expenses at the start of the financial year, during the Town Clerk handover period, but also due to an increasingly active Council. In contrast, the Council has budgeted £6,252 for communications, which is forecast to be significantly underspent, mainly due to the absence of a permanent clerk to write articles. Either way, the Council has substantial reserves held in General Contingency, earmarked reserves, with a year-end forecast of £237,772.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT

This will largely depend on the choice of manufacturer for the equipment. The example circulated is made from responsibly sourced primary materials, using supported local communities, and it can easily be reused and recycled. Likewise, it is provided using responsible packaging from a carbon-neutral company that is committed to transitioning its entire manufacturing supply chain to 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030, alongside many other initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of its products¹.

Minutes: After this, a lengthy discussion took place about the most suitable mobile phones for business use, integration with the Council’s IT Hardware Procurement Strategy, and the pricing structures available for various contracts. In the end, whilst the committee disagreed over prices, there was an agreement that value for money should always be sought. After this,

Motion: It was moved by Cllr James Hunt (Chair), supported by Cllr Christopher Edwardson, and resolved that:

Resolved: The Finance Committee delegates authority to the Town Clerk to commission mobile telephone, and related insurance, contracts at the Town Clerk’s discretion, example copies having been circulated.

EVENT APPLICATION

FIN_2022.110 The Coronation of His Majesty The King

Minutes: At the invitation of Cllr James Hunt (Chair), the Town Clerk provided the following background, summary, and advice:

“On the 13th of October 2022, the Full Council resolved that: “The Council creates an Events Working Group”. Since then, the Events Working Group has met, and discussed ideas. However, the timing of forthcoming elections has made the leadership decision a complication.

LEGAL POWER OR DUTY TO ACT

- Local Government Act 1972, s.145.

¹ Cook, T. (2022) *Environmental Social Governance Report*. [Online] Available at: https://s2.q4cdn.com/470004039/files/doc_downloads/2022/08/2022_Apple_ESG_Report.pdf (Accessed 24/01/2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS, CONDITIONS, AND OTHER CONTROLS

- *Review the application.*
- *Decide if the application requires deferral to Full Council.*
- *Resolve that: “The Finance Committee approves an event application from the Town Clerk with a budget of £10,000, copies having been circulated.”*

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- *To meet strategic objective E4 “Draw up a plan to provide more community-based events for local people.”*
- *To deliver the vision for the Council to “play its part in supporting the wider social and economic ambitions and aspirations of the area.”²*
- *To live up to the mission statement of the Council, which states, “using its allowable powers, Emersons Green Town Council will do all it can to create a welcoming and vibrant town, promoting civic pride and improving the quality of life for those who live, work and visit.”³*
- *To increase public participation and engagement with the Council.*

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has agreed on a £10,000 budget for events in 2023/24, not including the Calendar (£2,000) or Climate and Environmental (£1,500). However, the current budget for events is £4500, with current spending of £2,976. Inevitably, some of the invoices for this event will be met in different financial years. Either way, the Council has substantial reserves held in General Contingency, earmarked reserves, with a year-end forecast of £237,772.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT

A large proportion of the footprint could be mitigated by encouraging sustainable travel to attend the event, and by reducing the waste created by our partners. In fact, offering a local celebration, which is accessible on foot, could mitigate the need for local residents to travel further afield, which would have a greater impact.”

Minutes: To start with, Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) spoke in favour of the application and explained the difficulty with elections and leadership of this event, which meant that staff would be heavily relied upon for administrative functions. After that, Cllr Colin Hunt also spoke in favour, citing the popularity of the Royal Wedding, and the importance of supporting the King.

After this, the committee discussed the most appropriate way to deal with event applications, which had recently been delegated to the committee, and agreed that the same financial threshold of £5,000 should apply to grants and event applications. Therefore,

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), supported by Cllr Colin Hunt, and resolved that:

² EGTC (2022) Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027 p.4 ‘Our Vision for Emersons Green’.

³ EGTC (2022) Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027 p.4 ‘Emersons Green Mission Statement’.

Resolved: The Finance Committee recommends that the Full Council approves an event application from the Town Clerk with a budget of £10,000, copies having been circulated.

FIN_2022.111 Dates and Timings.

Minutes: Cllr James Hunt (Chair) announced that the next meeting of the Finance Committee was scheduled to take place:

Thursday 23rd February 2023 at 1900hrs in the Emersons Green Town Council Chamber.

Cllr James Hunt (Chair) concluded the formal business of the meeting at 2005hrs and announced that an informal 'round-table' discussion would take place afterward.