

## **Woughton Community Council**

### **Operations & Resources Committee**

**Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023, 6:30pm at the Woughton Community Council Hub, the Council Chamber, 60, Garraways, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes, MK6 5EG.**

**Present: Cllrs Jordan Coventry (Chair),** Maggie Ferguson, Donna Fuller, Ruth McMillan, Liz Simpkins, Sue Smith

**Also present:**

Brian Barton (Committee & Member Services Officer)  
Steve McNay (Council Manager)

**OC 112/23 Apologies:**

Cllr Luke Louis (personal)  
Cllr Amber McQuillan (personal)

**AGREED**

**OC 113/23 Declarations of Interest:**

There were no declarations of interest.

**NOTED**

**OC 114/23 Chairs Announcements:**

There has been movement with regard to the depot on Coffee Hall, with the start of the installation of the new Landscape Depot which will enhance delivery of this and other services.

The trailer will be visiting Peartree Bridge between 11.00am – 12noon and Leadenhall between 1.00pm – 2.00pm on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023 to inform residents about the new ID requirements for voting in person and to encourage residents to consider applying for a postal vote.

It was also agreed that Cllr Fuller would attend the café on Tinkers Bridge on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March for the same reasons to promote involvement.

**NOTED**

**OC 115/23 Questions from the public (Max. 10 minutes):**

There were no questions from the public.

**NOTED**

**OC 116/23 Minutes of the previous meeting:**

The minutes of the Operations & Resources Committee meeting held on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023 Were **AGREED** as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

**OC 117/23 To note and agree the policies, in line with the review process:**

As part of an annual review of policies, the Council Manager became aware that there are some inconsistencies with review dates, storage and visibility of some policies. This includes the policies on the website being out of date in many cases, with the same being true of those uploaded to the Brightpay App (the HR system that is used).

Whilst there is a spreadsheet that monitors the policy review dates (this is used by the Committee & Member Services Officer to direct this committee), this doesn't currently have a way of checking off when changes to policy mean replacing in other places. It is recommended that this be adjusted to have a 'reviewed date' and a further 'uploaded to website / Brightpay' column.

There have also been new policies introduced which haven't resulted in older policies being removed or updated. This means that in some places, there are a number of policies that cover the same area (e.g. there is an Appraisal and Review Policy and a '1to1 Supervision and Support policy' – these could / should be one policy).

Some policies are also contradictory, where different policies state different approaches to the same issue (e.g. the procurement policy is different from the financial regulations). These issues need to be resolved to ensure clarity.

There are also some issues around consistency of branding, where policies are in different formats, these should also be addressed.

Ensuring all these issues are addressed and embedding a system that promotes access, updates and consistency should be relatively straightforward but will take time to ensure everything is correct to start with, reducing the number of policies, ensuring that there is no repetition, placing them in the most suitable place and making sure that they are correct will take a little time.

It is recommended that the Council Manager and Committee & Member Services Officer spend an afternoon working through this prior to the new council year.

There are also some further policies that don't sit on the website that should be included within this process:

- Employee Handbook
- Grievance Policy
- Terms of Reference for Internal Audit
- Driving at Work (sit within a Health & Safety suite)
- Employment Policy, (possibly a link to the Redundancy policy?)
- Retention and disposal
- Risk Register / Contingency Planning (recently updated)

- Asset Register (recently updated)
- Write off and disposal policy
- General privacy statement
- GDPR and Data policy

#### **RESOLVED**

1. That the committee notes the report and policy as listed in the report.
2. That the committee agrees the list of policy changes that are suggested, to streamline the policy suite.
3. That the committee tasks the Council Manager and Committee and Member Services Officer to review all policies noted, upload the most recent versions to the most suitable place(s) (e.g. website, Brightpay) and to ensure that there is a folder on Sharepoint containing all policies.

#### **OC 118/23 To adopt the Menopause policy:**

The committee discussed version three (3) of the policy and agreed to the following amendments:

#### **Appendix one (1)**

- To add under “headaches” “to be aware of the amount of screen usage and to take time off accordingly”
- To make the document gender neutral and delete the word “male”

#### **Definitions**

- First paragraph first line delete “she” replace with they”.
- First paragraph towards the end of the last paragraph delete from “Usually up to “naturally”
- Delete the sentence after the word Post Menopause and add “when all symptoms have ceased”.

#### **RESOLVED**

**To adopt the Menopause policy including all amendments as agreed in the document and suggestions by members at the committee meeting.**

#### **OC 119/23 To update the committee on annual leave entitlements:**

As part of the pay award for all ‘Green Book’ employees (which includes all Woughton Community Council officers), an additional day of leave was passed as part of the agreement for 2022/2023. This was agreed by unions and employers in September / October last year.

It was thought at the time that this was an increase to the ‘minimum’ amount offered, Woughton Community Council already has a starting level that is higher than this additional day would lead to, so no action was recommended at the time.

Following investigations by the Council Manager, it is now clear that this is not the case, and an additional day should have been awarded to all employees, regardless of the level of leave they are currently receiving. This means that all officers should have had an additional day allocated. This did not happen. As a result, it is recommended that due to the proximity of the year end (leave year ends on 31<sup>st</sup>

March) that a payment of one days pay for officers is offered if leave is unable to be taken. This will cost a maximum of £2,300 at an average of £82 per officer.

This decision will also mean that extra leave is allocated on an annual basis and everyone will received an additional days leave each year. This means that all contracts, policies, staff handbook, etc. will need to be updated to reflect this change.

Linked to this is some confusion around the allocation of additional leave for employees on the fifth anniversary of their employment. This has previously been suggested as five additional days are awarded, but the Absence and Leave policy suggests three days. It is recommended that this committee reiterates the policy view that they would like to take.

The meeting agreed that Woughton Community Council would follow the Green Book on this and that 3 additional days additional was accepted.

**RESOLVED**

- 1. That committee notes the report and the impact on policy.**
- 2. That all new contracts, staff handbook, policies are updated to reflect the upgraded leave entitlement agreed as part of the 2022/2023 pay settlement.**
- 3. That due to pressures on time and current leave demands, that officers who are employed are awarded one (1) day of additional pay in lieu of the annual leave day for the current leave year.**
- 4. That clarity is reached on the 'long service' award for additional leave, in line with policy.**

**OC 120/23 To update the committee on pay negotiations for 2023/2024 and to propose an uplift from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023:**

It is recommended that, as has happened in the past two years, that officers are awarded with a pay rise based upon the offer from the national employers, on the understanding that if increased, additional backdated payments can be made. In previous years, where a large payment has been made in September, difficulties have been experienced by some officers with large NI bills, student loan bills, impacts on benefits and a disproportionate amount taken in 'payments'. To avoid this, it is recommended that all incremental payments and the £1,925 pay award are given from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

It should be noted that some of the unions involved in these discussions have already rejected this offer and are planning to ballot for strike action. This is due to this increase being below inflation for many.

**RESOLVED**

- 1. That the committee note the report and information from NALC.**
- 2. That the committee notes the impact that this increase will have on the budget for 2023/2024.**
- 3. That the committee agrees to award this increase from 1<sup>st</sup> April, on the understanding that any increased offer will result in backdating this additional amount.**
- 4. That the committee also notes that unions have rejected this offer and that industrial action is being discussed.**

**OC 121/23 To update the committee on the 2023/2024 budget:**

Since the creation and ratification of the budget in January, there have been some further developments and greater clarity around key issues. This includes both income and expenditure, with some extra monies coming in and some additional payments being needed.

The budget sheet as circulated to members covers the coming year and shows the differences suggested:

Separation out for the various 'organisational' costs, to promote transparency.

- Democracy and governance
- Whole organisation services
- Organisational Management

This also includes some minor changes around separating out 'uniforms' and 'branding and engagement', meeting and hospitality costs being renamed.

The move from what were previously 'HQ' costs into services.

- Dog and waste bins into Environment
- Events into Community Development
- Meeting Place costs moving into Services budgets.

Training and development has moved into Organisational Management costs, rather than services.

Also included within the income and expenditure lines are additional elements that are known, the Big Lottery Funding, Community Centre funding and spending.

Other changes are that all staffing costs that have been proposed and / or agreed have been included, this means the staffing costs now reflect the best case scenario for the coming year, with £1,925 and any incremental points allocated. This has resulted in £17,000 more within the staffing budget than previously, but this does include £25,000 allocated for 'cover'.

As can be seen, the Big Lottery Fund is due to pay the majority of the grant in year 1, this includes a contribution towards wages, which have not yet been separated out.

The upshot of all this is that the 'bottom line' has moved into a deficit. This is primarily due to the additional payments noted:

- Staffing (£17,000 more than budget, but with potential 'claw back')
- Community Centres investment (£45,000 added following agreement at Full Council)
- Slight uplift on Community Centres and 'Building Costs' due to the additional costs of annual / regular maintenance, plus a small amount due to the ending of the lease agreement at the Fishermead depot.

This remains a challenging budget, with some wriggle room for additional savings. Until year end is complete, the council will not be in a position to fully know the likely 'carry over' figure, or any residual spending necessary to complete the agreed decisions of the council (e.g. depot, pickup, etc.). There are savings that can be made (currently no service plan in place, no 'emerging priorities' spend, staffing cover of £25,000 that may not be needed, etc.) but longer terms adjustments are going to be essential to ensure that the strong fiscal position that has been achieved, does not go to waste.

**RESOLVED**

- 1. That committee notes the report and the budget sheet.**
- 2. That committee notes the additional expenditure as noted.**
- 3. That committee notes that this budget remains incomplete due to the lack of clarity from Milton Keynes City Council with regard to the Landscape Contract.**
- 4. That the committee agrees to a slightly different way of reporting against the budget for the coming year, bringing greater transparency and responding to requests from councillors.**

**OC 122/23 To update the committee on the additional investment in the community centres, following additional funding being allocated from Milton Keynes City Council:**

Following lobbying from ward councillors to Milton Keynes City Council, an award of £40,000 to 'match fund' a contribution from Woughton Community Council. This funding was agreed at Full Council on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023 (FC 197/23 refers).

In addition, an application was made for Community Infrastructure Funding (CIF) for 2023/2024 to cover improvements to toilets, disabled access and, in a separate bid, solar panels and battery storage at Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place. This funding is also 'match funding' the amounts are as follows:

- Solar panels / battery Milton Keynes City Council - £3,600  
Woughton Community Council - £3,600 Total: £7,200
- Access improvements Milton Keynes City Council - £8,114  
Woughton Community Council - £8,114 Total: £16,228

It is recommended that this installation is booked and takes place alongside any improvement works to electrics at Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place.

The access is more complex, with the following submitted:

- Provision of new bathrooms at Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place (£7,222) and Coffee Hall Meeting Place (£6,605), incorporating gender neutral, disabled access and, if possible, 'Changing Places' approaches (although this is felt unlikely, due to size constraints). This will include suitable equipment, access issues addressed and décor.
- Auto-openers at the Netherfield Meeting Place and The Council Chambers, plus the toilets, to enable equitable access (£2,400).

It is recommended that the 'auto openers' at the Netherfield Meeting Place and The Chambers are undertaken as soon as possible into the new funding regime, these will ensure accessibility to these spaces which has been lacking.

The other elements include new flooring, new ceilings, decorated throughout, new door furniture and locks on cupboards, etc. It may be that some of these issues can be reduced to make money go further. For example:

- Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place includes the removal and replacement of equipment in both men's and ladies' toilets. However, this is only necessary if those toilets are to become fully accessible and, within the current quote, this is not the case (with the disabled toilet simply having a new access door installed). This would potentially save a significant sum.
- Coffee Hall Meeting Place has the removal and replacement of the kitchen floor, which is relatively new and therefore is unlikely to be at the end of its life. This, whilst small, would also save some money.

There are a number of items that have been included within the quotes that could be altered to provide small, but significant, savings. With the additional funding towards the toilet works (£13,827), plus the potential for further savings by reducing the level of replacements within the existing quotes, it is anticipated that there could be up to £25,000 available to spend on other community centres. There is a pressing need to replace the kitchen at the Eaglestone Activity Centre (this is both unsightly and becoming dangerous) and a range of outstanding works at the Netherfield Meeting Place that would be supported by funding for disability access.

It is recommended that Woughton Community Council Officers, working with Councillors and Resident Association's where appropriate, detail a list of 'priority areas' for work within the budget agreed. As noted above, some of these changes are necessary as part of the funding awarded, but some flexibility remains.

It should be noted that concerns remain about investment into community centres where leases and agreements leave Woughton Community Centre open to loss of monies, this is especially concerning at the Netherfield Meeting Place where the lease, whilst currently in place until 2040, has a 'break clause' for development and has previously been suggested for demolition. However, the same concerns are present to a lesser extent at the Coffee Hall Meeting Place and the Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place (although the Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place is owned by Woughton Community Council, so a lessened risk).

There was a previous report that came to council that included discussions around this issue, with an agreement that a consultation was wanted around investment in community centres. It should be noted that this was prior to agreement from Milton Keynes City Council for the funding provided and was a parish wide consultation on the use, wants and focus for the community centres across the parish. This was agreed to take place post the local elections. It is recommended that this continues to take place, but that it doesn't delay the works that can get started when agreed.

**RESOLVED**

1. Committee notes the report and the award of funding towards improvements.
2. That the Council Manager, Health & Safety Manager and Caretaker Manager prepare a full evaluation of priority areas, within the agreed budget.
3. That this includes the stated outcomes linked to the CIF grant and agreements with Milton Keynes City Council regarding the submitted quotes.
4. That both the Eaglestone Activity Centre and the Netherfield Meeting Place are also included in any improvement plan, focusing on the most pressing issues.
5. That consideration is given to further investment if this programme shows clear benefit.

**OC 123/23 To agree the Bank Reconciliations, list of payments and receipts since February 2023:**

The Chair with the meeting's agreement will look through a selected sample of the bank reconciliations, payments and receipts to ensure that there are no discrepancies.

**RESOLVED**

**That the Chair to look through a selected sample of the bank reconciliations, payments and receipts to ensure that there are no discrepancies.**

**OC 124/23 To move and second and then to be put to the vote the following motion:**

**Cllr Sue Smith moved and Cllr Liz Simpkins seconded the following motion and was put to the vote:**

**Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960**

That by virtue of the provisions of Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded during discussion of the following business on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

**AGREED**

**OC 125/23 To consider any relevant Human Resources Matters**

A Human Resources matter was considered and progressed.

**NOTED**

**Date of next meeting:**

Monday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023, 6:30pm at the Woughton Community Council Hub, 60, Garraways, the Council Chamber, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes, MK6 5EG.

**THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 8:08PM**

Chair \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_