

Woughton Community Council

Operations & Resources Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 11th September 2023, 6:30pm at the Woughton Community Council Hub, the Council Chamber, 60, Garraways, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes, MK6 5EG.

Present: Cllrs Sue Smith (Chair), Ruth McMillan, D'Anne Mordecai, Alan Williamson

Also present:

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

OC 35/23 Apologies:

Cllr Penny Glasgow (personal)
Cllr Luke Louis (personal)
Cllr Liz Simpkins (personal)

AGREED

OC 36/23 Declarations of Interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

NOTED

OC 37/23 Chairs Announcements:

The Chair thanked all staff and volunteers, who organised, and were involved in, various events that unfortunately got cancelled due to the atrocious weather.

Following a number of trees coming down over the weekend, further work is being done to assess the suitability of the tree surveys that have been undertaken, to make sure that they are sufficient. This will include all estates in the parish.

Training on safeguarding to be held on Wednesday 13th September 2023 has now been cancelled due to a lack of take up.

Apple Day will be held on Saturday 23rd September 2023 at the new Community Garden on Coffee Hall.

NOTED

OC 38/23 Questions from the public (Max. 10 minutes):

There were no questions from the public.

NOTED

OC 39/23 Minutes of the previous meeting:

The minutes of the Operations & Resources Committee meeting held on Monday 10th July 2023 Were **AGREED** as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

OC 40/23 To inform the committee of the outcome of the External Audit:

Following the submission of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), the external auditors, PKF Littlejohn, have now provided their external audit report.

The external audit report did not highlight any areas of concern, with one exception the new Landscape team vehicle was not included in the figures used for the asset section of the return. This was due to the Asset Register being ratified in February 2023, in preparation of year end, with the vehicle then being purchased the following month.

This was an oversight which, whilst not a risk (the vehicle is insured and has since been added to the asset register), it does mean that there is an 'except for' on the external audit report.

RESOLVED

1. That the committee notes the report and external auditors report.
2. That the Council Manager ensures that variations are monitored and adjustments made prior to next years AGAR submission.
3. That the committee thanks the Accounts Officer for the work done in the absence of the Responsible Financial Officer for a successful audit and AGAR.
4. That the further steps, detailed in the external audit report, now take place to ensure actions are completed in line with regulations and that a summary of the external audit report is presented to Full Council on Monday 25th September 2023.

OC 41/23 To update the committee on HR issues:

The Council Manager informed the meeting that there was an additional HR issue, that had arisen since publication of the report on this agenda item and needed to be considered in private session. The committee agreed to this proposal.

RESOLVED

To consider under private session due to an additional HR issue, that had arisen since publication of the report on this agenda item.

OC 42/23 To propose the appointment of an external HR company, to replace the 'ad hoc' agreement currently in place:

The Council Manager proposed the appointment of an external HR company, to replace the 'ad hoc' agreement currently in place, which has resulted in mixed results in service, Councillor expectations and various delays to outcomes.

The Council Manager has provided various quotes, the meeting agreed that option 2 should be considered at the Full Council Meeting to be held in October 2023, which is a five (5) year contract costing £3,400 per annum. A specialist local councils approach, run and provided by a former Solicitor / Town Clerk and supported by others with personal experience within the sector. The company will undertake a review of contracts of employment, bespoke staff handbook and unlimited support on

HR issues. The company also offer governance support and reviews. Additional (paid for) options for other elements, such as training, investigations, etc.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Council considers the appointment of an external company to provide HR oversight, support and insurance, in line with the recommendations of the Operations & Resources Committee.**
- 2. That the Operations & Resources Committee recommends to Council the quote from company 2 and option 2.**
- 3. That if agreed, that this appointment starts as soon as practicable.**

OC 43/23 To review the following policies noted and make changes where appropriate and / or refer to Full Council for agreement:

The Council Manager reviewed the following policies:

Officers expenses

No changes to the policy is recommended, but it is suggested the following expenses are uprated by 10%:

- Breakfast - £6.00
- Lunch - £9.00
- Evening meal - £13.00
- Hotel (London) – £165
- Hotel (outside London) - £110
- Amount for 'emergency' spending - £25

It is further recommended to add a paragraph, which is linked to the Financial Regulations, which reads as follows:

'NB This should only ever occur as an emergency, the financial policy is clear that no personal credit cards should ever be used, but small amounts of cash / debit card usage as a last resort is acceptable.'

Redundancy

This is currently due for review in 2024 and there are no changes necessary.

Employee Handbook

It is recommended that the handbook is passed on to the appointed external specialists to ensure that it is kept up to date, and continues to be accurate and relevant.

Grievance

This policy has some minor changes to language (from 'Anti-bullying and harassment policy' to 'Dignity at Work Policy' and some grammar changes but is due for formal review in 2024. It is recommended that the language, expectations and time-scales are re-visited to ensure that they are realistic and that some learning is taken from recent events in terms of Councillor involvement.

Volunteer

This policy is again not due for review until February 2024 and, with the exception of a bit of formatting, there are no changes that need to be recommended.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the committee reviews the following policies:**
 - a. Officers expenses**
 - b. Redundancy**
 - c. Employee Handbook**
 - d. Grievance**
 - e. Volunteer**
- 2. That the committee agrees the review timescales for each policy.**
- 3. That any changes are made, and policies are then saved to the new Sharepoint Folder, Brightpay (where suitable) and the website (where suitable).**

OC 44/23 To consider suitable bank account management and approaches:

The Council Manager informed the meeting when undertaking a review of the banking arrangements it became apparent that that the signatories on the bank accounts have not been reviewed or changed for some time, four (4) signatories have been removed, it was agreed that that Vice Chairs are considered as alternative options, and that the Vice Chair of Council and Vice Chair of the Operations & Resources Committee become signatories with 'view only' access to the bank accounts.

Another issue that became apparent was the 'spend limits' that are in place. These are currently only for officer access but are set at a level that is likely to be higher than necessary and as such, is a risk that can be mitigated, the committee recommended that the Council Manager and Responsible Financial Officer have a spending limit of £20,000.

It was further recommended that the Council Manager and Accounts Officer review spend patterns, needs of the council and adjust accordingly, bringing proposals to the committee in October 2023.

Another aspect of the review is the banking provision, for the past four (4) years Metro Bank has provided on the whole a good service with no specific issues, value for money with current investments, good communication and products, the committee recommended continuing with the present bank provider.

Investigations have taken place into ways in which managers can spend for day-to-day aspects, in a secure and managed way. This has proved a challenge, but PLEO is a service that covers this. Cards are issued, with money 'loaded' onto them, which can then be used. This limits the amount that can be spent, whilst allowing managers to buy essentials (such as food for projects, ad hoc equipment that is cheaper in local shops, cleaning materials, etc.) The committee recommended that cards are issued with a limit of £250, and topped up when required, this arrangement can be reviewed from time to time.

RESOLVED

1. That the committee agrees to the Vice Chairs of committees to act as signatories on the bank account, and the Vice Chair of Council and Vice Chair of the Operations & Resources Committee to become signatories with 'view only' access to the bank accounts.
2. That the committee agrees to the Council Manager and Responsible Financial Officer to have a spending limit of up to £20,000, and that the Council Manager and Accounts Officer to review spend pattern needs of the council and adjust accordingly, bringing proposals to the October 2023 committee meeting.
3. That the committee agrees to continuing with the services of the current bank account provider.
4. That the committee notes the use of PLEO for 'day-to-day' spending by managers and agrees that this is suitable with a limit of £250, and topped up when required, this arrangement can be reviewed from time to time.

OC 45/23 To propose the commencement of the annual survey:

The Council Manager informed the meeting that the annual survey is now due and will be more broader this year, and will direct planning the budget and proposals for the coming Council Year.

Councillors are encouraged to contact the Council Manager with any suggestions for questions to be included in the survey.

RESOLVED

1. That this committee agrees to take the annual survey to the next Full Council meeting with the recommendation that the annual survey takes place.
2. That if agreed the survey is published, running until the end of December 2023.
3. That the feedback is used to direct planning, budgets and proposals for the coming council year.

OC 46/23 To move and second and then to be put to the vote the following motion:

Cllr Sue Smith moved and Cllr Ruth McMillan seconded the following motion:

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 41/23 To update the committee on HR issues:

The Council Manager updated the committee on various HR issues:

- The former Responsible Financial Officer has now left, final payment made, equipment returned, although office keys are unaccounted for, the fob has been cancelled.
- Two (2) landscape operatives have been appointed, one has commenced employment on the 4th September 2023, the second in October 2023.
- New structures of staffing need to be addressed and consideration of job descriptions, which would be considered at a meeting of this committee.
- One of the youth workers, who also provides the dance sessions on a Tuesday, has requested a move to bank / holiday work only, due to changes in her career. As a result, it is suggested that the Phoenix Arts group 'picks up' the dance element, with another youth worker, taking over the allocated hours. This is cost neutral and ensures no impact on service provision.

The Council Manager recommended to the committee to offer the Accounts Manager the Responsible Financial Officer role on salary pay scale PO1 which was agreed, and to look separately at the Operations Manager role as part of the staff structure review.

A member of staff has requested a salary increment rise due to a higher rate advertised for the same role by another Town Council. The committee agreed that this matter should be part of the staff structure review which should include pay scales for each role.

RESOLVED

1. **That the committee notes the report.**
2. **That the committee agrees to a further month to develop a staffing structure review following the resignation of the Responsible Financial Officer / Operations Manager.**
3. **That the Council Manager to review all staff roles and salary scale points, along with a market comparison, and to bring back for further consideration at a meeting of the Operations & Resources Committee.**
4. **To offer the Accounts Manager the Responsible Financial Officer role on salary pay scale PO1.**
5. **To look separately at the Operations Manager role as part of the staff structure review.**

Date of next meeting:

Monday 9th October 2023, 6:30pm at the Woughton Community Council Hub, 60, Garraways, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes, MK6 5EG.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 7:53PM

Chair _____ Date _____