

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations & Resources Committee

Monday 11th September 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To inform the committee of the outcome of the External Audit.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the committee notes the report and attached auditors report.**
- 2. That the Clerk 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 RFO for a successful audit and AGAR.**
- 4. That the further steps, as detailed below, now take place to ensure all is completed in line with regulations and that a summary of this paper is presented to Full Council on 25th September.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

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

The report was clear, with one exception – the new Landscape truck was not included in the figures used for the asset box. This was due to the Asset Register being ratified in February, in preparation of year end, with the truck then being bought the following month.

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

The remainder of the AGAR was clear and agreed – this is testament to the hard work from Marta Sobis and shows her abilities and commitment.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234) set out what you must do at the conclusion of the review. In summary, we are required to:

- Prepare a “Notice of conclusion of audit” which details the rights of inspection, in line with the statutory requirements. We attach a pro forma notice you may use for this purpose (a Word version is available on request).
- Publish the “Notice” along with the certified AGAR (Sections 1, 2 & 3) before 30 September, which must include publication on the smaller authority’s website. (Please note that when the statute and regulations were amended in

2014 and 2015, they did not include a requirement for the length of time for which that the “Notice” must be published. The previous statute required 14 days; but it is now up to the authority to make this decision).

- Keep copies of the AGAR available for purchase by any person on payment of a reasonable sum.
- Ensure that Sections 1, 2 and 3 of the published AGAR remain available for public access for a period of not less than 5 years from the date of publication.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

BU0218 S3 – Audit report form.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: OC 41/23

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations & Resources Committee

Monday 11th September 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the committee on HR issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the committee notes the report.
2. That the committee agrees to a further month to develop a staffing approach following the resignation of the RFO / Operations Manager.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

There are several staffing issues that have occurred / continued since last meeting – this paper aims to update the committee on these issues.

Samone Winsborough

Samone has completed her time with Woughton, following the agreement that was ratified at this committee before summer. The final payment has been made and Samone has returned equipment, uniform, etc. Unfortunately, Samone is unclear as to where her office keys are – we have cancelled her ‘fob’, but this does mean that potentially there are keys outside the council.

Landscape Operatives

Vincent (Vinny) is one of the two new Landscape Operatives, with a start date for Vinny of 4th September. Shane was the other operative, but he withdrew his application / appointment on the same day. As a result, the Landscape Manager / Council Manager interviewed a further candidate who has accepted an employment offer – Luke Aylett will be starting in October.

Immediate staffing issues

Following the end of contract for the RFO / Operations Manager, there is a need to consider the future staffing model and approach. Whilst WCC has continued to deliver and maintain essential elements, there is no question that things have been missed, lower standard than previously or that have been more chaotic than necessary. As a result, some initial work has been done to look at the Operations elements of the role (and the needs more broadly across the council) with a view to appointing a new role.

It is recommended that this committee delegates the creation of new job description, staffing models and structures to enable quicker action, with a view to having a

formal proposal for this committee in October. This would, if agreed, enable advertising and a potential commencement date of early January. This would build upon the agreement made at the last meeting that ‘.. council considers a slightly different approach to replacement, with a Deputy Clerk / Operational Manager position considered, for agreement in September.’. Due to delays caused by the summer break and the Clerks absence, discussions have NOT taken place and it is felt that getting the approach right, rather than quickly, is more important.

Youth service

One of the youth workers, Emily, 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 Ben, another youth worker, taking over the hours. This is cost neutral and ensures no impact on service provision.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

As per the report.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations & Resources Committee

Monday 11th September 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To propose the appointment of an external HR company, to replace the 'ad hoc' agreement currently in place.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 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 Committee.**
- 2. That if agreed, that this appointment starts as soon as practicable.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

WCC has tried a variety of approaches with regard to HR oversight, having previously had an 'all inclusive' contract, with more recent approaches being an 'ad hoc / hourly rate' approach. Both approaches have pros and cons, but providers have not always met the expectation level of councillors / officers of WCC. This has included delayed responses, lack of knowledge of the sector and at times, very expensive approaches.

To address this, the Council Manager has undertaken some research into options, looking at both approaches:

Company 1. Hourly rate of £95 + VAT. Recommended by others in the sector, but concerns expressed by others around the capacity for them to be as responsive and knowledgeable as they need to be. Were previously a smaller, more specialised company but following 'buy outs' now part of a larger conglomerate with a much broader focus. Does offer a more flexible approach and can be used as and when needed.

Company 2. Two options: 3 year contract £3700 per annum or 5 year contract £3400 per annum. Specialist local councils approach, run and provided by former lawyer / Town Clerk and supported by others with personal experience within the sector. Review of contracts of employment, bespoke staff handbook and unlimited support on HR issues. Also offer governance support and reviews. Additional (paid for) options for other elements, such as training, investigations, etc.

Company 3. £13.36 per employee per month (£4,800 per year). Unlimited calls, 24hour advice line. Online HR software, tribunal representation, contracts handbooks and similar. Expensive, but comprehensive. Not sector specific and patchy previous experience.

Following discussions within the Operations Committee on 11th September, the committee supported the proposal for Option 2, but requested that the final decision was made by Full Council.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

This approach aims to 'back up' any operational staff that have responsibility for HR issues. Whilst day-to-day issues can be managed in house, where there are issues that are messier, complicated or which require professional oversight, an external third party is hugely beneficial.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Previously, WCC has tried both approaches, with an expensive contract initially and then an hourly rate option. The contract is equivalent to around 40 hours of hourly rate support, which is around half what is needed for any significant piece of work. Based upon the previous four years, there is likely to be at least one issue each year that requires external involvement. Given this, it is recommended that a contract be considered as the default.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

HR & Governance Support quotation.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: OC 43/23

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations & Resources Committee

Monday 11th September 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To review the policies noted and make changes where appropriate and / or refer to Full Council for agreement.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 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).**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

These are the final five policies that are outstanding (i.e. from over a year ago).

Officers Expenses:

This policy remains suitable, with the only question being whether there is a need to increase any of the amounts noted within the policy (e.g. meals, hotels, etc.) – these are noted in red on the draft policy. It is suggested that these figures increase by approximately 10% to:

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

There is also an added paragraph suggested, to link to Financial Regulations, namely:

'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 so recommend reviewing in 2024.

Employee Handbook

This is a larger piece of work that is needed and links to having external HR oversight – the proposal that is also at this meeting with regard to an external provider would include elements of policy review and this, as the 'umbrella' policy for all officers is key. It needs to be correct, well written, up to date and accurate. It is recommended that this is passed to external specialists for oversight (it is likely that the policy suite as a whole may also be part of this process).

Grievance

This policy has some minor changes to language (e.g. change from 'Anti-bully 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 timescales are re-visited to ensure that they are realistic and that some learning is taken from recent events in terms of councillors involvement.

Volunteer

This is again not due for review until Feb 2024 and, with the exception of a bit of formatting, appears to be okay. As such, recommended that this is reviewed in 2024.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

As per policies.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Policy documents.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations & Resources Committee

Monday 11th September 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To consider suitable bank account management and approaches.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the committee considers suitable roles to act as signatories on the bank account.**
- 2. That the committee considers suitable spend limits for bank accounts.**
- 3. That the committee considers suitability 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.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Following changes of staffing at a senior level, changes are needed to the bank mandate. This is therefore a good time to consider banking more broadly and undertake a review of current provision and preferred approaches.

The Council Manager has undertaken a desktop review of the bank account as part of the review into job roles following recent staff changes. As part of this, it became apparent that the signatories on the bank accounts have not been reviewed or changed for some time. This meant that immediate change was needed and as a result, four (4) people have been removed from the mandate. This means that there are now limited councillors with oversight (three of the removed people were former councillors). To address this, the committee needs to agree to further roles that are suitable.

Previously, the Chair and Leader of Council, plus the Chair of Operations and, when it operated, the Chair of Finance were the signatories. With Operations and Finance now being combined, and the Chair of this committee also being Chair of Council, this approach no longer meets the needs of council to have sufficient numbers.

It is recommended that Vice Chairs are considered as alternative options – Vice Chair of Council and Vice Chair of Operations 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.

It is 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.

Another aspect of this paper is a general review of the banking provision. We have been with the current bank for the past 4 years and, with some exceptions, the service has been good, with suitable products, decent communication and, increasingly, some level of return on the investment of money

with the accounts. Whilst there are no specific issues currently, this committee may wish for investigations into alternative providers to see what options are within the market currently.

The final point is to note that 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 (<https://www.pleo.io/en>) 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 (e.g. food for projects, ad hoc equipment that is cheaper in local shops, cleaning materials, etc.)

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: OC 45/23

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Operations & Resources Committee

Monday 11th September 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To propose the commencement of the annual survey.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That this committee agrees to the annual survey starting.
2. That if agreed, the survey is published, running until the end of December.
3. That the feedback is used to direct planning, budgets and proposals for the coming council year.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

The annual survey is due.

This has been prepared in a similar way to previously, but with a broader focus that last year which was predominantly around the cost of living crisis.

The survey questions are attached to this paper.

Are there any questions missing? Anything that committee would like to see included? Anything that committee would like to see changed?

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Survey 2023.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

The Future of Woughton - what matters to you?

Why are we asking your views ?

Woughton Community Council provides a range of services and support to the 15,000 people living within the parish, alongside the hundreds of people who work, attend school and visit the parish every day.

Each year, we ask you, our residents, what you would like to see us do. Whilst we can't always do everything, we check every response and make sure that everybody who contributes has their views heard. Over the last year, this has meant that, following your feedback, we have:

- Increased the number of events, focusing on those that are suitable for everyone, young and old (community cinema, disco bingo, Coronation, Jubilee, community cafes)
- Worked with Crimewave to obtain CCTV cameras which will be used across the parish over the next three years to try and address issues such as anti-social behaviour, fly tipping, parking issues and other issues
- Increased cutting back of shrubbery to try and improve visibility and reduce the amount of litter / vermin within the bushes (this is ongoing - they just keep growing!)
- Worked with MKCC to try and address parking issues across the parish. This has not resulted in as much as we hoped, but we will continue to push for more improvements
- Updated dog waste bins and increased the number of waste bin within the parish. This will continue with more new bins planned
- Made some changes to mowing and planting, to help increase biodiversity and bring greater benefits to nature.
- Created a 'flood kit' - equipment to help reduce the risks, manage the situation and recover more quickly if flooding happens again (this includes wet / dry vacuums, inflatable sandbags, water diversion equipment, dehumidifiers, etc.)

There are things that we can't do - roads, street lights, rubbish collections, schools, social care - these are all MKCC services and whilst we will assist where we can, we cannot do the work ourselves. We continue to offer the wide range of support that we always have - advice, wellbeing, youth services, landscaping, environment team, community grants, training and education, community centres and more.

This survey aims to see what matter most to you, what you would like to see us doing and what matters most.

Question Title

1. Which estate do you live / work on?

- ☐ Peartree Bridge
- ☐ Leadenhall

- ☐ Eaglestone
- ☐ Coffee Hall
- ☐ Beanhill
- ☐ Netherfield
- ☐ Tinkers Bridge
- ☐ Redmoor
- ☐ Bleak Hall

Question Title

* 2. Of our current services, which do you think are important? Tick all that apply

- ☐ Youth Service (open access clubs, Play Rangers, music / film clubs, specialist services, schools work, etc.)
- ☐ Wellbeing and Advice Service (provision of tailored advice and information to local residents, outreach sessions, etc..)
- ☐ Grant Aid (grants to local groups for community benefit)
- ☐ Environment Team (dog bins and bags, flytipping, abandoned vehicles, rubbish / waste issues, green open spaces, etc..)
- ☐ Community Fridges and Cafes (reducing food waste, providing access to social and nutritional support, etc)
- ☐ Events (Festival, Apple Day, Divali, networking breakfasts, Christmas meals, Remembrance Day, etc..)
- ☐ Community Support (supporting local groups, schools, older people, people with disabilities, etc...)
- ☐ Community Centres (provision of centres in Coffee Hall, Netherfield, Tinkers Bridge and Eaglestone)
- ☐ Landscaping (grass cutting, hedge management, shrubbery, tree crowning, etc..)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Question Title

* 3. And of those services, which have you used or benefited from over the past year? Tick all that apply

- ☐ Youth Service (open access clubs, Play Rangers, music / film clubs, specialist services, schools work, etc.)

- ☐ Wellbeing and Advice Services (provision of tailored advice and information to local residents, outreach sessions, etc..)
- ☐ Grant Aid (grants to local groups for community benefit)
- ☐ Environment Team (dog waste bins and bags, flytipping, abandoned vehicles, rubbish / waste issues, green open spaces, etc..)
- ☐ Community Fridge and Cafe (reducing food waste, providing social and nutritional support, etc.)
- ☐ Events (Festival, Apple Day, Divali, networking breakfasts, Christmas meals, Remembrance Day, etc..)
- ☐ Community Support (supporting local groups, schools, older people, people with disabilities, etc...)
- ☐ Community Centres (provision of centres in Coffee Hall, Netherfield, Tinkers Bridge and Eaglestone)
- ☐ Landscaping (grass cutting, hedge management, shrubbery, tree crowning, etc..)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Question Title

4. And of the projects and new initiatives over the past year, which do you support

- ☐ New waste bins
- ☐ New dog waste bins
- ☐ The events, such as Jubilee, Coronation, Community Cinema, Games night, Disco Bingo, etc.
- ☐ The changes to landscaping, with areas left to 'meadow', reduced chemical use, battery powered tools, etc.
- ☐ The use of CCTV and evidence gathering across the parish
- ☐ The community cafes and fridges / larders
- ☐ The Community Gardens and growing spaces for residents to access
- ☐ Ongoing work to try and manage the issues of parking across the parish
- ☐ Oversight of planning applications and responses as an 'interested party'
- ☐ Work with MKCC to provide equipment to help prevent, manage and recover from any future flooding
- ☐ Something else (please provide some details)


Question Title

5. Last year, we kept the precept increase as low as possible - inflation meant that our costs increased by around 12%, with the increase kept at 5% (about £1 a month for most in the parish). This compares to some other areas in the city where increases were as high as 33%.

What is more important to you?

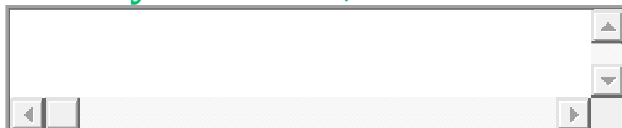
- ☐ Small / no increases and fewer services (less than £1 a month increase)
- ☐ A medium increase to maintain current delivery (around £2 a month increase)
- ☐ A large increase with more services and support (More than £2 a month increase -let us know what you would like to see)

If a larger increase, what should we spend that on? What services or support would you like to see?



Question Title

6. Are there other things that you would like to see Woughton Community Council provide? Please let us know your ideas, views or feelings below.



Question Title

7. If you are happy to do so, please let us know a little bit about you....This helps us make sure we are hearing from as many in our community as possible.

What age bracket do you fit into?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65+
- ☐ Would rather not answer

Question Title

8. And which of the following most accurately describe(s) you?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Intersex
- ☐ I prefer not to say
- ☐ Let me type....

Question Title

9. Which race or ethnicity best describes you?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Mixed
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Question Title

10. Would you consider that any of the following apply to you?

- ☐ I or someone in my household has a physical disability
- ☐ I or someone in my household has a mental health issue

- ☐ I experience loneliness or isolation
- ☐ I find it difficult to access services or support
- ☐ I would like to volunteer to help others / I already volunteer
- ☐ I feel involved and connected with my community

Question Title

11. Many thanks for completing this survey. We will use your views to help decide on how we deliver services and support in the future.

If there is anything else you would like to tell us about, please pop it in the box below.

