

**Minutes from the Finance Committee Events Meeting held on
July 12th 2024 at Wayland Hall**

Present: Kathryn Stallard (Chairman), Peter Bishop, Don Saunders, Stan Hebborn.

Officers Present: Jane Scarrott

1. Apologies received from:
Tina Kiddell
2. No Declarations of Interest made.
3. Minutes from the previous meeting
 - (i) The minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 13.06.24 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.
 - (ii) Update from the previous meeting:
 - It will be recommended to Full Council that “in consideration for a worst-case scenario, the Council will ensure an amount equal to 50% of the annual budget figure is held in reserve to cover all legal responsibilities”.
 - The Town Council has entered into a further contract with CBR for HR support.
 - The Ministry of Defence has confirmed it owns the Old School building in Church Walk.
 - Advice was taken regarding the possible addition to Finance Regulations of a clause to state that any traders with a direct association with the Town Council could not be considered for contracts with the Town Council.
Norfolk ALC advice (also suggests obtaining solicitors advice):

“It’s probably completely unlawful, as it discriminates against specific businesses without a valid reason and could result in the council being sued.

There are already protections (such as The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 and Section 117 of the 1972 Act - Disclosure by officers of interest in contracts) in place to ensure that people do not unfairly influence decisions they have an interest in. Putting a heavy-handed blanket ban in place doesn’t seem proportionate or reasonable.”

The Finance Committee suggests that a statement could be included within Financial Regulations clarifying expected ethical standards.

- It was decided to go back to the blacksmith who has looked at Walsingham Gates and say that the Town Council may be looking to commission works but needs to have a detailed cost estimate by August 12th to be considered at the Town Council meeting.
Noted that the Town Council has submitted a request to English Heritage to amend the listing of Walsingham Gates.
A suggestion was made to purchase footfall counters to use along Church Walk.
- The Heritage Park Working Group are to meet on 17.07.24.

Noted that the contractor engaged by the Town Council has failed to cut the grass at Heritage Park and agreement is requested to accept the quote from the Town Council preferred contractor to undertake a single cut at a cost of £750

(iii) Items raised by Full Council

- It will be recommended to Full Council that the Council purchases the two centre pages of the new Watton & Wayland Times each month at a cost of £400 per month. Noted that the Council has already resolved to purchase one page. Having further considered the submission from the editor, the Finance Committee has approved the first month at the cost of £400, for a double centre page spread. Funding for this ongoing project can be met from the community provision cost centre in the annual budget.
- Noted that an e-mail has been sent to the owner of the Thetford Road allotment land requesting they consider transfer of the land to the Town Council rather than the Charlotte Harvey Trust. The transfer of ownership of the land will be dependant on any response received.
- Electrical work as identified within the Wayland Hall electrical inspection report is scheduled to be undertaken but there is also further suggested works to be considered.

4. Bank Reconciliation

The Bank Reconciliation dated 31.05.24 was presented to the Committee and checked by the Internal Control Officer (Internal Control Officer also checked the Bank Reconciliation for 30.06.24).

Current expenditure against the budget was noted.

Recent agreed expenditure by Full Council:

- Up to £2000 on new Market Gazebos and signage for the Market
- £1874 CBR HR services yearly contract
- £1000 hedge trimmer/pruner
- £1200 solicitor's fees to produce GDPR Policies
- £500 grant to Watton Carnival Committee
- £2500 donation to the Charlotte Harvey Trust for 'Summer Fun Days'

5. Market Gazebos

A recommendation will be made to Full Council to spend £1500 on 7 new canopies and side walls for the Market Gazebos. It is envisaged the gazebos will be stored in the Town Council unit and will be erected by staff.

Funding for this will be taken from the Market Town Initiative allocation within the budget.

The possibility of the sale of the box trailer which was purchased to store the original gazebos was discussed.

Investigation will be undertaken regarding the possibility and cost of installing a mezzanine floor at the unit at Linmore Court to give more storage space.

6. Town Operative Tools and Training

Budget implications resulting from an increase in expenditure to equip and train the Town Operatives were considered and at this time the Finance Committee is confident there is enough money allocated within the appropriate cost centres in the 2024/5 budget to cover anticipated costs.

The Town Council will be informed of recent training undertaken by staff.

The Deputy Clerk has been looking at whether more grounds maintenance work can be undertaken in house, and she will be asked to produce a report on this for the next Finance Committee meeting. It is suggested grass could be cut by the Town Operatives at sites owned by the Town Council: Jubilee Garden, Memorial Garden and Hares Green and at locations where the Town Council assists charities with grass cutting: Loch Neaton and Watton Sports Centre.

7. Mayors Chain

To commission a new mayor's chain and jewel has been estimated at £5000. As this new information has been received the Events & Marketing Officer will be asked to produce an additional report showing the cost of a new chain (Councils originally preferred option) against the cost of replacing one chain of the current double Mayors Chain. This will be an agenda item for the Town Council meeting on July 23rd.

8. Christmas Lights for Church Walk

In light of the cost quoted to provide LED braid strings to daisy chain in and out of each tree along Church Walk the Events & Marketing Officer will be asked to research other possible alternatives to Christmas lighting along Church Walk (cost quoted c£17000 inc. vat).

Noted that the Norfolk County Council Highway Engineer has verbally conveyed that they have no objection to bulbs being planted along Church Walk or Christmas Lights being erected in the trees [this does not include the provision of electricity from the street lighting].

9. Additional Software

Sirif Affinity software to be used to aid lay out of the pages for the Watton & Wayland Times will be purchased at a cost of up to £80.

10. Pre-Payment Fuel Card

Research will be undertaken regarding obtaining a pre-payment card (Chase suggested) to be used by the Town Operatives to purchase fuel for the Town Council vans.

A policy will need to be written covering use of any card.

11. Internal Auditors Report

Recommended Action Points identified within the Internal Auditors Final Report for 2023/24 were considered. Outstanding actions will be addressed.

It was agreed that an additional insurance premium of £424.68 should be paid to increase the Town Council Fraud and Dishonesty cover.

12. Four Year Plan (4YP)

- Premises - Wayland Hall

A programme of repair works for Wayland Hall has been compiled and the commissioned structural report for the north end of the building will be included once received. It was suggested works need project managing and a specification will put together to include all areas to be further investigated with the intention to prioritise maintenance. The specification should include reports of the following: general internal and external fabric of the building, plumbing, heating, electrics and any HSE related issues (e.g. fire safety, legionella and security).

- Premises - Linmore Court Unit

To include possible provision of a mezzanine floor at the Unit.

13. Date of the next meeting of the Finance Committee: 15th August 2024

Meetings will routinely be scheduled for the second Thursday of each month at 3pm in Wayland Hall

Recommendations to Full Council:

- I. In response to the Internal Auditors suggestion that the Council should approve a Reserves Policy: that, in consideration for a worst-case scenario, the Council will ensure an amount equal to 50% of the annual budget figure is held in reserve to cover all legal responsibilities.
- II. that the Council purchases the two centre pages of the new Watton & Wayland Times each month at a cost of £400 per month.
- III. to spend £1500 on 7 new canopies and side walls for the Market Gazebos. The gazebos to be stored in the Town Council unit and erected by staff.
- IV. The contractor engaged by the Town Council has failed to cut the grass at Heritage Park and agreement is requested to accept the quote from the Town Council preferred contractor to undertake a single cut at a cost of £750.