



## WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

### RESOURCES COMMITTEE

17 JULY 2023 – 7.30 pm

### MINUTES OF MEETING

**Present:** Councillor Hoy, Vice-Chairman in the Chair; Councillors, Human (from 7.55 pm), Imafidon, Meekins, Tierney and Wallwork.

**Apologies:** Councillor Oliver.

**Public Participation:** None requested. However, two of the Directors of the Board of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum attended to provide the committee with the opportunity to seek clarification, if necessary, regarding any of the financial information which had been provided in support of the museum's grant funding.

The minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee held on 19 June 2023 were confirmed and signed.

#### **R4/23 Internal Audit of the council's governance and accounting arrangements for the financial year 2022/23**

The Clerk (and RFO) reported on the year-end inspection undertaken by the Internal Auditor in relation to the council's governance and accounting practices for the financial year 2022/23. He mentioned that the focus of the year-end inspection is the council's financial practices and year-end accounts; the council's governance practices had been the focus of the Internal Auditor's mid-year inspection (which had been considered by this committee at minute R15/22).

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that the council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) – which had been scrutinised by the Internal Auditor as part of her inspection - had been approved in part (the Governance Statement section) by Council at minute 25/23.

Members had been provided, by the Clerk (and RFO), with a copy of the Internal Auditor's report in advance of the meeting.

It was noted by members that the council's Internal Auditor had no concerns or issues to raise as a result to her year-end inspection and, consequently, makes no recommendations as to action required by Wisbech Town Council.

the Internal Auditor notes in her report, that, further to minute R15/22, the Wisbech Town Centre Committee had decided at minute T21/22 that arrangements would be made for the minutes of the former councils (which are stored currently at the Town Hall) to be accommodated/displayed in one of the rooms on the first floor of Wisbech Castle (the Town Clerk to, firstly, ascertain from the County Council's Archives Service what measures would be considered necessary to ensure the preservation of those documents).

Members considered the appointment of an Internal Auditor for audit of the council's 2023/24 accounts. The Clerk (and RFO) informed members that the company which had undertaken the internal audit of the council's governance and accounting arrangements for the financial year 2022/23 (and had done so for several previous years), Canalbs Ltd, is willing to do likewise for the 2023/24 financial year.



Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Meekins, seconded by Councillor Wallwork, that

- (1) the content of the report from the council's Internal Auditor in relation to the council's governance and accounting practices for the financial year 2022/23 be noted;
- (2) Canalbs Ltd be appointed as the council's Internal Auditor in relation to the council's governance and accounting arrangements for the financial year 2023/24.

#### **R5/23 Wisbech Town Council's accounts 2023/24**

The Clerk (and RFO) reported to members on the council's financial position as at the end of the first quarter of the financial year 2023/24; he gave explanations as to variations between the estimated income and expenditure for that period and the actual financial position as at 30 June 2023.

As at 30 June 2023, the council had received 47% approximately of the estimated annual income and had incurred 25% approximately of its estimated annual expenditure based upon the figures set out in the council's revenue budget for the financial year 2023/24. In addition, the council had incurred expenditure (totalling £11,760) from its ear-marked reserves in respect of Wisbech Castle (new central heating boiler) and the Anti-incinerator Campaign (consultancy support).

The Clerk (and RFO) responded to members' questions.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Wallwork, that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk (and RFO) be noted;
- (2) the accounts for the first quarter of the financial year 2023/24 be approved and that, in accordance with minute R3/19, a copy of the report presented by the Clerk (and RFO) be signed by the Chairman;
- (3) the Clerk (and RFO) would examine opportunities for generating additional interest for the council through the investment of a proportion of its financial reserves.

#### **R6/23 Grants and financial support 2023/24**

Further to minute R19/22, members considered further applications for financial support from Wisbech Town Council as well as matters which were undetermined at that minute.

The Clerk (and RFO) reminded members that Wisbech Town Council's budget for the financial year 2023/24 (agreed at minute 81/22) includes a sum of £5,000 for small grants and £34,000 for special grants. In addition to the small grants and special grants budgets, the overall Council budget for 2023/24 includes a community support budget of £5,000.

Given that of £2,200 of the small grants budget had had been allocated at minute R19/22, £2,800 is still available for allocation in the current financial year. At minute R19/22 this committee had allocated £12,500 of the special grants budget, resulting in £21,500 being still available for allocation in the current financial year. In addition, this committee had allocated, at minute R3/23, £1,800 from the community support budget; this means that £3,200 is still available for allocation in the current financial year.



Since minute R19/22 the council has received two further applications for funding from the small grants “pot”; these are set out below:

	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Purpose of grant</b>	<b>Amount requested</b>
1.	Cambridgeshire Search and Rescue (CamSAR)	To contribute towards the cost of purchasing specialised equipment to assist water-based research technicians to perform their, time-critical, searches more effectively and efficiently.	£150 (total project cost of £660)
2.	Freedom Leisure and the Cambridgeshire County Council’s Public Health Team	To contribute towards the cost of purchasing inflatable equipment to support the fun splash and water safety sessions held at the Hudson Leisure Centre for Gypsy Roma Traveller and vulnerable communities/families.	£1,979 (total project cost of £2,995)
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£2,129</b>

### **Feed Fenland**

Further to minute R19/22, members considered the information which had been provided by Feed Fenland in response to this committee’s request for additional information (as set out at minute R19/22) in relation to that organisation’s request for financial support from Wisbech Town Council.

The Clerk (and RFO had forwarded to members, in advance of the meeting, the information that been provided to the council by Feed Fenland.

Members considered the information which had been provided to the council by Feed Fenland and, consequently, indicated that they would be prepared to consider allocating financial support to Feed Fenland, provided that

- Feed Fenland engages with the Housing/Homelessness service at Fenland District Council as part of its activities – the Town Council needs to investigate whether that is happening?
- Feed Fenland achieves charitable status
- Wisbech Town Council be informed of the identities of the members of the “management committee” of Feed Fenland.

### **Wisbech and Fenland Museum**

Further to minute R19/22, members considered, following the meeting which had taken place on 27 June 2023 between the members of this committee and the Board of Directors of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum, how Wisbech Town Council could best support the Wisbech and Fenland Museum.

To assist members’ deliberations, the Clerk (and RFO) reminded members of the background to Wisbech Town Council’s provision of financial support to the Wisbech and Fenland Museum since



the financial year 2017/18 (at which time the council had increased from £5,000 to £20,000 the level of annual grant aid to the museum).

Councillor Hoy expressed the opinion that the meeting between members of this committee and the Board of Directors of the museum had been a very positive and useful experience; however, the council now needs to decide how to proceed in this matter. She made the point that there is the need to achieve the correct balance between the spending of taxpayers' money and the benefit of the museum to the town. Councillor Wallwork expressed her concurrence with Councillor Hoy's comments.

Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that with regard to the provision of financial support to the Wisbech and Fenland Museum, the Town Council is in a "difficult place". On the one hand, there is the desire to help the museum to grow and thrive – hence providing funding of £20,000 for each of the previous six financial years – but "on the other hand", it is not the Town Council's responsibility to fund the museum using taxpayers' money.

The comment was made by Councillor Tierney that it had always been his understanding that at the time of the Town Council increasing the level of financial support to the museum it had been seen as a short-term "rescue" measure, providing time for the museum to "get its affairs in order" and move to a situation where it could be mostly self-funding or applying for other financial support.

Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that the current arrangement, of the Town Council providing an annual grant of £20,000 but with no oversight or say in how that money from the taxpayers is used, cannot continue. He, therefore, proposed that the Town Council offers the Wisbech and Fenland Museum two options; those being:

1. Wisbech Town Council to provide the sum of £20,000 for the current financial year but in each year thereafter the level of funding be reduced by £2,500, with a view to that funding reducing to zero in eight years' time. Under that arrangement, the museum would be asked to provide its accounts and forward plan each year before the council releases that year's funding. This would provide the museum with some financial security for a number of years but would require a focus upon transformation of the manner in which the museum operates and generates income.
2. A full partnership between Wisbech Town Council and the Wisbech and Fenland Museum. Under this arrangement, Wisbech Town Council would continue to provide funding at the level of £20,000 per annum, with the proviso that the number of Town Council representatives on the Board of Directors be increased from one to five (with Fenland District Council retaining the ability to appoint one representative). This would result in five of the twelve Directors being representatives of Wisbech Town Council.

The Town Council would, as a full partner, then join-in the efforts of promotion, generating new ideas and building a strong future for the museum. In this way, the Town Council and the people of Wisbech could be assured that the funding provided through taxation has full democratic oversight and that the council's representatives, and consequently the Council as a whole, would be part of the team going forwards, to help drive growth and change and assist in delivering an exciting future.

If this option were chosen, the council would be willing to explore the management structure; it may not be necessary for the Town Council's representatives to become Trustees if the structure were changed to provide a Management Committee to which councillors could be appointed. There could be discussions between Wisbech Town Council and the Wisbech and Fenland Museum as to the most appropriate arrangements to achieve the suggested partnership approach to running the museum.



Whichever of the two options is selected by the museum, a Service Level Agreement would be put in place to cover those financial years within the term of the current council (i.e., running until 31 March 2027).

Members decided

- (1) that the details of the two additional small grant applications submitted to Wisbech Town Council for the financial year 2023/24 be noted;
- (2) that small grant application number 1 (£150) be approved in full;
- (3) small grant application number 2 be not supported (for the reasons that: this committee does not feel it appropriate to award monies to Freedom Leisure (not a local community group) and that Freedom Leisure ought to fund this equipment itself; the committee feels that more should have been done by the applicant to raise funds, so that the “ask” of the council was for a lower amount; the committee does not consider it appropriate to provide funding for something which is for targeted-provision, rather than all pool users).
- (4) on the proposal of Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Meekins, that, with regard to the small grant application from Feed Fenland, this committee would be prepared to consider allocating financial support to Feed Fenland provided that
  - Feed Fenland engages with the Housing/Homelessness service at Fenland District Council as part of its activities
  - Feed Fenland achieves charitable status
  - Wisbech Town Council be informed of the identities of the members of the “management committee” of Feed Fenland.

The Clerk (and RFO) would raise these matters with Feed Fenland;

- (5) unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Wallwork, that funding of £20,000 be paid now to the Wisbech and Fenland Museum for the financial year 2023/24 and that the two options described above in relation to funding for the museum for the financial years 2024/25 and beyond be submitted by the Clerk to the Board of Directors;
- (6) to note that, consequent to the decisions at (2) and (5) above, the remaining balances of the council’s “financial support” budgets for the financial year 2023/24 are now:
  - Small grants = £2,650
  - Special grants = £1,500
  - Community support = £3,200.

### **R7/23 Civic insignia**

Members considered a proposal, which had been formulated jointly by the Town Mayor and the Clerk (and RFO), in relation to “updating” the Mayor’s chain of office.

The Mayor explained to members the work that is proposed (which includes the provision and affixing of additional “shields” and the engraving of the names of some past Mayors) to “update” the Mayoral chain.



Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Meekins, seconded by Councillor Tierney, that the proposed works to the Mayoral chain be approved and that the lower of the two quotations received, in the sum of £4,000 (plus VAT), be accepted.

(Members resolved to exclude the public for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)

**Meeting finished at 8.30 pm.**

Signed.....

Dated.....

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