Minutes of the meeting of the Finance & Strategy Committee held on 18th September 2024 at 18.00hrs using www.zoom.us

Present: Cllrs Tony Dawson (Chair), Mark Greenwood, Ken Pollard, Fred Willson, and Paul Mackin.

Town Clerk: F Fitch

1. **Apologies:** received from Cllrs Lisa Hayes, and Jez Perkins.

2. **Declarations of interest:** KP and FW declared an interest in Agenda item 10 due to KP being a member of the Shefford Good Neighbour Group and FW being the spouse of the Chair of the Shefford Good Neighbour Group. They left the meeting when the matter was reviewed, and a resolution made.

3. **Minutes**
   The minutes of the meeting of the Committee on 17th July 2024 were agreed as a true record and signed digitally by the Chair. The Zoom recording was agreed to be deleted.

4. **Public Question Time:** no questions received.

5. **Bank Reconciliations**
   The bank reconciliations for July and August 2024 were reviewed by TD prior to the meeting and approved. The petty cash was also counted by TD prior to the meeting and approved.

   It was reported and noted by the Committee that a payment had been made from the Bellcote Meadow Millennium Green Trust bank account to Mrs KE Easton for the reimbursement of petrol receipts and refreshments for the Trust's Annual General Meeting.

6. **Shefford Town Memorial Association**
   The minutes of the meetings of the Shefford Town Memorial Association (STMA) Management Committee held on 26th June and 24th July 2024, and the draft minutes of the meeting held on 28th August 2024 were received by the Committee and noted.

7. **Insurance**
   It was reported that correspondence had been received from a resident regarding possible root damage to their property by trees on Town Council-owned land. Advice was obtained from the Council's insurance provider and a response has been sent to the resident accordingly.

   Following a request from the Council's insurance provider, a quotation for an up-to-date stock valuation of the Council's four play areas was reviewed by the Committee.

It was resolved by Delegated Powers to raise an order to the Play Inspection Company to carry out the stock valuations for the four play areas managed by the Town Council, including Bellcote Meadow Millennium Green, St Michael's Close, the Shefford Town Memorial Association (STMA) and the Lucas Way play areas.

8. Operation Menai Bridge

A report on Operation Menai Bridge, regarding the preparations and storage of supplies, was reviewed by the Committee and noted. It was also noted by the Committee that the official photographs have yet to be finalised and once the photographs have been published, they will be incorporated into the provisions.

9. IT Equipment

A report was received on the status of the Council Offices' printer and the Town Clerk's work phone, including the recent replacement of the office printer (same model as the previous printer purchased to utilise the stock of ink cartridges) and a quotation for review by the Committee to purchase a newer model mobile phone and suitable case for the Town Clerk.

It was resolved by Delegated Powers to purchase a new refurbished mobile phone and suitable case for the Town Clerk, funded through the IT revenue budget.

10. Shefford Good Neighbours Group (SGNG)

A request from the SGNG was received for the Committee to review for grant to cover the cost of the Group's public liability insurance.

It was resolved by Delegated Powers to donate £200 to the SGNG to cover the cost of their public liability insurance.

11. Marie Curie Cancer Care

A request from Marie Curie Cancer Care's Community Fundraiser for fundraising support or potential donations was reviewed by the Committee.

It was resolved by Delegated Powers to donate £250 to Marie Curie Cancer Care.

12. Community Safety Information Sharing Agreement

Central Bedfordshire Council's Community Safety Information Sharing Agreement (ISA) was distributed to the Committee and reviewed.

It was resolved by Delegated Powers for the Town Clerk to request further information from the Safety Communities and Partnership Team at Central Bedfordshire Council to report back to the Committee on the consequences and commitment the Town Council would be making whether or not they sign and agree to the ISA.

13. MAGPAS Request

A request from MAGPAS was received for support in holding various fundraising events.

It was thought inappropriate for the Town Council to hold fund-raising events themselves; however, it was resolved by Delegated Powers to support MAGPAS in their fundraising endeavours by offering them a fundraising pitch at Council-run events such as the Summer Fun Day and/or the Community Market.

14. Keech Hospice Care Request

A request was reviewed by the Committee for consideration to be made for the Keech Hospice Care to be the chosen charity for donations received at this year's Santa's Grotto event.

Recommendation by Delegated Powers to be made to Full Council for the Keech Hospice Care to be the chosen charity for fundraising donations received at the Council's Santa's Grotto event to be held on 13th December 2024. The success of this children's event, including value for money, will be reviewed by the Committee in early 2025 to determine if the event will be delivered in future years.

15. Electric Vehicle Charging Programme

An update on Central Bedfordshire Council's electric vehicle charging programme, including briefing note, sites form and FAQs sheet, together with a request for help and support to identify more publicly accessible sites and locations in Shefford (not including on land under private ownership or on a highway) where residents would be able charge their vehicle, were distributed to the Committee and reviewed.

It was resolved by Delegated Powers for the Town Clerk to inform Central Bedfordshire Council that two of the previous identified sites, the Shefford Town Memorial Association and Town Meadow car parks, had been taken up, and that no additional further sites could be identified that fit the specified criteria.

16. Bus User Group Meeting

The draft notes for the Bus User Group meeting that was held on 11th July 2024 were distributed and reviewed by the Committee. It was note that following the resignation of Cllr Julie Ford, the Town Council no longer have a representative at the Bus User Group meetings.

Recommendation by Delegated Powers to be made to Full Council to request Member representation at the Bus User Group meetings.

17. Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Publicity from Central Bedfordshire Council on their Local Nature Recovery Strategy was distributed to Members and noted.

18. Budgetary Process for 2025/2026

It was reported that the capital projects and events for consideration in the draft 2025/2026 budget included: the replacement of the fire doors to the first floor offices/rooms in Shefford House; the installation of a new CCTV system at Bellcote Meadow Millennium Green; monitoring/maintenance costs from Central Bedfordshire Council for additional CCTV cameras; VE 80th Anniversary events; installation of three removable bollards to prevent unauthorised access to the Market Square; the continuation of the Council's annual events; additional staffing resources; new contracts for the fuel (gas/electric) supply in Shefford House; and a contingency to cover litter picking at Bellcote Meadow Millennium Green. A request was made to Members for details of any further projects for consideration to be fully costed and submitted to the Town Clerk by 9th October 2024 in order to be included in the draft budget and Precept figures for 2025/2026. Due to last year's success, it is proposed to again hold a dedicated meeting inviting all Councillors to attend a hybrid meeting to carry out the due diligence for reviewing the draft budget and Precept figures for 2025/2026 (date to be confirmed).

19. External Audit for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

The completion of the audit for the year ended 31 March 2024 was reviewed by the Committee, including the external auditor's report and certificate 2023/24, and the recommendations and matters reported therein including: the date of announcement for the period of public rights being the same day as the period started, when the date of announcement should be on the working day prior to the period starting; and the recommendation that the standard proforma provided by the External Auditor be used for the bank reconciliation to ensure it shows the cash book figures to reconcile to the bank statements. Both these minor scope for improvement matters will be addressed in 2024/2025.

Meeting closed 19:25hrs