

**Minutes of a meeting of the Leisure Services Committee held at the Oakwood Centre
on Tuesday 14 January 2025 at 8:00 pm**

Present: *Councillors D. Smith (Chairman); D. Bragg; Y. Edwards; D. Errawalla;
M. Firmager; M. Kennedy; P. Singh*

Officers present: *K. Murray, Town Clerk; M. Filmore, Deputy Town Clerk;
E. Whitesmith, Leisure Services Manager*

Also present: *Councillors K. Baker; R. Horskins (Virtual Attendance)
1 member of the public*

38. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gilder, Jewell and Lewis.

39. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor M. Kennedy – Pecuniary interest: Agenda item 8 – Charges 2025/26: Councillor Kennedy advised he is a member of the gym at Woodford Park Leisure Centre.

40. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 NOVEMBER 2024**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting of 19 November 2024 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

41. **ACTIONS / FOLLOW UPS**

Members noted the update on the actions and follow ups from previous meetings, as provided in the agenda.

42. **BUDGETARY CONTROL**

Members reviewed the Budgetary Control report.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 1/25.

43. **WOODFORD PARK LEISURE CENTRE, SPORTS DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITIES**

The Leisure Services Manager presented Report No. LS 2/25.

A concern was raised regarding the current process of members having to telephone to book onto classes at 10am the day prior to the class. It was noted classes are often fully booked with waiting lists. A query was raised as to whether the Council should consider introducing an online booking system for classes. The Leisure Services Manager advised that he has reviewed systems previously and will continue to do so, and would be looking to implement an online system should a suitable solution be found. He also explained that the current telephone booking system was introduced during Covid, and requiring booking 24 hours prior had reduced the number of cancellations. It was also noted some gym members may not be able to access an online booking system. A suggestion was made that a system by which members could register interest for a class, after which the system would randomly select those the participants if the class was oversubscribed, might be a fair system.

Following a query, the Leisure Services Manager advised that the maximum number of members which can currently be managed at the centre is between 750 and 780 members. He explained the main reason for the capacity was available space to hold classes, not staffing. It was suggested other Council venues could be considered should space need to be sourced.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 2/25.

44. **PARKS AND BUILDINGS**

The Town Clerk presented Report No. LS 3/25.

Members noted two poplar trees at the allotment site, due to be felled in November but delayed, have now been felled.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 3/25.

45. **CHARGES 2025/26**

The Town Clerk and Leisure Services Manager set out the proposed charges for 2025/26, set out in Report No. LS 4/25.

Members requested that in future information be provided about the number of hirers in different price categories, ie Woodley resident, non-Woodley resident, charities. The Town Clerk advised the Council was moving to a new system which would make this level of reporting more achievable.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 4/25.
- ◆ To recommend that the proposed charges for 2025/26, as set out in the Budget Appendix, be approved.

Voting: For: 5 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote: 2

46. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2024/25**

The Town Clerk set out the revised estimated for 2024/25.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 5/25.
- ◆ To recommend that the Revised Budget Estimates for 2024/25, as set out in the Budget Appendix, be approved.

Voting: For: 6 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote: 1

47. **BUDGET ESTIMATES 2024/25**

The Town Clerk set out the budget estimates for 2025/26.

Members noted that budgeted expenditure had significantly increased for 2025/26 compared to the 2024/25 budget because staff costs had now been more accurately apportioned to each cost centre. This included national insurance and pension contributions which had previously all been included as a central cost. Members agreed this was a more appropriate way of apportioning costs as it would enable a clearer view of the actual cost of running individual services.

In relation to memorial benches and trees, the Town Clerk confirmed that the income received is donation towards the benches, not a purchase. He advised that the Council was close to reaching a saturation point whereby additional new benches would not be necessarily required. Members noted that residents requesting a memorial bench meet with the Amenities Manager to source a suitable location.

In relation to the significant budget increase relating to repairs and maintenance costs at the Maintenance Depot, the Town Clerk advised that vehicle servicing which previously was managed in house was now required to be outsourced.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 6/25.
- ◆ To recommend that the Budget Estimates for 2025/26, as set out in the Budget Appendix, be approved.

Voting: For: 6 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote: 1

48. **YOUTH GRANT APPLICATIONS**

Members discussed the youth grant applications set out in the agenda. The Deputy Town Clerk highlighted that the youth grant fund, setup using unspent Youth Service budget in 2023/24, had £3,240 remaining, with the two grant requests totalling £6k.

It was noted the 2024/25 Youth Service budget, set at £30k, was currently unspent, although three annual grant applications were due to be considered for funding utilising this budget under the next agenda item.

Members discussed the applicants and were supportive. Following discussion, the Town Clerk confirmed the Committee could use unspent 2024/25 Youth Service budget to cover any additional cost of funding the applications in excess of the remaining grant fund.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To award the following youth grants, utilising the remaining £3,240 youth grant fund and £2,760 from the 2024/25 Youth Service budget:
 - Chattertots - £3,000 - Towards the cost of providing weekly early interventions for children with Downs Syndrome, with main sessions running from Woodley Baptist Church.
 - Loddon District Scout Council - £3000 - Towards the cost of building new headquarters at Paddicks Pitch, Waingels Road, Woodley

Voting: For: 6 Against: 0 Abstain: 0 No Vote: 1

49. **ANNUAL GRANT APPLICATIONS**

Members considered the annual grant applications which had originally been considered by the Planning & Community Committee on 7 January 2025, with that Committee requesting the grants be considered for funding utilising unspent 2024/25 Youth Service budget.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To award the following grants to annual grant applicants utilising unspent 2024/25 Youth Service budget:
 - ARC Youth Counselling - £5,000
 - First Days' Childrens Charity - £5,000
 - Home-Start Wokingham District - £2,900

Voting: For: 6 Against: 0 Abstain: 0 No Vote: 1

50. **FRIENDS OF WOODFORD PARK UPDATE**

Members noted that, in light of the time of year and the previous report provided in November, Friends of Woodford Park provided no reported update at this time.

Councillor Horskins advised Committee members that he remained in regular contact with the Friends of Woodford Park and, despite standing down from the Leisure Services Committee, will continue to attend these Committee meetings to provide feedback when possible.

51. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Following a query about progress on the negotiation of an extended lease for Wheble Park, the Town Clerk confirmed that he was in discussion with Reading Borough Council's Estate Manager. He also confirmed that updates would be provided to this Committee, as well as the Strategy & Resources Committee who would be responsible for approving any new lease agreement.

There were no future agenda items raised by Members.

52. **PUBLICITY AND WEBSITE**

Members recommended the Council publicise the awarding of grants, as approved at the meeting, as well as advertising that the Youth Grant scheme has now closed following the award of all remaining funds.

The meeting closed at 9:06 pm
