

Abingdon Town Council

The minutes of a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Tuesday 9th June 2009 at 7.00 pm at the Old Abbey House, Abingdon

Present:

Councillor Jim Halliday
Councillor Angela Lawrence
Councillor Patrick Lonergan
Councillor Jan Morter
Councillor Julie Mayhew-Archer

In Attendance:

Councillor Jan Morter - Chair of Grants Sub-Committee
Mr Nigel Warner - Town Clerk
Mr Stephen Rich - Project & Technical Manager

1. Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Julie Mayhew-Archer, seconded by Councillor Patrick Lonergan and **resolved** that Councillor Lesley Legge be appointed Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee for the year 2009 / 2010.

2. Election of Vice Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Angela Lawrence, seconded by Councillor Patrick Lonergan and **resolved** that Councillor Julie Mayhew-Archer be appointed Vice Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee for the year 2009 / 2010.

3. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from the Mayor of Abingdon Councillor Patricia Hobby, Councillors Peter Fulk, Lesley Legge, Alison Rooke and Martin Smith.

4. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Jim Halliday, Angela Lawrence, Patrick Lonergan and Julie Mayhew-Archer all declared personal interests in any matters relating to the Vale of White Horse District Council as they were all elected Members of that Council.

5. Minutes

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th March 2009 be signed as a correct record.

6. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

7. **Matters Referred from Other Committees**

There were no matters referred from the following Committees: Museum Management, Planning and Highways Committee, Amenities and Recreation.

8. **Grants Sub Committee Meeting**

The Chair of the Grants Sub Committee informed the meeting that the Sub Committee had met and recommended the following for approval:

Name of Applicant	Reason for the grant application	Grant recommendation
Abingdon Foster Care Coordinators	Support for carers and children and families in need	£500
Abingdon European Society	Increased costs of hall hire	£100, subject to further information being received (delegated to Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair of Grants).
Northcourt centre	To replace wooden block floor	£500
Victim Support Oxon & Bucks	Training of volunteers	£250
The Kingwood Trust	Room hire costs	Further information required & defer to meeting

Resolved: *that the above applications be awarded through the grants scheme.*

The Chair of the Grants Sub Committee made a recommendation to the Committee that the Sub Committee should only meet twice a year namely June / July and January.

The Committee felt that this could have a detrimental effect on applications made to the District Council for grant funding, as the District Council required applicants to have the support of the Parish Council before making a grant, and that those making claims could have a substantial wait for a confirmation or otherwise of a grant. The Chair said that there were concerns over the recommendation required further consideration and should return to this Committee, if necessary, at a later date.

9. **Environmental Impacts Working Party**

Resolved: *That the Committee receive and approve the minutes of the meeting of the Environmental Impacts Working Party which took place on 14th April and 20th May 2009 and any recommendations therein.*

The Town Clerk informed the meeting that the Council had reintroduced paper towels back into the office in preference to electric hand dryers.

The Committee discussed the draft revised of the Town Council's Environmental Charter and requested that "to discourage indiscriminate use of bonfires" be put back into the document.

The general principal of encouraging indigenous plant species whilst discouraging invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam should also be included in the document. The documents should include reference to Allotment Associations encouraging organically produced vegetables, and the Council collecting rain water for use in watering and consideration of the use of "grey water."

The Charter should also highlight the Councils gradual move to LED lighting for the Christmas displays.

Resolved: that the draft of the Environmental Charter be approved the Council's working document and that it be referred back to the Working Party for further consideration before then being brought back to the next meeting of this Committee for approval.

10. **Twining Forum**

Resolved: That the Committee receive the minutes of the meeting of the Twining Forum which took place on 28th April 2009.

11. **Minutes of the Joint Environmental Trust (JET)**

The Committee **resolved** to note the minutes of the Joint Environmental Trust (JET) held on 3^d April 2009.

12. **Choose Abingdon Partnership – Interim Board**

The Committee **resolved** to note the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership held on 20th April and 11th May 2009.

13. **Schedule of Accounts**

Resolved: that the Committee approve the Schedule of Payments for the period 1st February to 30th April 2009.

14. **Approval of Statement of Accounts for Year Ended 31st March 2009**

Members received and considered the above document.

Members felt that the Town Council should voice their concerns to the District Council concerning the payment of the 2008/09 service charge which the Town Council was liable for relating to work to the roof, electrics and fire protection. The Town Council had not been informed that this work was taking place and consequently had not made budget provision.

In response to a question in relation to the treatment of capital expenditure in relation to the Museum project and the effect on earmarked reserves, the Town Clerk agreed to contact Councillor Jim Halliday directly.

The committee agreed to **recommend** to the Town Council acceptance of the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2009, including the annual governance statement.

15. **Financial, Performance Monitoring and General Report of the Town Clerk**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda.

It was agreed that there should be a debriefing meeting for the Rock in the Park event held on 9th May 2009. The event was considered a success but in order to meet the requirements of the police and District Council estimated additional costs were incurred by the Council amounting to £1,500.

It was **resolved** to accept the list of Key Objectives for 2008 / 2009 and the Draft List of objectives for 2009 / 2010.

The Committee asked that the last item on page one of the Draft list of Key Objectives, documentation of Council policies and procedures, be detailed in greater depth i.e. to list them and put timescales in place.

Councillor Jim Halliday said he would like to see target dates against the objectives for 2009/10 and this was agreed, for implementation for the next meeting.

Councillor Patrick Lonergan said he would like to see the objectives cross referenced with Council policies.

The Committee considered the results from the Best Value Consultation exercise and expressed a view that they would like to see the results compared with previous years. Members were pleased that 95% of those questioned expressed satisfaction with the Council's services. Following on from the figures there was a list of comments. Members felt that relevant comments should be forwarded to the appropriate authorities, including the Choose Abingdon Partnership. However it should be made clear that the comments were in direct response to two questions namely:

"3. If you answered "Poor" to any of the above could you give your reasons and suggestions for improvements?"

"4. Please add any comments you wish, in relation to any of the Council's services. In particular, with limited resources, what would be your first priority for improvement of services?"

It was **resolved** to agree the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2008 / 2009 to 2012 / 2013.

It was **resolved** to agree the Financial Regulations and the amendments therein.

It was **recommended** that Standing Order 30 (Contracts) be altered so that the threshold for requesting tenders be reduced from £50,000 to £25,000. It was noted that this recommendation would be moved in accordance with Standing Order 34 (Motion to permanently vary the Council's Standing Orders) and therefore, having been moved and seconded, would stand adjourned without discussion until the next Council meeting.

Resolved: that the Committee receive and approve the Financial, Performance Monitoring and General Report of the Town Clerk.

16. **Audit Matters**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda.

The Committee noted that the external audit for the year ended 31st March 2009 had been called for Monday 3rd August 2009 and external auditors would be working at the Town Council offices for the following two weeks.

Regarding the Internal Audit report the report from Auditing Solutions reported on both recommendations made during the year, and the Council's response. The Town Clerk's reports picked up on outstanding matters. The Town Clerk reported on two matters not covered in his report. In relation to the cemetery invoice whereby a flat rate rather than a double fee had been charged for the interment of a person from outside of the parish, it was reported that the person concerned had previously been a resident of Abingdon and consequently qualified for the lower fee. In relation to debts of over 6 months old as at 31st March 2009 the meeting was informed that the amount outstanding had reduced from £2,034 to £917, and the remaining amount was being actively pursued. The Town Council did not undertake activities which resulted in significant problems with bad debtors. However the Council was now asking for payment in advance or on the day in cash for occasional markets.

It was **resolved** to agree the Internal Audit report and the actions taken as a result of it.

17. **Markets**

Members were requested to formally approve the creation of the following markets:

- Mamma Mia Italian Market Friday 26th, Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th June 2009.
- Continental Market: Friday 23rd, Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th October 2009.

It was **resolved** that under powers given to the Town Council by virtue of the Food Act 1984 that the above markets be approved.

18. **Choose Abingdon Partnership**

Members noted the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

In relation to the constitution it was noted in relation to recommendation 1 (a) the Partnership Board has resolved that the Board should consist of two nominated Members from each of the Town Council, but only one from each of the District and County Councils; the Town Council had suggested that there should be two from each local authority. Members noted this and **resolved** to give continued approval to the Town Council's involvement in the Partnership in the light of this constitutional change but nonetheless to write to the Partnership pointing out the Town Council's view that whilst it is content with the position taken by the principal authorities it is this Council's view that there should be two members from each authority.

It was **recommended** that the Council agree to the three year funding commitment of a contribution to the Partnership of £20,000 per annum subject to the annual budget cycle.

It was **resolved** that the transfer of the earmarked reserves for the Partnership totaling £21,178 be agreed. It was noted that should the Partnership be dissolved at any time in the future, the monies would be returned to the original donors in proportion to their original contributions.

It was **resolved** to receive the report of the Town Clerk and agree to the suggestions and requests therein.

19. **War Memorial**

The Committee received the Project and technical Officers report regarding the structure and movement of the Abingdon War memorial.

The Committee **resolved**:

1. To make an application to the Joint Environmental Trust for a grant in order to draw up plans and costings for the area of the War Memorial with a view to refurbishment of the area to include dismantling the Memorial and installing new piled foundations, possible realignment of the Memorial, possible introduction of trees, street furniture, railings and revamp of paved and flower beds and subject to receiving this grant to ask for a quote from Mr Mike Habermehl of Adams Habermehl Environmental Design Partnership for undertaking this work, and to appoint him subject to a satisfactory quote being received.

2. To undertake all necessary investigative work so that information be made available so that provision can be made in the 2010 / 2011 budget exercise with a view to work being carried out early in the new financial year.

20. **Proposal for Communal Lakes**

This matter had been deferred from a previous meeting where a request had come from Mr Mick Foster, the Council's Water keeper, via the Fisheries Sub-Committee for a communal lake to be built for fishing, with an estimated project cost of £20,000.

The Committee wished to thank Mr Foster for his suggestion and interest. Members considered that the existing corporate fisheries offered plentiful fishing locally and were not minded to make provision in the Council's forward plans for such a lake, as the Council already had a significant capital programme over the next few years. It was noted that there were plans for Thrupp Lake (Radley Lakes) to be turned into a nature reserve; this could be a location for a communal lake and may be a complementary activity. It was **resolved** that the suggestion be forwarded to the appropriate authorities in relation to the Radley Lakes.

21. **Influenza pandemic**

(1) Council Involvement as a Burial Authority

The Project and Technical Manager presented a paper to the Committee detailing the worst case scenario, based on the 1918 flu pandemic, and how burial services in Abingdon could be affected.

The Committee **resolved** to accept the following actions:

- To agree that staff can work overtime and a varied shift pattern should it become necessary.
- To purchase extra wooden shoring and Speed Braces to allow for the maximum number of burials under a normal service (Cost approx. £1,100).
If situation goes to Red alert the cost would be approximately another £1,650 on top of the £1,100 mentioned above.
- To draw up lists of contractors available for grave excavations.
- To draw up lists of suppliers of excavators and spares.
- To open negotiations with the District Council, as the principal burial authority, on the use of their staff should they be required. *The expectation would be that this would be on a similar basis that the Town Council staff was used for the 2007 flooding i.e. assistance in an emergency without charges being levied between the Councils.*
- To negotiate with other authorities on the provision of burial space should the cemetery become full and vice versa for other local authorities.
- To set up direct line of contact with the Principal Officer to authorise actions summarised above (e.g. Collective Burials, cessation of certain services etc.)
- To set up a Local Liaison Group with Funeral Directors, the Clergy, District council and Members to discuss Pandemic issues and ensure there is a path of communication.

(2) Role of Parish Councils More Generally

The Town Clerk presented a paper to the Committee regarding the role Parish Councils could play other in relation to emergencies and the production of a Community Action Plan. One such emergency could be a flu pandemic.

The Town Clerk and Councillor Angela Lawrence had attended a meeting of the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils at which the County Council gave a presentation on Community Plans. They have acknowledged that parishes have resource limitations but would look to them in an emergency for information on local matters e.g. contacts for staff, local voluntary groups, key holders for public buildings. The Town Clerk informed the meeting he thought the Town Council could produce such a Plan based on the template published.

The Committee **resolved** that officers should prepare a Community Action Plan for consideration at the September Meeting.

22. Flood Alleviation

This item was deferred from a previous meeting. The Council had set aside a sum of £10,000 for flood alleviation.

The availability of funding had been advertised in the Town Crier publication but as yet with no up take. It was likely that local Flood Action Groups would be formed and therefore the sum should be kept in the accounts for as and when groups came forward, most likely to top-up grants received from other sources.

23. Armed Forces Day

The Project and Technical Manager presented a paper to the Committee detailing the arrangements for the national Armed Forces celebrations on 22nd June (Flag raising) and 4th July (Family Day at Dalton Barracks).

The Committee **resolved** to accept the paper and the contents therein.

24. **Community Safety**

The committee received notification of the Vale Community Safety Partnership Forum taking place on 7th July 2009 and Members were requested to nominate Members to attend.

It was **resolved** that Councillor Patrick Lonergan attends the Forum.

25. **Town Notice Boards and Banners**

The Town Clerk presented a report to Committee regarding notice boards and banners. It was noted that there was no budgetary provision in the current financial year.

The Committee **resolved** (1) to ask Community Associations if they would consider advertising Town Council information in their notice boards if packs of information were to be sent out. (2) Regarding banners the Committee were not minded at this stage to follow-up the idea of cross-street banners, although it wished to see what information could be obtained from other local authorities, specifically South Lakeland District Council, to which the Leader had made a request. (3) to undertake appropriate advertising using banners in the Market Place at officers' discretion.

26. **Civic Matters**

The Town Clerk presented a report to Committee regarding purchasing a new supply of Council ties and other civic items (tankards, pens, paperweights etc).

Members **resolved** that a supply of ties should be purchased. These would not be placed on open sale although there would be no restriction on who could purchase the ties. It was further **resolved** that scarves for ladies should not be purchased as these items were no longer fashionable and would not sell well.

Councillor Patrick Lonergan informed the meeting that the Mayors Badge of Office should be taken out of circulation to enable urgent repairs to the enamel on the badge, which had become badly worn. The Committee **resolved** that arrangements should be made at an appropriate time in agreement with the Mayor for specialist repairs to take place, to be funded from the treasures budget.

It was **resolved** that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, to commission and purchase other civic items such as shields, pens and paperweights.

Members were also asked to consider badges for the Freemen of the Town of Abingdon. It was explained that when Past Mayor's badges had been commissioned in 2000, badges for Freemen had not been considered. It so happened that at that time all the individual Freemen were past Mayors but wore their badge with a yellow rather than a green ribbon. Corporate Freemen wear the regalia and/ or uniform of their own organization.

Resolved: *that officers look into the cost of having a Freeman's Badge manufactured and report back to a future meeting.*

27. **National and Oxfordshire Associations of Local Councils**

(1) Meeting of Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC)

The Town Clerk presented a report to Committee regarding the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils meeting of 12th May which had been attended by him and the Leader. He verbally reported on the Annual General Meeting of the OALC which had taken place on 8th June 2009. He had attended this meeting with Councillor Angela Lawrence. Papers for the meeting had been previously circulated.

(2) NALC Annual Conference and Exhibition

Members were informed of the above event taking place in London on 4th and 5th September 2009.

It was **resolved** *that an e-mail be sent to all Members requested any nominations to attend this event.*

(3) Representation on OALC Executive Committee

The Town Clerk reported that Town Councils had expressed concern over the years regarding services to the larger Councils and a lack of representation of larger Councils on the OALC Executive Committee. A number of issues concerning Town Councils had been positively addressed by both the OALC and the NALC. However it had been pointed out that larger Councils had not been putting themselves forward for election and there were vacancies for a Parish Councillor from the Vale of White Horse for filling by co-option until 2011.

It was **resolved** *that Councillor Angela Lawrence or Lesley Legge be nominated to fill one of the vacancies (to decide between themselves as to whose name goes forward).* It was further **resolved** *that Councillor Angela Lawrence or Lesley Legge be nominated for election to the NALC national committee when nominations are requested (to decide between themselves as to whose name goes forward).*

(4) Members Training Courses

Members were informed of two courses – Getting to grips with Finance and How Local Councils Fit into the Planning System.

It was **resolved** *that an email be sent to all Members asking if they wished to attend the above courses.*

28. **Planning Towards Celebrations for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee**

The Project and Technical Manager presented a report to Committee informing Members of the forthcoming celebrations for Her Majesty The Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

It was **recommended:**

- *A Working Party to be established to work on all aspects of the Diamond Jubilee, starting in October 2009. Members are requested to make nominations for the Working Party.*
- *To recommend to Council suitable celebrations, events, projects and purchases that the Town Council could undertake for the Diamond Jubilee.*
- *To recommend to Council a suitable amount of funding to be set aside for the following three years (2010/2011, 2011/2012, 2012/2013).*

29. **Publicity**

The Committee asked that news on the Museum project continue to be given regular publicity.

30. **Exclusion of the public including the press**

Resolved: *that in accordance with section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 (as extended by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972), the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, as summarised below.*

Items for discussion:

- Confidential Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on 10th March 2009;
- Matters arising;
- Property matters;
- Radley Lakes;
- Tenders for Council services.

The Meeting rose at 10.20pm

Signed Date

Chair