

**Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2012  
At 7.00 pm at the Old Abbey House.**

**Present**

Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Chairman, Chairman of Audit & Performance Sub-Committee
Cllr Marilyn Badcock	Vice-Chairman, Chairman Amenities & Recreation Ctte
Cllr Michael Badcock	Mayor of Abingdon, ex-officio
Cllr Angela Lawrence	
Cllr Iain Littlejohn	
Cllr Monica Lovatt	
Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer	
Cllr Katie Nobes	
Cllr Alison Rooke	

**In Attendance**

Cllr Alice Badcock	
Nigel Warner	Town Clerk

**F71 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Peter Jones (Chairman, Planning and Highways Committee).

**F72 Declarations of interest**

Cllrs Marilyn Badcock, Michael Badcock and Sandy Lovatt declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the Oxfordshire County Council.

Cllrs Marilyn Badcock, Michael Badcock, Angela Lawrence, Sandy Lovatt and Julie Mayhew-Archer declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the Vale of White Horse District Council as they are members of that authority.

Cllr Monica Lovatt declared a personal interest in the discussion of the grant to the Abingdon and District Citizens' Advice Bureau, as she is the Council's representative on this body.

Cllr Angela Lawrence declared a personal interest in the discussion in relation to the grant to the Abingdon and District Citizens' Advice Bureau, as she is a member of the Friends of Abingdon and District Citizens' Advice Bureau and friend of the Chair of that organisation, Mrs. Hilary Green.

**F73 Minutes**

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2011 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to an amendment

**F74 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising which we not already covered elsewhere on the agenda.

F75 **Statements and Questions from the Public**

There were no statements or questions from the public.

F76 **Matters referred**

The budget estimates of the County Hall Museum Management Committee and of the Amenities & Recreation Committee had been referred by those Committees for financial implications, and were considered under minute F78.

F77 **Grants Sub-Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Grants Sub-Committee of 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012, as circulated with the agenda, were received and considered.

The Chairman of the Sub-Committee, Cllr Monica Lovatt, was pleased to note that amongst the grant applications being considered were applications from clubs and societies which had not previously applied for grants from this Council. Another Member concurred with this, but also wondered if this was a sign of the difficult economic climate.

It was **resolved**:

- (i) That grants be awarded as follows:

Abingdon College & District Film Society (a)	£300
Abingdon Naturalists' Society (a)	£850
Abingdon Rugby Union Football Club (b)	£710
Oxfordshire Play Association (b)	£500
Preston Road Community Association (c)	£1,000
Total	£3,660

It was noted that these grants were being awarded in pursuance of the Council's powers, as noted immediately after the name of the body being awarded the grant, as follows:

- (a) Local Government Act 1972, section 145;  
(b) Local Government Act 1972, section 137;  
(c) Local Government Act 1972, section 133.
- (ii) That the minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee of 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012 be approved.

*Cllrs Marilyn and Michael Badcock declared a personal interest in the grant application from Abingdon Rugby Union Football Club as they had made a donation from their County Allowances to sponsor one of the teams to receive coaching from Wasps.*

*Cllr Iain Littlejohn declared a personal interest in the grant application from Abingdon Rugby Union Football Club as his son is a member of the club.*

*Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer declared a personal interest in the grants applications from*

*Abingdon College & District Film Society , Abingdon Naturalists' Society and Preston Road Community Association, as she is acquainted with various members of these groups.*

*Cllr Alison Rooke declared a personal interest in the grants application from Preston Road Community Association as she knows Mrs. Mary de Vere, Trustee of the Association.*

*Cllr Angela Lawrence declared a personal interest in the grant application from Abingdon College & District Film Society as her husband is a member of the Society, and indicated that she would consider this interest prejudicial should the application be discussed.*

*Cllr Angela Lawrence entered the meeting during discussion of this item, it being 7.12 pm.*

F78 **Budget estimates 2012/13 and financial report**

The report of the Town Clerk/ Responsible Finance Officer, in relation to the above, as circulated with the agenda, was received and considered.

1. Payment schedules

It was **resolved** that the schedule of payments for the period October to November 2011 be approved.

2. Audit matters

It was noted that the audit for 2010/11 had been completed and the auditor's report received. Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations, the consideration of the report was a matter which is reserved for the Council and therefore would be brought to the meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2012. The audit fee was £3,500; this is the standard fee for a Council of this size and no additional fees were charged. The original budget against audit fees, based on the previous audit requirements, was £10,000 and therefore there has been a saving of £6,500.

The latest internal audit report would be considered by the Audit and Performance Committee at its meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2012. The Internal Auditor, Mr. Stuart Pollard of Auditing Solutions, would be at the meeting to present the report and answer Member's queries.

Cllr Angela Lawrence had attending a meeting of the National Association of Local Councils Larger Councils' Committee earlier that day. With the abolition of the Audit Commission, Council's would need to appoint their own auditors; previously they had been appointed directly by the Audit Commission. She stated that there would be a consultation regarding this matter in due course, which the Council would need to consider.

3. Budget estimates 2012/13

Members considered the report in relation to the above.

Cllr Sandy Lovatt led discussion of the estimates for 2012/13. The first draft revenue and capital estimates had been considered in some detail by the Finance and General Purposes Committee at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2011. The estimates which came under the auspices of the County Hall Museum Management and the

Amenities & Recreation Committees had now approved by those Committees and had now return to to this Committee for further consideration.

#### Base revenue estimates 2012/13

Members noted the base revenue estimates for 2012/13, which provided funding for maintenance of services at current levels of activity, i.e. "business as usual."

#### Capital and larger revenue (project-based) estimates 2012/13

Cllr Alison Rooke noted the Diamond Jubilee budget bid of £25,000 and asked if there were estimates of attendance or income, and what provision had been made for costs of staff time. The Town Clerk stated that no charge was being made to attend the events; they were open to the community. With regard to attendance, it was anticipated that this would depend on the capacities of the different sites. The costs of staff time needed to be viewed in the context of what the Council needed to achieve through the budget setting process. Within the budget bid there was provision for the marginal costs of staffing, i.e. the additional hours for the works team staff. Provision had not been made for staff time which was already provided for within the base revenue estimates. At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Alice Badcock, as Chairman of the Diamond Jubilee Working group, stated that sponsorship was being actively explored and donations would be requested at some events. Any surplus on an event would be donated to the Queen's charities.

Cllr Alison Rooke stated that there should be a permanent commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee and had suggested a bandstand. She was suggesting that the Council provide "seed money" and that then the local bands raise money and grants be applied for. Cllr Marilyn Badcock stated that she had recently looked at her papers from 1987, when this matter had been raised. She felt that this was a matter worthy of further consideration, but that the Council and its officers would be busy with the Jubilee events this year and therefore it should be brought forward as a project to consider next year.

With regard to the proposed budget for the Olympics/ Olympic torch events, Cllr Alison Rooke queried what this expenditure was for, as she understood that the District Council were responsible for the road closures etc. Cllr Iain Littlejohn stated that the Council may consider events to take allied to the event of the torch passing through, and other events surrounding the Olympics. Cllr Alice Badcock stated that the detailed plans were due for discussion by the Diamond Jubilee Working Group.

Cllr Alison Rooke proposed an amendment, seconded by Cllr Angela Lawrence, that the budget for play area improvements be increased from £10,000 to £20,000, with the additional £10,000 being funded from the Community Fund.

Cllr Marilyn Badcock, as Chairman of the Amenities and Recreation Committee, stated that the Council's play areas were in good condition, as evidenced by reports from the officers, and £10,000 was considered an appropriate amount, which could be considered for additional "adult equipment." She did query the terminology of the budget head and whether a heading like "recreational and play equipment" would be more appropriate.

Cllr Alison Rooke stated that her focus was more on providing additional equipment. For example, some play areas could accommodate more equipment, for instance in Chilton Close. Provision for teenagers was also worthy of consideration.

Cllr Marilyn Badcock stated that the matter would be reviewed by the Amenities and

Recreation Committee during 2012/13, but that earlier this year Members had been requested to submit any suggestions regarding play equipment, and none had been forthcoming. Cllr Angela Lawrence stated that she had been requesting additional equipment for the Boxhill area for some time.

Cllr Iain Littlejohn stated that he agreed with improving the play equipment, but this needed to be reviewed by the Amenities and Recreation Committee as suggested.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was **lost** with 5 votes against, 3 in favour and 1 abstention.

In response to a question regarding the **website** budget, Cllr Marilyn Badcock, as Chairman of the Communications Sub-Committee, stated that the current website agreement is renewable annually in December. It had been agreed to continue with this provider for now and to review the matter in June/ July. By then, there would be progress in relation to Guildhall marketing and this would inform decisions regarding the future direction of the website.

Cllr Alison Rooke proposed an amendment, seconded by Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, that the grant to the **Abingdon and District Citizens' Advice Bureau** be increased from £10,500 to £14,000, with the additional £3,500 being funded from the Community Fund.

Cllr Monica Lovatt spoke to this item as the Council's representative on the Bureau, and commenced by saying that she was pleased that she had not become a trustee, as this would have stopped her addressing the Committee, as she would have had a personal and prejudicial interest. She was very keen on supporting the Bureau and had attended a "Big Energy week" event at which it was very clear that the public valued the services of the Bureau and held the Bureau in high esteem. She knew that the Bureau was facing financial difficulties which could result in it having to reduce opening hours. Following this matter being raised at the previous meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, she had requested information to justify an increase in grant, but more information was required. She had however ascertained that a number of other parishes do give valuable support.

Cllr Angela Lawrence stated that this was a valuable service and that 95% of staffing is by volunteers. However there was a quality requirement that a paid member of staff be present in all Bureaux during advice sessions. Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer stated that with cuts to legal aid budgets and Bureaux taking on this work, the Prime Minister had recently congratulated Councils which support their Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Cllr Sandy Lovatt stated that the Community Fund was the appropriate budget for any additional grant but that more information was required.

Cllr Michael Badcock proposed a further amendment, seconded by Cllr Iain Littlejohn to the effect that the grant to the Abingdon and District Citizens' Advice Bureau be increased from £10,500 to £14,000, with the additional £3,500 being funded from the Community Fund, subject to provision of additional information from the Bureau, and approval of the justification of the additional grant, by Members at the Council meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2012. The amendment was **agreed** and is reflected in the recommendations set out below.

Cllr Alison Rooke proposed an amendment, seconded by Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, that the budget for **weed control** be increased by £1,500, with the difference being funded from the Community Fund. Cllr Sandy Lovatt stated that this was something

which County Councillors could fund through their area budgets. On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost with 5 votes against, 3 in favour and 1 abstention.

It was **recommended**:

1. *That the draft base revenue budget estimates for 2012/13, as circulated in the report of the Town Clerk, be approved in the sum of £1,004,008 (net expenditure).*
2. *That the estimates for capital and larger revenue (project-based) items for 2012/13, as detailed in appendix A in the report of the Town Clerk, be approved in the sum of £340,200.*
3. *That an additional grant of £3,500 be allocated to the Abingdon and District Citizens' Advice Bureau, with a commensurate decrease in the allocation to the Community Fund, subject to provision of additional information from the Bureau, and approval of the justification of the additional grant, by Members at the Council meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2012.*
4. *That the total net spending provided in the estimates for amounting to 2012/13 £1,344,208 be funded by way of the precept; that a sum of £370 be designated as a transferred to the general reserve; and that the Council request the District Council to levy a precept, for Town Council purposes, amounting to £1,344,578 for the financial year 2012/13*
5. *That following the review of Council reserves, that the general reserve be deemed to be appropriate to the revenue expenditure of the Council, that the earmarked reserves be justified and sufficient in relation to known and potential commitments of the Council, that the capital receipts reserve be noted and that the projected reserve movements at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 be approved as detailed in appendix B of the Town Clerk's report.*
6. *That the Council's reserves be further reviewed when considering the final accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012.*

## **Fees and Charges**

### Cemetery:

It was noted that previous comparisons with other local authorities have revealed that that the Council's fees in relation to the cemetery have been less than the average. In relation to burials, covered by cost centre 210, the Council's aim was not to make a surplus out of these services but to cover costs. However this varied considerably year on year depending on the number and type of burials. The projected estimate for 2011/12 was noted as a deficit on the service of £2,411, although for 2010/11 there had been a slight surplus of £165. The Committee considered that it should continue to move in the direction of aiming to breakeven on this service, but at the same time having regard to the difficult economic situation. In line with the recommendation of the Amenities and Recreation Committee it was **recommended**

7. *That cemetery fees and charges be increased by 5% from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012.*

Guildhall: In relation to the Guildhall a similar level of income had been assumed for 2012/13 as for 2011/12, the assumption being that increased lettings of the improved facilities would be balanced by the unavailability of part of the premises during the improvement programme. Members considered that with both capital works and

business planning ongoing, the Council should not increase fees and charges at this point and the budget was based upon that assumption. This did not preclude a review and changes during 2012/13. It was **recommended**

8. *That there be no change to Guildhall fees and charges from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012.*
9. *That authority be delegated to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, to publish the estimates for 2012/13, including any budget summaries for the Council tax leaflet and the website.*

F79 **Town archives**

The report of the Honorary Town Archivist, Mrs Jackie Smith, in relation to the above, as circulated with the agenda, was received and considered.

Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, as Chairman of the County Hall Museum Management Committee, stated that Mrs Smith had been of great assistance to the Committee in planning new exhibits etc for the Museum. She suggested that the Council may wish to organise another session for Members to meet Mrs Smith and view the archives.

**Resolved:** that the report be noted and that the Honorary Archivist be thanked for her continued

F80 **Localism Act**

The plain English Guide to the Localism Act (Department for Communities and Local Government), as circulated with the agenda, was received and considered.

Cllr Angela Lawrence stated that the Act had implications at local level, with matters such as the Community Right to Buy, and there were opportunities to lead in this area. Training was available through the National Association of Local Councils and the Local Government Association. She mentioned the "Community Infrastructure Levy" (CIL) which effectively meant that developer contributions, previously "section 106" monies, were not restricted to a specific area, although the levy had to be relevant; for example, a levy in relation to roads and generated by a development in one part of the County could be used in another part of the County. The National Association of Local Councils was asking that 40% of the CIL should be administered by local (parish and town) Councils.

Cllr Sandy Lovatt stated that he did not disagree but that many of the provisions of the Act related to principal authorities, particularly planning. However the role of energizing the community at local level would rely on towns and parishes.

Cllr Marilyn Badcock noted that local authorities would be keeping a list of community assets, which would then give the community the right to buy these should they be offered for sale. The Town Clerk stated that he would make enquiries regarding which local authority would maintain the list. He thought that it would be administered through the local land charges department, but the Town Council would have an important role in putting forward suggestions for the list. He stated that he would make enquiries in this regard and report back to the Committee.

**Resolved:** that the matter be noted.

F81 **Publicity**

The Committee **resolved** that publicity be given to the grants awarded and the Joint Environment Trust (minute F77); and the commencement of works in relation to phase 1 of the Guildhall Improvement Project.

F82 **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2012. The Town Clerk stated that he was looking to produce a draft calendar of meetings as soon as possible, but was concerned to avoid clashes with the District Council. The District Council's diary for 2012/13 had not been agreed but it was understood there was a draft and so he would contact the District Council and proceed on the basis of the draft.

**SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)**

F83 **Exclusion of the public, including the press**

The Chairman moved and it was **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.

F84 **Council computers**

The confidential report of the Deputy Town Clerk in relation to the above, as circulated with the agenda, was received and considered.

**Resolved:**

1. that the report of the Deputy Town Clerk be approved;
2. that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk (exercised through the Deputy Town Clerk), in consultation with Cllr Andrew Todd, to procure the new computer server and support contract, in accordance with the recommendation in the report of the Deputy Town Clerk.

F85 **Open air swimming pool**

The confidential report of the Deputy Town Clerk, together with the confidential final operating report 2011 (Vale of White Horse DC) in relation to the above, as circulated with the agenda, was received and considered.

**Resolved:**

1. that the report of the Deputy Town Clerk be noted;
2. the comments of Members outlined in the confidential appendix be noted and that a meeting be arranged with the Vale of the White Horse District Council to discuss matters.

F86 **Property matters**

The confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above, as circulated with the agenda, was received and considered.

**Resolved:** that the report be approved, including the recommendation at paragraph 16.1, and the resolutions detailed in the confidential appendix.

F87 **Partnership grants – Choose Abingdon Partnership and Thames Valley Police**

The confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above, as circulated with the agenda, was received and considered.

It was noted that the three year partnership arrangements in relation to both the Choose Abingdon Partnership and the Thames Valley Police (Town centre police Community Support Officer) came to an end at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 and both bodies were seeking the Council's commitment going forward.

Cllr Sandy Lovatt stated that the Choose Abingdon Partnership had proved to be very valuable for the town, and was something that the Town Council should support.

**Resolved:** that the report of the Town Clerk be noted.

**Recommended:**

1. That the Town Council make a grant to the Choose Abingdon Partnership of £20,000 for 2012/13, in accordance with the powers set out in sections 137 and 144 of the Local Government Act 1972, as provided for in the draft estimates, and agrees in principle to renew its commitment to the Partnership for a further three year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012.
2. That the Town Council renews the memorandum of understanding in relation to the provision of a town centre Police Community Support Officer for a term of three years from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012, in accordance with its powers under section 4 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 noting that provision is made within the estimates for 2012/13 in the sum of £16,700.

The meeting rose at 9.10 pm.