

Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee on Tuesday 11 January 2010 held in the Old Abbey House.

Present

Councillor Lesley Legge	Chair / Leader
Councillor Jim Halliday	Vice Chair
Councillor Alastair Fear	Chair of Amenities & Recreation
Councillor Tim Oates	Chair of Planning & Highways
Councillor Julie Mayhew-Archer	Chair of County Hall Museum Mgt
Councillor Patrick Lonergan	
Councillor Alison Rooke	

In Attendance

Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mrs Sandra Hill	Deputy Town Clerk
Mr Steve Rich	Project & Technical Manager

One member of the public.

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

Part A

108 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the Mayor of Abingdon, Cllr Duncan Brown and Cllr Angela Lawrence.

109 **Declarations of interest**

Cllrs Lonergan, Halliday Mayhew-Archer and Rooke declared personal interests in any matters relating to the Vale of White Horse District Council as they are Members of that Authority.

Cllrs Mayhew-Archer and Rooke declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the Guildhall as they are Members of the District Council who own and operate this facility.

110 **Minutes**

Resolved to sign as a correct record the minutes of the meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 9 and 10 November 2010.

111 **Matters Arising**

95 – 10 November 2010

Quasimodo 2012 - it was confirmed that a further meeting would be arranged to discuss further Abingdon's representation at the annual Quasimodo Fair in 2012.

Burgess Trust – the meeting were informed that five very good applications have been received, and that a panel consisting of the Town Council's Twinning Representative, Chair of Finance & General Purposes Committee, Chair of Grants Sub Committee and the Twinning Officer would be interviewing applicants.

112 **Statements and Questions from the Public**

There were no statements from the public.

Part B: Matters referred and minutes of sub-committees, working parties and other bodies

113 **Matters referred**

There were no matters referred.

114 **Grants Sub-Committee Meeting**

Resolved to receive and consider the minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee meeting which took place on 4 January 2010 and recommendation contained therein to approve a grant to Larkmead School for the Big Weave Community Project in the sum of £500, as detailed in the minutes.

115 **Town Crier Editorial Working Party**

It was noted that under minute 25 on 16 November 2010 Minutes that reference to Mayor in Waiting (2nd paragraph) should be changed to Deputy Mayor.

Resolved to receive and consider the minutes of the meeting of the Town Crier Editorial Working Party which took place on 16 and 23 November 2010 and to consider any recommendations contained therein.

116 **Choose Abingdon Partnership Board**

Resolved to note the minutes of the meeting of the 27 September and 12 October 2010.

Part C: Financial

Cllr Jim Halliday joined the meeting at 7.17 pm

117 **Budget Estimates 2011 / 2012**

During the budget discussions the proposed running costs for the Guildhall was raised and at this point Cllrs Mayhew-Archer and Rooke declared a personal and prejudicial interest as Members of the Vale of White Horse District Council, which own and operate the facility, and they left the meeting during discussion of that item.

The meeting received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/ Responsible Financial Officer, in relation to the budget estimates, as circulated with the agenda.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Lesley Legge presented the proposed budget to the Committee. She stated:

“The Council’s expenditure funded from the precept remains the same for 2011/2012 as for 2010/2011. Overall the Council is aiming to maintain a similar level of the good service that we have provided this year.

“The budget papers presented to the meeting show how the proposed budget is made up and some of the changes in income and expenditure. I would draw your attention to some of the major items such as:

“The Guildhall, where the negotiations are ongoing with the Vale: whilst final agreement is awaited, the budget anticipates that the service will transfer on 1st April 2011 and a £120K provision is made.

“The Council is aware of the pressure on local services and community groups and it is proposed to allocate a sum of £40K to support such groups and local services – and community projects. I suggest that a sum of £5K is allocated within this budget towards a community Jubilee project.

“A general allocation of £10K is proposed towards street furniture, to include new seats, notice boards, bus shelters and cycle racks etc.

“The Council has some significant property responsibilities and it is proposed that £53K is included in the budget for general repair and maintenance and an additional £25K is included specifically towards work needed on the two cemetery chapels.

“Finally the Council will continue to make firm and prudent plans towards the provision of future services - Councillors will be aware that within the next ten years a new cemetery will be required and that the anticipated costs are between £500K and one million pounds depending upon the type, location and availability of land. By the end of this financial year the Council will have saved £151K towards this facility and we should continue to make sufficient provision towards this major project, so the Council does not get caught out, as some other Councils have been. It is proposed that a further £75K be saved towards this essential project.

“As we are all aware, these are difficult financial times for Local Government but I commend this budget to you as being a prudent budget that, whilst freezing the precept, allows the Council to both maintain and develop its services and also move forward to meet the challenges ahead.”

The Vice-Chair of the Committee, Cllr Jim Halliday, drew particular attention to a number of items which showed how the Council was carefully planning ahead for future needs by providing funding towards a new cemetery as well as looking after its property assets through the property fund and additional funding towards repairs to the cemetery chapels.

Members noted that the new street furniture fund of £10,000 could be used towards bus shelters, seats, notice boards and dropped kerbs, although it was noted that the latter are generally the responsibility of the County Council.

Members noted that the budget made provision for the operation of the Guildhall, and continued support to the “Choose Abingdon Partnership.” Members felt that the proposed Community Fund was a very valuable initiative which would also enable the Council to be very responsive towards current and emerging needs of the town.

It was recommended:

1. *That the draft budget estimates for 2011/12, as circulated in the report of the Town Clerk, detailed in appendices A and B and incorporating both revenue and capital schemes, be approved in the sum of £1,319,124 (net expenditure).*

2. That the total net spending provided in the estimates for amounting to 2011/12 £1,319,124 be funded by way of the precept; that a sum of £16,755 be transferred to the general reserve and that the Council request the District Council to levy a precept, for Town Council purposes, amounting to £1,335,879 for the financial year 2010/11.
3. That reserve movements at 31st March 2011 be approved as detailed in appendix C of the Town Clerk's report.

Section 137 Matters

It was noted that each year the Council must separately detail any expenditure items which it is funding under the "free resource" (section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972) but for which it does not have other specific legal powers. This allowed the Council discretion to fund expenditure on items which in its opinion (the test of the legality) are in the interests of the area or its inhabitants, or of part of it or of some of them, and which will benefit them in a manner commensurate with the expenditure.

The Council's spending on such items is capped according to the size of the electorate and an amount per elector. The amount allowable is £6.44 per elector – £168,158. The Town Council operates within this limit.

In this regard it was **recommended**

4. That the Council, in accordance with its powers under Section 137 and 139 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), incur the following expenditure which, in the opinion of the Council, is in the interests of the area or its inhabitants, or of part of it or of some of them, and will benefit them in a manner commensurate with the expenditure:

Grants to organisations (general)	£11,550*
Other grants – age and youth	£10,500*
Town Twinning	£7,531
Town Centre Partnership	£20,000
Joint Environmental Trust	£5,000
Christmas lights (including maintenance, installation and new lights)	£34,589
Total	<u>£89,220</u>

*It was noted in relation to those items with * against them, that depending on the organisations receiving the grants, some of these budgets may be allocated against other powers. Similarly, sections 137 and 139 may be relied upon to fund some of the items against the Community Fund (total fund £40,000), and these would be detailed on allocation.*

Fees and Charges

It was noted that Members had previously considered the Council's fees and charges. With regard to cemeteries and markets the Council's existing fees in these areas are at or below the average of many other local Councils.

Cemetery burials had historically been provided at a relatively small deficit but the Council's strategy had been to move to cover costs in this area. The budget for 2011/12 provided for this with an increase in fees and charges in line with inflation (retail prices

index November 2010). In relation to market tolls in recognition of difficult trading conditions as a result of the national economic situation, no increase in stall fees was proposed.

It was therefore **recommended**:

6. *That fees and charges in relation to cemeteries be increased by 4.7%; that market tolls remain the same as for 2010/11.*

The meeting conveyed their thanks to the Town Clerk and the Chair, Cllr Lesley Legge and Vice-Chair, Cllr Dr Jim Halliday, in preparing the budget.

118 **Finance report**

The meeting received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/ Responsible Financial Officer in relation to the above and as circulated with the agenda, and the Annual Audit Letter 2009/10. It was noted that the matters raised in the report had been responded to at the September meeting of the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee note the Report of the Town Clerk/ Responsible Financial Officer and the Annual Audit Letter 2009/10.

Part D: Town Council services

119 **Abingdon Visitor & Community Information Centre Review Consultation**

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

Resolved that

- (a) the proposed reduction in Saturday opening hours should be deferred to the next meeting of the Finance & General Purposes on Tuesday 15 February 2011.
- (b) that change in Saturday opening times should be referred to the next meeting of the Finance & General Purposes on Tuesday 15 February 2011.
- (c) the summer lunchtime crossover periods should be reduced to fall in line with the winter (October – May) crossover periods.
- (d) that the changes in the summer crossover contractual hours take effect from 1 February 2011.
- (e) that relevant staff should be given two months' pay at the summer crossover period to compensate for the reduction in the summer crossover contractual hours, and this would be paid in the February and March 2011 pay.

120 **Abingdon War Memorial**

The Projects and Technical Manager verbally reported that the war memorial had been successfully stabilised in its current position, thus removing the need to move the memorial. This had been a more cost effective approach and had removed the risks which were inherent in moving such a structure. The rise in the respective corners of the memorial was 1mm in the southeast, 22mm in the northeast, 6mm in the northwest

and 9mm in the southwest. In stabilising the memorial they encountered unforeseen problems but have corrected and stabilised the tilt as best they can.

The results of the tender exercise for the landscaping work were expected shortly and it was hoped that this work will be completed by the end of the financial year.

121 **Archives Report 2009 / 2010**

Thanks were relayed to the Hon. Archivist for her interesting and clear report.

Resolved that the Hon Archivist be asked if there any requirements she would like in order to fulfil her role, and that this should be reported back to the next Finance & General Purposes Committee on 15 February 2011.

Resolved to note the Hon Archivist's 2009/2010 report.

Part E: Consultations

122 **Oxfordshire County Council - Closer to You Strategy**

Resolved that the Town Council's two representatives would be the Leader/Chair of Finance & General Purposes Committee, Cllr Lesley Legge and the Town Clerk, Mr Nigel Warner.

123 **Dates of future meetings**

Resolved to note that future meetings of this committee are due to take place on: Tuesday 15 February 2011 and Tuesday 15 March 2011.

124 **Publicity**

Resolved that the Budget (after consideration by Full Council on Wednesday 19 January 2011) and the War Memorial should be considered for publicity.

SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)

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

The Chair will move:

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:

- Confidential Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on 9 and 10 November 2010.
- Matters arising and matters referred;
- Property matters.