

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 13th November 2012

At 7 pm in the Committee Room at the Old Abbey House, Abingdon

Present:

Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Chairman
Cllr Marilyn Badcock	Vice Chairman
Cllr Michael Badcock	
Cllr Iain Littlejohn	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Monica Lovatt	Ex-officio, Mayor
Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer	
Cllr Helen Pighills	
Cllr Alison Rooke	
Cllr Andrew Todd	

In Attendance

Cllr Samantha Bowring	
Ms Heather Brown	Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)

F40 **Apologies**

All Members were present.

F41 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

F42 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 4th September 2012.

Resolved: that minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 4th September 2012 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

F43 **Matters Arising**

Meeting of 29th May 2012 – Minute F5, Civic Regalia. The Mayor, Cllr Monica Lovatt, reported that she had made enquiries regarding the purchase of a gold back chain to support the Mayor's Chain. However, this had proved to be very expensive and consequently she had purchased a silver back chain at the cost of £63.

Minute F33 – Personal alarm devices / bells. The Town Clerk reported that had been in discussions with the Police and had also made enquiries of Age UK. He understood that the items in question could probably be obtained free of charge, but if not, he anticipated funding from one of the local service groups in the town.

F44 **Statements and Questions from the Public**

None.

F45 **Choose Abingdon Partnership (ChAPS)**

As previously requested, the ChAPS Manager, Ms Heather Brown, was present at the meeting to answer any queries in relation to Choose Abingdon Partnership matters.

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board Meeting which took place on 4th September 2012, as circulated with the agenda. A Member stated that a board meeting had taken place in October and was concerned that as these minutes were not available, the Committee did not have the most up to date information. The ChAPS Manager stated that with the preparation for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and the consequential associated work, she had not yet had a chance to produce these minutes and that she normally worked to the instructions of the Partnership Board in this matter which, when this subject was last discussed, had asked her to produce the previous minutes and next agenda together about a week before each board meeting. However the board could be asked to amend these instructions.

The ChAPS Manager, Ms Heather Brown, reported that she had received favourable feedback from the AGM and in particular the presentation which had taken place by "Hidden Britain". Their report had given a boost to the work of ChAPS and its partners. In particular, the finding in the report that 95% of visitors would make a repeat visit to the town was encouraging and supported the strategy in relation to the promotion of events. Ms Brown stated that the report was on the ChAPS website.

Ms Brown circulated a copy of the "Christmas in Abingdon-on-Thames" booklet which had been a joint production between the Chamber of Commerce and the Partnership, and Members welcomed this initiative. This booklet included details of the many events which were taking place in the town in the period up to Christmas.

Ms Brown stated that the Young Entrepreneurs' Awards had recently been launched. This would enable young entrepreneurs to enter a competition for which three cash awards would be given, together with a free promotional video and free advertising. She was pleased to report that Infineum had contributed £1,000 for the first prize. Further details could be obtained via the link

www.chooseabingdon.co.uk/news/young-entrepreneurs-awards

(Cllr Iain Littlejohn entered the meeting at this point, it being 7.15pm.)

Finally, Ms Brown stated that a major agenda item for the next board meeting would be consideration of taking the "Hidden Britain" report forward. Following a briefing to Members of the Town Council on 23rd October 2012, she would be proposing two specific initiatives:

- 1) to organise a marketing workshop. She considered that this would be the next step forward, using "Hidden Britain" to assist in this work.
- 2) She felt that work should be undertaken in relation to the riverside areas, a "big conversation". This would not be a neighbourhood plan but would nonetheless be a detailed study. Previously West Waddy ADP had undertaken some work in this area and she would be making an initial approach to them in this regard. A

Member stated that he was pleased that it was proposed that the riverside and its potential be looked at.

Members then discussed the work of the Partnership.

In response to a question, Ms Brown stated that it was her understanding that the scaffolding in the Abbey Shopping Centre would be removed in time for the Christmas Extravaganza on 1st December 2012, although this was in the control of the developers.

In relation to Minute 9 of the Partnership minutes of 4th September 2012, there was a query regarding the breakdown of the £57,500 which was available for delivering the High Street Action Plan. It was stated that £22,500 had originated from the Portas Fund allocated to the District Council, and a further £35,000 related to developer funding from Scottish Widows. These funds had to be used on regenerative activities for the retail areas of the town, with an emphasis on footfall and retail sales. The Partnership Manager stated that these funds were to be administered by the District Council who will be working with ChAPS to deliver the projects which had to be undertaken during the current financial year, i.e before 31st March 2013. An action plan was being prepared which would be considered by the District Council at its meeting on 12th December 2012. It was noted that a video had to be submitted to the relevant government department by 5th December 2012, outlining how it was intended this money should be spent.

(Cllr Samantha Bowring entered the meeting at this point, it being 7.26pm.)

A Member stated that she did not consider that the town had received its appropriate share of the £100,000 "Portas Funds". She understood that £10,000 was required by the Vale for administration of these funds, leaving £90,000 which had simply been divided between four areas, resulting in £22,500 going towards Abingdon, whereas the population of the town and the size of the retail centre meant that she considered the town should have received more of this money. The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, stated that whilst this was correct, the District Council had been persuaded to allocate £27,000 of the £100,000 area committee monies to Abingdon so that this was in proportion to the population of the town.

A Member stated that a consultation was currently taking place in relation to NNDR (National Non-Domestic Rates) and in particular, the powers of councils in relation to this matter. She stated that the Partnership should make representations to government regarding these proposals.

Members asked that their thanks to the Partnership for its work be recorded, and in particular, the work of the previous Chairman, Mr James White, who had worked hard to establish the Partnership as an important organisation in the life of the town. It was noted that whilst he had now stood down from the Board, he was continuing to lead in relation to the proposed 2014 Science Festival. It was **resolved** that the Town Clerk write to Mr James White and thank him for his work as the Chairman of the Choose Abingdon Partnership from 2009-2012.

F46 **Communications Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the joint meeting of the Communications Sub-Committee and Website Working Party of 16th August 2012

(circulated at the meeting) and of the Communications Sub-Committee of 20th September 2012 (as circulated with the agenda).

The Chairman of the Sub-Committee, Cllr Marilyn Badcock, reported that the latest edition of the Town Crier was being delivered by a new distributor and she requested that Members look out for the publication and report to the Deputy Town Clerk if they do not receive a copy.

With regard to the Communications Strategy, Cllr Marilyn Badcock reported that a revised version of this document would be presented to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee. In relation to the proposed Abingdon-on-Thames portal, Cllr Marilyn Badcock reported that following detailed analysis of the tenders from the two companies which were under active consideration, advice had been sought from the District Council regarding a number of areas which required clarification. In order to progress matters, professional assistance had been commissioned to take matters forward and to look at the various options and she anticipated that matters would shortly come to a conclusion.

A number of points were made by Members. One Member stated that the Council needed to be clear as to what the portal was and stated that most of the work involved in the new portal would be inputting data. The Councils' task was to choose the template into which this data was to be placed. Another Member stated that this matter had been looked at very carefully and one of the important tasks which was being undertaken was examine the tenders and to separate out the skilled work which the contractor would have to undertake from the more routine data inputting which could probably be sourced more economically through the Council.

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, referred to the latest edition of the Town Crier and stated that this was a well produced document and, in particular, the "Yeller" youth section was well received.

Resolved: that the minutes of the joint meeting of the Communications Sub-Committee and Website Working Party of 16th August 2012 and of the Communications Sub-Committee of 20th September 2012 be approved.

F47 **Grants Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Grants Sub-Committee which took place on 5th November 2012, including the recommendations contained therein.

The Chairman of the Grants Sub-Committee, Cllr Andrew Todd, presented the report of the Sub-Committee to Members and detailed the various recommendations and the rationale behind them.

In relation to the application by the Town Council for funding for Roysse Court Gardens from the Joint Environmental Trust, Cllr Todd stated that the amount requested in relation to this scheme was large in relation to the balances held by the Trust. The Sub-Committee was sympathetic to the Council's request but would not make a recommendation on this matter until it had seen detailed plans.

A Member queried why the Roysse Court Garden project was being brought forward. The Chairman of the Guildhall Committee, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, stated that the gardens required improvement as it had been some time since any significant work had been undertaken on them and the aim was to make this an attractive open space for the

benefit of residents and also the users of the building. For example, the improved gardens would form a back drop for wedding photographs, which is was intended would develop as an important part of the Guildhall's business.

In relation to the unsuccessful application for funding by the Church in Abingdon Twinning Group, a Member stated that she noted that the application was in relation to food and entertainment costs and if such applications were to be refused then it would be better to advise applicants of the criteria for grant funding rather than allow them to spend time making applications which were going to be unsuccessful.

A Member noted that the application for the individual requesting assistance towards her costs in participating in athletics in a "high level" was, at £50, only a small proportion of the costs which the applicant was going to incur. The Town Clerk stated that the Council had on a number of occasions considered its powers to make grants to individuals under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972. He was aware that some councils did not make grants to individuals but only to organisations. This Council's policy in order to attempt to strike a balance, was to limit the amount of grant assistance to individuals to a maximum of £50. A Member suggested that on some occasions it may be appropriate for an individual grant to come forward from an organisation, for example, if an individual went on a training course and the skills acquired were then deployed in working in the organisation.

It was **resolved** that the following grants be approved:

Name of Applicant	Reason for the grant application	Grant requested	Grants AWARDED plus notes and conditions
Abingdon Amblers	Training for volunteers to undertake coaching courses in order to develop their skills further and to ensure the long term stability of the Club.	£1,000	£1,000 Power (b)
Abingdon Health Walks	Purchase new first aid kits for 30 leaders, 200 safety cards and waterproof wallets and to provide publicity.	£340	£290 – safety cards and & wallets not deemed relevant for a grant award. Power (b)
Abingdon Passion Play	Hire of sound equipment and staging.	£1,000	£300 – Town Council could offer them the of the council's stage. Power (a)
Abingdon Sea Cadets	Refurbishment of Unit.	£1,000 to £2,000	£1,000 Power (b)
Abingdon Vale Junior Netball Club	Purchase of new netball kits.	£500	£400 Power (b)
Breakaway Club	On-going costs for minibus – such as	£500	£500 Power (b)

	inspection/service to tail lift, MOT and Insurance.		
Christian V Eitzen	Financial assistance for costs to partake in athletics at a high level.	Running costs are £1,878 but grateful for any kind of support.	£50 plus an explanation stating that the this is the maximum amount the Council award for an individual grant. Power (b)
Church in Abingdon Twinning	Financial assistance for church visitors from Abingdon-on-Thames' Twin Towns of Colmar, Schongau and Argentan to cover meals and farewell party.	£150	Grant not awarded. The Grants Sub-Committee did not consider that this would be an appropriate use of the grant funds.
John Mason, Larkmead & Fitzharrys Schools	Finance towards keeping costs down which include coach/ferry to Argentan, insurance, coach trip to Bath.	£10 x 30 pupils £300.	£300 Power (b)
South & Vale Carers Centre	Contribution towards core activities by Outreach Workers and Representation.	£5,000 or the maximum able to give.	£1,000 ; they should also be informed to apply for a grant from the Vale of White Horse District.

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 and Rating Act 1997, part III, section 31;
- (d) Local Government Act 1972, section 144;
- (e) Local Government Act 1972, section 142 (2A).

It was further **Resolved** that the minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee which took place on 5th November 2012 be approved.

F48 **Mayoral Allowance Working Party**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Mayoral Allowance Working Party of 10th October 2012. It was noted the meeting due the previous week had been postponed and would be rescheduled for December. This meeting would make recommendations to this Committee on the way forward.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Mayoral Allowance Working Party of 10th October 2012 be approved.

F49 **Matters Referred**

There were no matters referred from other Committees in the open session of the agenda.

F50 **Financial Report including Estimates 2013/14**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer in relation to the above.

1. Schedule of accounts

Resolved that the schedule of accounts for the period July to September 2012 be approved.

2. Audit 2011-12

The Committee noted that the audit of the accounts was completed on 28th September 2012. The external auditor has given his opinion that *“the information in the annual return is in accordance with proper practices and no matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.”* The auditor had produced an issues report which would be presented to the Audit and Performance Committee for consideration, together with the report of the Town Clerk.

3. Budget estimates 2013/14

The Committee noted that the drafting of the detailed estimates in relation to the Finance and General Purposes Committee was currently ongoing. In drafting the revenue budgets the Town Clerk was examining each individual expenditure line and where possible cost savings would be made. As with the two other spending committees, there do not appear, at this stage, to be any pressing inflationary pressures on the Council's revenue budgets although it was stated that there was work to be undertaken in a number of areas, including management and maintenance in relation to the Council's property portfolio, which has increased significantly in recent years.

The Committee noted and endorsed the budget parameters in the report and noted that for the majority of budgets a 'zero based' budgeting technique was used which assumed no increase but took into account trends during the last few years, known changes and the Council's objectives and priorities.

It was noted that currently town and parish councils were not subject to the provisions of capping and the excessive increase referendum. However there was an expectation that these provisions would be extended to the sector for 2013/14 and that any increase on the Council Tax would be likely to be capped at 2.2%.

In relation to the budget timetable, it was stated that the original intention was for the estimates be drafted and approved by the Council by the end of December 2012 in order to co-operate with the District Council's request that the precept be set by the end of the calendar year. However, following the proposals for the localisation of support for council tax benefit it was understood that the tax base would not be available until later in November or possibly early December 2012. In these circumstances the Committee agreed that whilst initial estimates would be considered during the current cycle of meetings, final estimates would not be agreed until the new year.

Accordingly it was:

Resolved: that the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, scheduled to consider the budget on 4th December 2012, should be cancelled.

It was **recommended:**

- (i) That the Council meeting scheduled to consider the budget on 19th December 2012, should be cancelled.
- (ii) That a briefing on the budget be held for Members on 19th December 2012.

The Town Clerk apologized that his report had stated a number of dates incorrectly. The correct dates were that the final draft estimates would be considered by this Committee on 8th January 2013. The Committee would examine the Council's overall budget in order to make a recommendation to the full Council over the budget and its funding, and the precept and council tax will be set at the Council meeting on 16th January 2013.

Resolved: that the report of the Town Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer be approved.

F51 **Council Archives**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Honorary Archivist, Mrs Jackie Smith, for the period November 2011 to October 2012.

It was noted that during this period a total of 128 enquiries had been received. Most of these were via e-mail and there were now less written letters of enquiry. Emails had been received from as far away as North Carolina, Canada and Australia. Subjects covered by email had included Tudor witchcraft trials, the progression of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, and the location of the assizes prior to the building of the County Hall.

The archivist had been involved in the annual John Mason School Charter Day Visit to the Guildhall in November 2011 and was working with staff and Members on the November 2012 Charter Day. She had written a short article on "Bun Throwing and Abingdon Traditions" for the Diamond Jubilee Edition of the Town Crier and had led a number of walks and tours of the town.

Members asked that their thanks be conveyed to Mrs Smith in relation to her hard work, dedication and expertise in caring for the Council's archives, and requested the Town Clerk to write to her accordingly.

Resolved: that the report be approved.

F52 **Markets**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

It was **resolved** that in accordance with the Council's powers under the Food Act 1984 the Council creates markets on the following dates:

9th March - Fairtrade event

30th March - Local Excellence Market
11th-13th April - French Market
8th June - Chamber Showcase event
29th June - Local Excellence Market
31st August - Local Excellence Market
21st September - Chamber Showcase event
26th-28th September - French Market
19th October - Chamber Food & Drink Showcase
30th November - Local Excellence Market
7th December – Christmas Craft Fair

It was noted that these markets are in addition to those previously approved by the Council and that there is a Local Excellence Market on 24th November 2012 and a Christmas Craft Fair on 8th December 2012.

Members considered an application from “Cultivate,” a not-for-profit social enterprise, to site their “Veg Van mobile shop” on the Market Place on for an hour every Friday (except on the third Friday of the month when the Farmers’ Market is in operation). It was explained that should the Council wish to approve this application, this would need to be authorised through the creation of a market, under the control of the Town Council.

It was **resolved**:

1. That the Abingdon-on-Thames Chamber of Commerce, Abingdon branch of the National Market Traders’ Federation (Monday market), Abingdon Business Alliance and Thames Valley Farmers’ Market Co-operative be consulted on the application;
2. That following the above consultation, that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman to make a decision to create a market under the Food Act 1984 with the sole trader being the “Veg Van mobile shop” as detailed in their application, and that the delegation include authority for the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman to set terms and conditions in relation to the market.
3. That taking into account the limited trading hours and the Council’s market tolls, a toll of £10 per market be set should the market be created.
4. That the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, may also refer this matter back to the Committee if he does not, for whatever reason, deem that he should not exercise the delegation.

F53 Boundary Commission for England: Review of Parliamentary Boundaries

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

It was noted that in 2011 the Boundary Commission for England had consulted on proposals for parliamentary boundaries. Following the initial consultation period, revised proposals had been issued by the Boundary Commission and it was understood that revised proposals were in line with the initial proposals. The consultation in relation to this matter finished on 10th December 2012 and the

Committee was requested to consider the revised proposals and whether there were any reasons why the Council would change its initial view of this matter.

It was noted that at the Council meeting of 28th September 2011, it was resolved (Minute C47 (vii) / 11) that:

This Council objects to the recent proposals by the Boundary Commission for England for the new Parliamentary Constituency of Abingdon & Oxford North. In particular, the transfer of the Radley Ward from the constituency of Oxford West & Abingdon to the new constituency of Henley is a singularly disruptive measure as the ward is part of the hinterland of Abingdon's local economy and shares a common interest in the Town. This Council instructs the Town Clerk to register this objection with the Boundary Commission.

The Committee **recommended** that the Council responds to the consultation in line with the above.

Vale of White Horse review: It was also noted that earlier that day (13th November 2012) the Local Government Boundary Commission for England had published its draft recommendations to propose new wards, ward boundaries and ward names across the Vale of White Horse. The closing date for the consultation was 7th January 2013.

It was **resolved** that the Town Clerk consult with the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition regarding a date for a special Council meeting in December to consider this matter, and that following that consultation, to advise the Mayor to call the Special Meeting.

F54 **Government Consultation: Improving Local Government Transparency**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

Resolved:

That authority be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee to respond to the consultation to the effect that the Council was broadly supportive of the drive towards improving local government transparency but that:

(a) The Council does not believe that one code adequately cover the requirements for transparency for Councils whose turnover ranges from £200,000 up to £1,000,000,000.

(b) That a code more appropriate to town and parish councils should be published, working with those councils to decide on the scope of this code whilst maintaining the essential elements to achieve the objectives of the code.

(c) That the code should represent good practice but not be compulsory.

F55 **Publicity**

The Mayor, Cllr Monica Lovatt, reported that she had attended the awards ceremony of the Oxford Preservation Trust on 7th November 2012, together with the Chairman of the County Hall Museum Management Committee, Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer. She was delighted to report the award of an Oxford Preservation Trust Plaque for the Abingdon County Hall Museum Improvement and Access Project.

Cllr Michael Badcock reported that there was funding available for “2 hours free parking” signs during the current financial year and asked whether the Council might consider renewing the town entry signs at the same time, perhaps with an application for support from the Joint Environmental Trust. He also considered that the issue of brown tourist signs should also be looked at. In addition Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer asked that the matter of sign-posting the Museum from the highway should be considered, as the signage is very poor, and the one sign at the bridge had been removed some years ago and never replaced. The Committee **resolved** that the matter be referred to the Planning and Highways Committee for further consideration.

SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)

F56 **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.

F57 **Matters referred**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk relating to the above, as circulated with the agenda.

County Hall Management Committee of 6th November 2012

The recommendation of the above Committee was endorsed.

Amenities and Recreation Committee of 7th November 2012

The Committee received the recommendation in relation to the purchase of a ride-on mower, which was discussed in confidential session as it was subject to procurement.

The Chairman of the Amenities and Recreation Committee, Cllr Marilyn Badcock, reported that the acquisition of this equipment would reduce the amount of time which was taken in cutting the grass. Members agreed that a mower should be acquired, but requested that as part of the process the relative merits of purchase against leasing should be considered, and that the Council’s policy in relation to depreciation and the setting aside of funds for the eventual replacement of the equipment should be considered. The Town Clerk reported that the Council had a renewals fund for vehicles, whereby 20% of the purchase value is set aside for a period of five years; however the fund did not cover other equipment, provision for which was made on an annual basis.

Resolved: that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman of the Amenities & Recreation Committee and the Chairman of the Finance & General Purposes Committee to procure a ride-on mower in accordance with the confidential report of the Town Clerk subject to:

1. Consideration of the relative merits of purchase against leasing;
2. In the case of purchase, that three quotes are obtained;
3. That funding for this item be drawn from the pooled equipment fund, 50% from the current year and 50% from the 2013/14 fund.

F58 **Property Matters**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

Abbey Meadow Open Air Swimming Pool

Members received and considered the annual report from the District Council in relation to the above. Members noted that the report was a District Council report, and it was clear that it was written for that audience. The District Council had designated it to be confidential, but requested the Town Clerk to make enquiries of the District as to when the information could be released in to the open session.

See also reference in the confidential appendix.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

Monday market – application for sale of alcohol on the market

The Town Clerk reported that he had received an enquiry regarding a stallholder wishing to sell alcohol on the Monday market. An application had been received but this had not been full and complete. Members did not consider it appropriate to make any decision to allow such activity, either on a temporary or a permanent basis, without the full details which had been requested.

Resolved: that the stallholder be advised that a full application including all the details as requested, should be made by the stallholder, and following receipt of this application, the matter would be taken to the Committee for determination. The Town Clerk would advise the stallholder of the dates by which the application would need to be made, so that it could be considered by the Committee.

F59 **Staffing matters**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above, which detailed the issues arising from the vacant positions of Treasurer and Committee Clerk. The report was approved and the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer were appointed to serve on the group to consider matters.

It was also **resolved** that the Council consider its position in relation to the “living wage” and an “equalities review.”

The meeting rose at 9.00 pm.