

**Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council**

**Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 4<sup>th</sup> September 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 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**

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

**F20 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Michael Badcock.

**F21 Declarations of Interest**

The Town Clerk confirmed that the advice from the District Council Monitoring Officer was that membership of other local authorities is not deemed to be a declarable pecuniary interest.

There were no declarations of interest.

**F22 Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

**Resolved:** that minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**F23 Matters Arising**

Minutes F12 (4 – Data Transparency)

In response to a question from a Member, the Town Clerk stated that the intention was that the Council would be publishing online its details of all expenditure over £500 which had been incurred since 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012. He explained that there was work involved in ensuring that the published data was clear and understandable, and he anticipated that this work would be undertaken following the month end closedown. In usual circumstances such payments would appear online by the end of the following month. Members reiterated their previous concerns regarding commercially sensitive information and the Town Clerk assured Members that there were procedures to deal with this.

F24 **Statements and Questions from the Public**

None.

F25 **Audit and Performance Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee which took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012. Cllr Iain Littlejohn (Sub-Committee Chairman) moved the acceptance of that Committee's minutes and this was seconded by Cllr Patrick Lonergan. Cllr Littlejohn took the Committee through the various items.

At Minute F13, Cllr Littlejohn stated that the service review had given a very positive report on the services under consideration. These reports were now being referred to the relevant service committees. The Finance and General Purposes Committee would be considering the report in relation to town vitality and the markets under the confidential agenda.

In relation to Minute 17, Internal Audit, Cllr Littlejohn stated that Members should be pleased to note that the report which had raised only some relatively minor recommendations which were being addressed. He asked that his appreciation to the Town Clerk and his team for their work in the areas detailed in the report be minuted.

It was **resolved**:

1. That the internal audit report be approved
2. The Council's response to the report be approved in accordance with the action plan attached as an appendix to the minutes of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee.

In relation to Minute 15, the Forward Plan 2012-2015, Cllr Littlejohn stated that the intention was that this forward plan would set out the Council's vision and priorities for the current administration, and he intended that it be presented to the next meeting of the Town Council for adoption.

The Forward Plan had been considered by the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee on a number of occasions, as well as the various service committees, and as previously requested at the meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012 (Minute F9) all changes since then had been tracked in the Word document.

A Member stated that there had been some good work put into this plan but felt that there was a lack of detail specifically in relation to the section on the Abbey Grounds (on page 27). Cllr Littlejohn responded that it was intended within the Forward Plan to include all areas which were likely to be strategically important to the Council but in relation to this specific project, much of the work would be undertaken at a future date and the Plan was not intended to fetter the Council in this regard.

Cllr Alison Rooke indicated that she wished to put forward a number of amendments to the Plan and these were taken individually.

It was proposed by Cllr Alison Rooke and seconded by Cllr Patrick Lonergan that a statement be included in the plan that the Town Council facilitate the creation of a skatepark in South Abingdon. An amendment to this proposal was moved by Cllr

Iain Littlejohn and seconded by Cllr Andrew Todd that a statement be included within the plan that “the Council is supportive of the development of recreation and leisure facilities in Abingdon and specifically awaits with interest the result of the consultation currently being undertaken in South Abingdon.” Following discussion on this matter, this amendment was accepted by the proposer and the seconder and it was **resolved** that this be added to the plan.

It was proposed by Cllr Alison Rooke and seconded by Cllr Helen Pighills that a statement be included in the Plan that the Council would “restore the playground equipment budget to the level of 2010/11.” In debating this matter, a Member stated that the Chairman of the Amenities and Recreation Committee, Cllr Marilyn Badcock, had previously stated that the budget would be reconsidered by her committee during the budget cycle. In response, Cllr Marilyn Badcock stated that her committee was still awaiting suggestions from Members regarding play area improvements. The Chairman of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, stated that operational budgetary details had not normally been included elsewhere in the plan; however, Cllr Alison Rooke pointed out that the Plan did mention specific budget figures in a number of places and it was important that the Council showed its aspirations to improve its play areas. On being put to the vote, the proposal was defeated with four votes in favour and five votes against.

It was noted that the County Hall Museum Management Committee would be considering the Plan at its meeting later in the week and any changes would be tracked within the document to be presented to the Town Council. The Chairman, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, also requested that any additional minor amendments should be forwarded to him so that these could be reflected in the plan which will be presented to Council.

**Recommended:** that the Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council Forward Plan 2012-2015 be presented to the Town Council at its meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012 for approval.

It was noted that the Plan would be presented to the Council in its tracked form which did mean that page numbering would be inaccurate and page breaks in the wrong place; however, the final version of the Plan would not include the tracking.

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee which took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012 be approved.

## F26 **Communications Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meetings of the Communications Sub-Committee which took place on 28<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012; and the joint meeting of the Communications Sub-Committee and Website Working Group of 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2012. The Chairman of the Communications Sub-Committee, Cllr Marilyn Badcock, drew attention to Minute 6 of the meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012. It had been suggested that the Town Crier be produced three times a year, with the space vacated by the fourth delivery slot being filled by the official guide and the town map, each of which was produced in alternate years. It was reported that both publications had proved to be very popular when placed on the Town Council Jubilee stall.

The Chairman of the Sub-Committee, Cllr Marilyn Badcock, drew the Committee's attention to a meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012 which consisted of presentations by potential portal / website providers, and that a copy of these minutes would be

submitted to the next Finance and General Purposes Committee. However, the substantive recommendations of this meeting in relation to the potential website / portal provider were included as the report of the Deputy Town Clerk at Minute F37, confidential agenda.

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the meetings of the Communications Sub-Committee which took place on 28<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012; and the joint meeting of the Communications Sub-Committee and Website Working Group of 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2012 be approved.

F27 **Grants Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee which took place on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

There was a discussion regarding the recommendations of the Sub-Committee and in particular, that part of the recommendation at Minute 16 which recommended that a grant not be awarded to Church in Abingdon Twinning Group. The group had requested a grant of £150.

It was proposed by Cllr Alison Rooke and seconded by Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer that the recommendation be amended to the effect that a grant of £150 be awarded to the Church in Abingdon Twinning Group. The Chairman of the Grants Sub-Committee, Cllr Andrew Todd, stated that the grant had been carefully considered by the Committee. On being put to the vote, the amendment was defeated by four votes in favour to five against. Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer commented that if it was not the intention to award grants in these circumstances, then the grants criteria should be looked at and amended accordingly. The Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee stated that it was difficult for the Committee to consider amendments to the recommendations as they did not have the relevant documentation to hand.

It was proposed by Cllr Alison Rooke and seconded by Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer and **resolved** that the recommendation in relation to the Church in Abingdon Twinning Group should be **referred to the Town Council** at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012, and that the grant application for should be included with the papers for that meeting. This amendment to the Sub-Committee's recommendations was accepted by five votes in favour to three against and one abstention. It was **resolved** that grants be awarded as detailed overleaf:

General Fund

Name of Applicant	Reason for the grant application	Previous grants received in last five years	Grant requested	Grants awarded plus notes and conditions
Abingdon Street Pastors	To train more Street Pastors (if people come forward) and to increase either the number of nights or areas of operation, to encompass Peachcroft, Boundary House and/or South Abingdon.	2011-2012 - £1,000	£1,000	£1,000 with the following condition: As the organisation do not have people at the current time to train as Street Pastors £500 would be issued now, with the remaining balance of £500 to be claimed as and when they have people ready to Be trained. Power (c)
Church in Abingdon Twinning Group	15 people visiting from Schongau from 6.10.12. Also had 5 visitors from Colmar in May 2012.	2008 - £100	£150	<b>To be determined by the Town Council</b> Power (b)
Relate Oxfordshire	Funding for the Relate Oxfordshire first annual Film Festival in October 2012 to raise funds for the organisation.	None	£500	£250. Power (a)

Joint Environmental Trust (JET)

Name	Reason for Grant Application	Estimated Costs	Grants awarded plus notes and conditions
Mostly Books – Stert Street	Shop Front Grant Redecoration of the front of the shop, including the sign above the shop.	£1,200.	Grant awarded for redecoration of shop front only as grants criteria does not include signage.  £227.70 Power (b)
The Heart of Abingdon Heritage Trail Project Group	Environmental Grant Create heritage trail centred on St Helen's Church.	£16,200 – requested £1,500	£1,500 Power (d)

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.

**Resolved:** that subject to the above, that the minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee which took place on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2012 be approved.

F28 **Matters Referred**

The report of the Town Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer, as circulated with agenda, was received and considered.

Amenities and Recreation Committee, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2012

The Chairman of the above Committee, Cllr Marilyn Badcock, stated that a proposal may come forward that the Fun in the Park event be expanded and undertaken in conjunction with a Proms in the Park event, and that it was considered that this was more appropriately dealt with by the Amenities and Recreation Committee.

The Committee endorsed the recommendation of the Amenities and Recreation Committee and it was **resolved** that responsibility for the "Fun in the Park" event be transferred from the Finance & General Purposes Committee to the Amenities & Recreation Committee, and that the Committee Terms of Reference be altered accordingly. Members are referred to the papers for that meeting.

Guildhall Committee, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012

It was noted that at the above Committee meeting, Members considered an improvement scheme for the Roysse Court Gardens, as part of the Phase 2 Improvement Works. Adams Habermehl had been commissioned under an existing financial delegation to produce an outline design for the gardens, in accordance with the brief set by the Committee. Cllr Alison Rooke stated that at the Committee it was her understanding that it was intended that the Roysse Court gardens remain open to the public. Members concurred with this intention.

The Committee endorsed the recommendation of the Guildhall Committee and it was **recommended** that a sum of £50,000 be set aside from the Guildhall Capital Improvements sum, as an estimated budget for the above work. It was noted that this would then be reviewed following completion of the work being undertaken by Adams Habermehl.

Guildhall Committee, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2012

It was noted that at the above Committee meeting, Members approved the draft design brief for the Guildhall Improvement Project, phase 2. This was due for further consideration at the meeting of that Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

The Committee endorsed the recommendation of the Guildhall Committee and it was **recommended** that a sum of between £500,000 and £750,000 be provisionally allocated from the Guildhall Capital Improvements Sum which the Council has in relation to the Guildhall. This matter would then be reviewed following production of

architects' plans to RIBA Stage D (excluding planning permission).

Within this sum the Committee would need to provide for professional fees to RIBA Stage D. This was due to be considered at the meeting of the Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2012 and it was **resolved** that this be reported directly to the Council and that this be allocated from the Capital Improvement Sum. Permission of the Council would be requested for this sum to be utilised during the current financial year.

It was noted that the Capital Improvement Sum showing in the accounts as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 was £1,042,777.

## F29 **Choose Abingdon Partnership (ChAPS)**

The Committee received and noted the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board meetings which took place on 30<sup>th</sup> May and 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

As previously agreed, it was noted that draft minutes of the Partnership which had not yet been approved by the Partnership itself would be circulated to Members on a confidential basis. In relation to the minutes of 3<sup>rd</sup> July Ms Brown confirmed that these minutes had been adopted by the Board earlier that afternoon, so could now be considered as non-confidential.

The Chairman then invited Ms Brown to speak to the meeting regarding the work of the Partnership. Ms Brown highlighted a number of areas.

Firstly, the Annual General Meeting of the Partnership was due to be held in the Guildhall at 7pm on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2012. One of the main items on the agenda was to be a presentation by "Hidden Britain" who had been commissioned by the Partnership to undertake a study of tourism and marketing of Abingdon. Ms Brown stated that the report made interesting reading and she would circulate a copy of it to the Town Councillors. In relation to Town Council services, the Information Centre had been praised within the report for its helpful staff and good range of leaflets. There was an offer from Hidden Britain of a briefing specifically for the Town Council. Members considered this matter and felt that this would be beneficial as there may be specific matters which the Town Council would wish to consider within the report. It was therefore **resolved** that Hidden Britain would be asked if they can attend a briefing in relation to their report and this was provisionally scheduled for 7pm on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2012 in the Committee Room at Old Abbey House.

Ms Brown reported that there were a number of sums of money which were available to assist the town and its work for town centre vitality and she talked the Committee through this. The Council's "Portas pilot" application had not succeeded, it was believed because there were so many applicants and progress already made by the town meant that it was not perceived to be in as much need of the money as some of the other applicants. However it was now understood that £10,000 was being made available from Government because the application had been made. Ms Brown was due to attend a workshop regarding this matter, and the Vale Cabinet were keen to progress the "Buy Box Locker" Project.

It was also understood that the Partnership was being seen as a delivery mechanism for £35,000 which it was understood was being made available from the Community Infrastructure Levy, and a further £22,500 which had been allocated by the Vale from a government sum of £100,000 relating to high street improvements in the Vale of White Horse District. Ms Brown reported that she was seeking to release additional funding towards the town portal / website.

Ms Brown stated that the next Local Excellence Market is due to take place on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September and ChAPS was setting up a “Young Entrepreneur’s Award”.

It was reported that ChAPS was looking to set up a science festival in Abingdon and had established a steering group which was working with the organisers of the Oxford Science Festival. Whilst it was hoped that the festival itself would take place in 2014, Ms Brown reported that the group hoped to organise a small “taster” Abingdon Science Festival in 2013, emphasising that this would not be on the scale of what was being planned for 2014.

In relation to the £100,000 town centre budget which had been released by the Government to the District Council, a Member queried why Abingdon, with one third of the Vale’s population, was receiving £22,500. In response to this question another Member stated that £10,000 of the £100,000 was required for central costs, leaving £90,000 and this was being split four ways between the four areas of the Vale.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, thanked Ms Brown for her report and stated that ChAPS was one of the best partnerships of its kind; Abingdon was far ahead of many towns in this regard and the Town Council, as one of the prime movers of the Partnership, should take credit for this.

Members discussed Ms Brown’s future attendance at meetings. It was felt that it was helpful to have this item on the agenda and for Ms Brown to talk directly to the Town Council regarding the activities of ChAPs. It was **resolved** that this be made a permanent agenda item and that in future this be taken as the next item on the agenda following declarations of interest.

F30 **Financial Report**

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

Cllr Iain Littlejohn noted that at cost centre 221, Olympics, the spending for the year to date amounted to £2,000 out of a budget of £5,000. He therefore proposed and the Committee **recommended** that the remainder of this budget be transferred to the grants budget and that officers be tasked to write to sports clubs and organisations working with disabled people to invite them to apply for grants which would increase community involvement in sports, for example, in coaching and encouraging disabled sport.

*(Cllr Patrick Lonergan left the meeting at this point, it being 8.28pm.)*

F31 **Abingdon Fairs**

Members received and considered the report of the Head of Service Delivery in relation to the above.

**Resolved:** that the report be approved.

F32 **Mayor’s Allowance**

It was **resolved** that a working party be established to make recommendations in relation to the administration of and the level of the Mayor’s Allowance and that this

working party consist of the Mayor of Abingdon (Cllr Monica Lovatt), Cllr Michael Badcock and Cllr Alison Rooke.

In relation to a query regarding a Deputy Mayor's Allowance, the Town Clerk stated that the Council had powers to only award two types of allowance, a Mayoral allowance and an allowance to Town Councillors. There were no powers to pay an allowance to the Deputy Mayor, although the Mayor by convention allocated part of their allowance to the Deputy Mayor.

A Member asked that consideration be given to allowing those Members who chose not to claim their allowance to vire the money over to another budget head. The Committee requested that the Town Clerk make enquiries regarding this matter and **refer** this matter to the next meeting.

F33 **Personal alarm devices / bells**

The Town Clerk reported that from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 4<sup>th</sup> September 2012 there had been 12 reports to the Police of thefts from purses or handbags in the town centre. The Police had previously sold purse bells at 50p each; it was understood that these had been procured by the Police and may have been sold with a subsidy, but that the Police's budget for such items had been reduced. It was understood that the purse bells could be purchased commercially at approximately £2.00.

Cllr Marilyn Badcock, who had originally brought this item forward, considered that the Council should purchase some of these purse bells which could be given to the Town Council-sponsored town centre Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) to distribute to those who may benefit from these items. Members considered this matter. One Member stated that she was not sure that this was within the Town Council's remit and that there may be other charities who could undertake this work. Another Member felt that this was an appropriate use of the Council's resources as the Town Council funds the Town Centre PCSO.

It was proposed by Cllr Marilyn Badcock, seconded by Cllr Iain Littlejohn and **resolved** that:

1. a sum of £200 be earmarked from the Council's community fund towards the purchase of purse bells;
2. that the Town Clerk make enquiries of Age UK, and service organisations such as the Rotary Clubs and the Lions Club as to whether they would sponsor such items;
3. that subject to the above, authority be delegated to the Town Clerk to purchase the purse bells and that they be given to the town centre PCSO to distribute to those who would benefit from the bells.

F34 **Publicity**

Members asked that publicity be given to the designation of Boxhill and Caldecott Recreation Grounds as Jubilee Parks, and also the proposal to vire money from the Olympics budget to the Grants budget (when approved).

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

F35 **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.

F36 **Confidential Appendix**

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

**Resolved:** that the confidential appendix to the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

F37 **Abingdon-on-Thames Portal**

Members received and considered the confidential table produced by the Deputy Town Clerk which was an updated version of her report to the Communications Sub-Committee and Website Working Group on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012. The table detailed the various tenders which had been received. Members also received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk.

A Member suggested that the Council should consider asking for some assistance from the District Council to assess the various tenders and in particular those tenders shown against company A and B in the table.

It was **resolved**:

1. that the matter be referred back to the Communications Sub-Committee
2. that authority be delegated to the Communications Sub-Committee to select the successful contractor and to place a contract for the Abingdon-on-Thames portal subject to this being within the Council's agreed budget as detailed in the report of the Town Clerk, including the sum as detailed in his final paragraph if this became available.

F38 **Property Matters**

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

**Resolved:** that the report be approved, including the recommendations contained therein, including the lease payment.

F39 **Service Reviews**

The Committee received and considered the service reviews in relation to town vitality and markets.

The Chairman of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, stated that the two reviews showed that the Council was doing a good job and there were no major issues to deal with. In taking the reviews forward, he proposed that the relevant heads of service be asked to consider the reviews and come forward with their recommendations to the next meeting. The Committee **resolved** accordingly.

The meeting rose at 9.20 pm.