

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
Draft Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held at 7.00 pm
on 10th March 2015
In the Roysse Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present

Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Chairman
Cllr Marilyn Badcock	Chairman, Personnel Sub - Committee
Cllr Michael Badcock	Chairman, Planning and Highways Committee
Cllr Angela Lawrence	Mayor, ex-officio
Cllr Iain Littlejohn	Chairman, Audit & Performance Sub- Committee
Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer	Chairman, County Hall Museum Management Committee
Cllr Helen Pighills	Chairman, Amenities & Recreation Committee
Cllr Monica Lovatt	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	

In Attendance

Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)
Mr Steve Rich	Head of Services
Mrs Susan Whipp	Treasurer
Three members of the public.	

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F64 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the Vice Chairman Cllr Alison Rooke.

F65 **Declarations of interest**

None.

F66 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 13th January 2015. An error in section F52 was identified, the sentence should read “rises to *parish councils*”. This was identified prior to the meeting and has been corrected in the paper copy to be signed by the Chairman.

Resolved: that subject to the correction to section F52 the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 13th January 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F67 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising at this point which were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

F68 **Statements and Questions from the Public**

(i) The Committee received a presentation from Mr Jim Hines from the Abingdon Music Centre. He gave an update on the activities at the Music Centre and their involvement in the life of the town. He outlined the noise management procedures in place to mitigate noise nuisance from the premises and gave his opinion on why the Music Centre needed to remain in its current location. A summary of activities was circulated to members at the meeting.

(ii) Dr Peter Harbour from Friends of Abbey Meadows Outdoor Pool asked the following question of the Chairman of the Committee:

FOAMOP (Friends of Abbey Meadow Outdoor Pool) and all keen outdoor swimmers would like to thank Abingdon Town Council for their stewardship of the Outdoor Pool over the past 35 years, without which the Pool would surely have been closed by the District Council in 1980 or in 2006 and is even now in question under the present Vale council consultation.

We note that under the new contract arranged between the District Council and pool operators, GLL (trading under the "Better" brand), the Town Council will now save expenditure of £45,000 per annum, even if, as we hope, the Pool continues to operate.

On the assumption that the public will vote again for the pool as they did in 1980 and 2006 (Option A or it will be demolished!) and that therefore the Abbey Meadow Swimming Pool will be retained and maintained as an Abingdon amenity for the future benefit and good health of all, please will the Town Council consider a nominal contribution towards the pool, for example £1k annually, to be spent after consultation with FOAMOP, with a view to retaining a seat on the four part meeting that has traditionally been held between the Town and District Councils, the Pool Friends and the pool operators, and giving an opportunity for greater local influence by the people of the Parish of Abingdon?

In response, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, as Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, stated that the Vale and South leisure facilities are now operated by GLL. There are very different commercial arrangements in place than previously. The contract is monitored by the District Council's Scrutiny Committee. The Town Council had no control in relation to the pool and there were no four part meetings taking place, although he would make enquiries regarding this. The leisure contract makes money for the District Council.

With regard to the public consultation, it was for the public to decide. Cllr Lovatt stated that he did understand the question and its motive. The Town

Council did not have a budget for the pool although there was funding available in the Community fund.

(Dr Peter Harbour and Mr Jim Hines left the meeting at this point, it being 7.26pm).

F69 **Matters arising**

F29 Finance & General Purposes Committee – 9th September 2015

Mr John Tabor of the South and Vale Carers Centre was now present at the meeting and the Committee received a presentation from him in relation to the work of the Centre and the progress made in putting the organisation on a sustainable pathway for the future.

Members raised the following points:

- Do you receive grants from other parish and town councils? Answer: yes, parishes vary from £10 to £250. Amongst town councils the following had been received: Faringdon - £1,500; Wantage - £1,500; Didcot - £5,500; Henley-on-Thames - £500; Thame £500.
- Terms of Comic Relief funding – lasts for 18 months, can apply again but there is much competition.
- Need to raise public awareness. Council could include details on website and also Town Crier.

F69 **Communications Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Communications Sub-Committee held on 25th February 2015.

Regarding item 7, there was a query as to whether copyright permission would be required to publish the words for the “Last Night of the Proms” section of the “Music in the Park.” This was being investigated.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Communications Sub-Committee held on 25th February 2015 be approved together with the recommendations contained therein.

F70 **Grants Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Grants Sub-Committee held on 2nd March 2015.

The following grants were considered:

Name of Applicant	Reason for the grant application	Applied/Recommended
1 6 th Abingdon (Trinity) Scout Group Power (b)	Traditional camping equipment	Applied for £2,120 GSC recommend £1000 as proportion of grant. Approved in this sum.
2. Royal Voluntary Service Power (a)	Darby and Joan Club activities	Applied for £400 GSC recommend full amount. Approved in this sum
3. Abingdon Joint Schools Power (b)	Carnegie Forum reading day	Applied for £500 GSC recommend full amount. Approved in this sum
4. Friends of Abingdon Power (b)	Community Shop project – taking on the responsibility from the Choose Abingdon Partnership	Applied for £1,600 GSC recommended £750 as proportion of grant Approved in this sum.

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The above grants were 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);
- (f) Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 19.
- (g) Local Government Act 1972, section 133.

Minute 6: Funds relating to the former Joint Environmental Trust (JET)

(i) The Sub-Committee had previously recommended approval of an application from the owner of 40 Victoria Road, for work to a perimeter wall and the award of a grant of £600 and this was approved by the Finance & General Purposes Committee at its meeting on 13th January 2015.

In accordance with the service level agreement governing the disbursement of the funds of the former Joint Environmental Trust (JET), District Councillors

with Abingdon wards had been consulted and an objection to this grant had been received. The matter had therefore been reconsidered by the Grants Sub-Committee and the Sub-Committee recommended approval of the grant.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee considered the recommendation of the Grants Sub-Committee. Views were expressed that awarding this grant was not a good use of public money and that the costs of this work should fall to the householder. On being taken to the vote the recommendation of the Grants Sub-Committee was rejected with 1 vote on favour of the recommendation, 4 against and 1 abstention. Consequently it was **resolved** that a grant of £600 not be awarded.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee held on 2nd March 2015 be approved together with the recommendations, as amended above.

F71 **Personnel Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the draft minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Sub-Committee held on 11th February 2015.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee held on 11th February 2015 be approved.

F72 **Choose Abingdon Partnership (ChAPs)**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board meetings from 4th December 2014.

Cllr Iain Littlejohn updated the Committee on the BID election process. The revised date of the Business Improvement District vote was due to have been in May/ early June 2015 but this may well be put back due to the fire at the District Council.

There had been a further meeting of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board on 3rd March 2015. No written minutes were available. This meeting was attended by the Town Clerk who gave the Committee a verbal update. The main item on the agenda had been the distribution of the remaining tasks of the partnership.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board meetings of 4th December 2014 be noted by the Committee.

F73 **Financial Report**

The Committee received and considered the report of Treasurer.

Resolved: that the schedule of accounts for the period December 2014 to February 2015 and the management accounts for Council cost centres for the financial year to date, be approved.

Members' allowances

The Town Clerk advised that under the Local Code of Conduct there was a general exemption for Members to remain in the meeting and to vote on this matter.

Members considered the Members' Allowances for 2015-16 and the options as outlined in the report of the Treasurer. The 3 options were then voted on, *option 1* – 5 votes; **option 2** – 2 votes; *option 3* – 2 votes. Members therefore favoured option 1 and it was **recommended:**

(a) that in accordance with the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended) the allowance for Town Council members for the year commencing 1st April 2014 be set at 20% of the District Council allowance, i.e. £915.

(b) Travelling and subsistence allowance: that travel and subsistence allowances be paid for the following approved duties: attendance at conferences of the National Association of Local Councils, attendance at the annual Twin Towns' conference, attendance at the County Council Museums Joint Working Party, and attendance at other such meetings outside of the Parish as are approved by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The relevant rate is mileage rate was agreed to be that set by the NJC (National Joint Council for Local Government) if travelling by car or the cost of standard class public transport. Subsistence allowance is at the rates agreed by the NJC.

In terms of the Mayor's Allowance, it was noted that this was paid under the Local Government Act 1972 Sections 15 (5) and 34 (5). The amount agreed as part of the Council's budget making process for the Mayor's allowance for 2015/16 was £3,190, which was the same as for 2014/15. This was a contribution towards the significant expenses of undertaking the role of Mayor. It was also noted that the Town Council did not have the power to pay an allowance to the Deputy Mayor but by local arrangement the Mayor allocated a sum of £250 per year from their allowance as a contribution towards the expenses of the Deputy Mayor in deputising for them.

F74 General Report of the Town Clerk

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk.

(i) The model Safeguarding Policy issued by Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board was considered.

Resolved: to adopt the Safeguarding Policy.

(ii) The Guidance on “Purdah” was discussed and noted by Members.

(iii) Members discussed the way forward on the disposal of items which had been collected over the years and were surplus to requirements.

It was reported that on 29th January 2015 an exhibition of these items was held in the Bear Room. These were items which had been acquired over the years by the Council, most of which had been stored at the Council’s previous offices at the Old Abbey House. Most of these items comprised of books / booklets and prints, although there was a relatively small number of miscellaneous items including non-valuable cups, coasters and similar items. The majority of these had been acquired over the years as a result of visits to and from the twin towns and often presented to mayors who would then deposit them with the Council. In particular, there were multiple copies of some of the books. The officers were of the view that none of them had any value above what one would expect, for instance, for a good condition second-hand book. Officers had displayed over 200 items which filled out the Bear Room. Ten Members attended the exhibition and filled out forms indicating which items they wished to retain within the Council or which they felt required specific attention. Approximately 50 items were highlighted and this leaves approximately 150 items which officers now recommend for disposal.

It was noted that at present these items, being numerous, cannot be displayed and are taking up storage space.

In considering this matter Members were sensitive to the fact that many of the items were gifted to the Town Council in a spirit of friendship and must be, if disposed of, treated with due respect.

Recommended:

That authority be delegated to the Town Clerk to dispose of the items outlined above (approximately 150), as follows:

1. Any items which were given to a particular mayor should be offered to them or their descendents;
2. Any remaining books should be offered to the local public library and to schools if not wanted by the Abingdon library;
3. The Town Clerk should contact those Members who had expressed an interest in purchasing any items and authority be delegated to him to agree a purchase fee for the item(s) concerned.
4. That the Town Clerk then organise disposal of all remaining items.

(iv) Members considered suggestions for a Bun Throwing Ceremony in 2016.

Resolved: that the Town Clerk to take advice from the Lord Lieutenant’s office regarding this matter and this would then be reported to Full Council to consider.

The Town Clerk's advice that consideration be given to any changes which may be necessary to event management was noted and the view that in future this was likely to require full closure of the town centre and diversion routes to be set up via the Wagon and Horses and Stratton Way, resulting in higher organisational costs

Cllr Patrick Lonergan left the meeting at this point, it being 8:45pm.

(iv)The Committee considered a list which had been provided by the Honorary Archivist, Jackie Smith, of names for potential for additional plaques to commemorate persons of note through the installation of a Blue Plaque. Blue plaques are attached to buildings which have a connection with famous or noteworthy persons. It was noted that locally the Blue Plaque Scheme was run by the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board.

Members queried the lack of scientists on the list and resolved that the Town Clerk would ask the Honorary Archivist to consider whether there were appropriate names/ buildings and to report back.

In the meantime it was **resolved** that the following suggestions be forwarded to the Blue Plaques Board:

- **Oswald Jennings Couldrey** (1852-1958) artist and poet. Lived in Spring Terrace then father, Frederick Knight Couldrey moved to 47 East St Helen Street.
- **Rev John Lempriere DD**, Head Master of Roysse's School 1792-1809, famous for his "Classical Dictionary", first edition published in 1788. Location: Roysse Court where headmaster's house used to be.
- **Richard Mayott**: first mayor, 1556-57, appointed by the Borough Charter, lived in a "capital messuage" in the High Street. Location: former Dawson's Music store in the High Street.
- **Mrs E C Reynolds**, died May 1932, First woman to be elected a Borough Councillor, 1919 Philanthropist, renowned for her war work. Lady Almoner of the old Cottage Hospital. Location: The Gables, Bath Street.
- **Dorothy Richardson**, (1873-1957). Born in Abingdon in 1873.), famous as early modernist novelist. Spent childhood in large house in Park Crescent, later the home of A E Preston. Location: 18 Park Crescent.
- **Edwin J Trendell**, 19thc mayor and alderman. Town and church benefactor, Presented statue of Queen Victoria. Purchased the Abbey House in 1853 and laid out the gardens, allowing public access on special occasions.
- **William Watkin Waite**, 19th century Abingdon artist from a family of artists. Watercolour painter. Most well known local painting is of St Helen's Wharf. Location: Ock Street
- **Dr Joan Harcourt Norris**, details to be confirmed by Town Archivist.

F75 **Markets**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Community Services Officer.

Resolved:

That pursuant to its powers under the Food Act 1982, Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, being the market authority for Abingdon, create the following markets:

(a) Artisan, Crafts and Antiques from France: 24th- 26th April 2015.

(b) Chilli Festival 15th August 2015. (Note that unlike other “festivals” this event has trading stalls as a major feature and these take a considerable percentage of floor space; it was therefore treated as a market by the Town Council in its inaugural year 2014).

(c) Local Excellence Market 2016 dates – fifth Saturdays (30th January/30th April/30th July/29th October).

(d) Craft Market 5th December 2015 and that the market previously created for 12th December 2015 be extinguished (note previously booked for 12th December but altered to 5th December following requests from craft workers and analysis of competitive craft events around the region).

For the avoidance of doubt it was further **resolved** that these were markets were being created for operation on the above days only.

F76 **Council Committee / Democratic Services Structure**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Working Group.

A concern was raised regarding the application of the “Widdicombe rules” (the law relating to principal authorities which the Council followed the “spirit of” regarding the provision of Section 15 (4) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, concerning the allocation of places between representatives of any political groups.

A further meeting of the Working Group would take place prior to the Council meeting, primarily to discuss Terms of Reference for the revised committee system, and this would report directly to the Council so a decision could be made ahead of the new Council taking office.

Recommended that the proposals contained in the report be approved by Council.

(Note: subject to separate agenda item on the Council agenda for 25th March 2015; agenda item 14).

F77 **Calendar of Council and Standing Committee meetings and the Council Calendar for 2015/16**

The Committee received and considered the Calendars for 2015/16 and thanked Cllr Sandy Lovatt, Chairman and Leader of the Council for his work on this.

Recommended that the Calendars be approved by Council.

(Note: subject to separate agenda item on the Council agenda for 25th March 2015; agenda item 18).

F78 **Publicity**

A Member expressed his opinion that the town signs are now looking in need of replacement. In his view, this would be an ideal time to update the name to Abingdon-on-Thames. He noted that there was a sum of £7,000 available in earmarked reserves and £2,100 in the Joint Environmental Trust funds for this purpose. It was proposed by Cllr Michael Badcock, seconded by Cllr Marilyn Badcock and **Recommended**

1. That the purchase of new town signs now be approved by Council.
2. That the designs of the signs and all other relevant considerations be referred to the appropriate committee for action.

(The meeting adjourned at 9:20pm and reconvened at 9:30pm)

SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)

F79 **Exclusion of the public, including the press**

Resolved that the Chairman 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.

F80 **Confidential Appendix**

The confidential appendix to the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 13th January 2015 were considered.

Resolved that the confidential appendix of the meeting of 13th January 2015 be approved as a correct record.

F81 **Matters Arising**

G48 Property matters

The Town Clerk confirmed that the external valuers have not yet visited to give a value for the items of furniture marked for disposal. It was noted that none of the furniture was amongst the Council's treasures.

It was suggested that an opinion also be obtained in relation to the Eric de Graaf chairs formerly located in the Museum and now in the Guildhall.

F82 **Matters referred from other committees**

County Hall Museum Management Committee 3rd February 2015

The Confidential Report of the Town Clerk was noted.

F83 **Personnel Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meetings of the Personnel Sub-Committee held on 11th February 2015.

Resolved: that subject to the confidential appendix to the minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee held on 11th February 2015 be approved.

F84 **Choose Abingdon Partnership**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk.

Arrangements for the discharge of functions previously undertaken by ChAPs were noted as follows:

- BID Project: Project team, Chairman Mike Hurley. Governance remains with ChAPs Board;
- Community Shop: Friends of Abingdon;
- Town App: Town Council – a briefing note to be prepared for Members in relation to this matter;
- Local Excellence Market: Chamber of Commerce;
- Gazebo Project and ownership of the gazebos: Chamber of Commerce;
- What's On: Town Council.

It was noted that the Town Council had allocated a sum of £10,000 within its budget for 2015/16 towards the costs of the Partnership.

Having reviewed its balances and commitments the ChAPs Board had requested that the Town Council set aside a sum of £3,000 as a contingency for expenditure. It was **resolved**:

- (i) That a sum of £3,000 be allocated as a contingency for Choose Abingdon Partnership purposes as set out in the confidential report of the Town Clerk;
- (ii) That in addition to the above, that power be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the two Town Council representatives to ChAPs and the Chairman of Finance & General Purposes Committee to authorise additional expenditure of up to £1,000 in relation to the Partnership.

F85 **Property Matters**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk.

Resolved: that the confidential report of the Town Clerk be approved, subject to the resolution in the confidential appendix.

F86 **Markets**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Community Services Officer.

Resolved: that the report of the Community Services Officer be approved, subject to the resolution in the confidential appendix.

F87 **Security**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Head of Services.

Resolved: that the Council continue to use R & R Frontline Services for its security needs for the period to 31st March 2017 and that ahead of this a full tender exercise for these services would take place..

F88 **Residents' Parking Scheme**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk. Following the discussion of this matter, Members **resolved** that the discussion and the recommendation be detailed in the minutes.

The Town Clerk stated that the scheme was the responsibility of the County Council but operated under an agency agreement. This meant that the Town Council, on behalf of the County Council, administered the Residents' Parking Scheme to the County's specification. The Town Council employed staff to

undertake this, and they were responsible for patrolling the scheme to ensure that the parking restrictions in the area were properly enforced. The Town Council was responsible for issuing the permits in relation to the scheme and paying the fees and charges generated directly to the County Council. The Town Council did not have any control of the terms of the scheme, changes or developments and matters such as the cost of permits, the creation of new spaces and the systems in place for the purchase of visitors' permits.

The report outlined the current circumstances in which the scheme found itself, with the retirement of the one full-time member of staff at the end of September 2015, at which time the casual members of staff would also retire, with between them over 50 years of experience. The report outlined why the Council may wish to consider terminating the agreement at this point and this is summarised below:

- Running a Residents' Parking Scheme was not a core responsibility or service of a parish Council although the Council had a power to enter in to an agency agreement to assist another authority. As far as the Town Clerk was aware the only other parish Council within the County operating such a scheme is Henley-on-Thames Town Council.
- There was a real risk with the loss of all the experience and the change of staff that there would be a need for much more support from both the Head of Services and the Town Clerk at a time when the Town Council was managing a major project at the Guildhall and all that entailed, whilst trying to keep on top of its core services. Its resources are likely to be stretched.
- The scheme returned a relatively small amount to the Town Council's budget. Arguably if the Council charged rent on the space being used, which was at a premium in the Roysse Court offices, and management time, processing payroll and invoices etc, the scheme will be running at a cost to the Town Council. Not taking these matters into account, the surplus on the scheme for the Town Council in the 2015/16 budget amounted to £4,110. If this income was lost a saving would need to be found elsewhere in the budget for this amount.
- As the Town Council agreement was to recharge all scheme expenditure plus a fee of 10%, the amount which the Town Council was paid for administering the scheme had reduced considerably over the years.
- There was a concern that there was a lack of investment and interest in the scheme by the County Council, for instance the loss of spaces as development had taken place and the lack of replacement with new spaces within the scheme, putting great strain on residents parking spaces.
- Since at least March 2006, the potential for decriminalisation of parking offences, as provided under the 1991 Road Traffic Act. The "on-off" nature of the debate locally had meant, in essence, that since 2006 the Town Council has not really known from one year's end to the next whether or not it would be losing its agency agreement and have to TUPE transfer its staff over to the District Council although the current position was that decriminalisation was not taking place in the Vale.

(Note that in relation to decriminalisation, there are no provisions for town and parish councils to undertake this work, it can only be undertaken by a principal authority). It was understood that this was now unlikely to take place in the Vale and South Oxfordshire district areas but that it could take place at sometime in the future. If the Town Council was going to withdraw from the scheme it would be better for this to happen at a time of the Town Council's choosing.

- The scheme only ran effectively on its current levels of staffing due to the individuals involved. Running the service was not really viable with the current staffing level and would staffing would need to be reviewed if the Town Council retained the agency agreement.

A Member expressed her concern with the proposal to terminate the agency agreement. She stated that the Parking Wardens were a valuable resource for the town and they operated the scheme with commonsense and humanity. There were real risks to the scheme if the Town Council no longer ran it locally. She accepted that there were issues with the way the agency agreement operated but considered that the Council had missed a step in the process and that it should now speak with the County Council, detailing its concerns.

Another Member stated that now was the time for a parting of the ways with the agreement and argued that this was a County responsibility and that they should now take this service back.

On being taken to the vote it was **recommended**, by 6 votes in favour and 2 against: that notice be given of Oxfordshire County Council for the Town Council to terminate the current agency agreement, with effect from 30th September 2015.

F89 **Mayor Making / Annual Meeting**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Community Services Officer.

Resolved: that the report of the Community Services Officer be approved and that Paul Viney be requested to organise official Council photographs be taken, on the day of mayor Making (13th May 2015) as follows:

- Departing Mayor portrait
- New Mayor portrait
- Retiring Mace Bearer portrait
- Group shot of all of new council
- Individual head/shoulders images of all councillors (robes/no hat)

The meeting rose at 10:45pm.