

**Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council**  
**Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee**  
**Held at 7.00 pm on 3 December 2013**  
**In the Committee Room, Old Abbey House, Abingdon-on-Thames.**

**Present**

Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Chairman
Cllr Alison Rooke	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Marilyn Badcock	
Cllr Michael Badcock	Chairman of Planning & Highways Committee
Cllr Iain Littlejohn	Chairman of Audit & Performance Sub-Committee
Cllr Monica Lovatt	
Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer	Chairman of County Hall Museum Management Committee
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Helen Pighills	Chairman of Amenities & Recreation Committee

**In Attendance**

Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)
Mrs Heather Brown	Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager
Mrs Susan Whipp	Treasurer

**F67 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Samantha Bowring (Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames).

**F68 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**F69 Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013 and of the Special meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013. One minor word change was agreed in the minutes of 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013 (section F29: change “he stated that” to “he felt that”).

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**Resolved:** that with the subsequent wording change, the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes special meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**F70 Matters Arising**

In relation to Minute F44, Review of Street Trading Policy, it was reported that the policy is going out for consultation. Cllr Marilyn Badcock, who also acted as Chairman of the Vale’s Licensing Committee, explained that currently there is a

licensing system which designates prohibited streets and consent streets. The proposal was to move to a system whereby all roads would be classified as “consent streets” within which street trading could be permitted subject to a licence being issued. Each application for a street trading licence would be consulted on and the Market Place would also be subject to the control of the Town Council through the Market Place Act 1978.

In relation to Minute F49, Grants Sub-Committee, it was reported that the Stroke Club (Abingdon) has not submitted another grant application as yet.

In relation to Minute F51, Amenities and Recreation Committee 28<sup>th</sup> August 2013, a Member noted that the Parish rate for burials applied to those moving from Abingdon to move into a nursing home outside the town, for a period of up to 2 years. However, this was not reflected in the proposed fees and charges from 1 April 2014. The Town Clerk agreed to update the schedule to reflect this policy.

In relation to Minute F52, 4. Monday Market, the Town Clerk confirmed that the Council’s solicitor had advised that the Monday Market was not subject to registration with the Land Registry.

In relation to Minute F60, 1. Markets, it was reported that the Rotary Club of Abingdon Vesper has now decided to hold the food and drink festival at Miele headquarters rather than in the Market Place.

(Cllr Iain Littlejohn joined the meeting at this point, it being 7.10pm).

F71 **Statements and Questions from the Public**

None.

F72 **Choose Abingdon Partnership (ChAPs)**

The Committee received and noted the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013 and 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013. The Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager, Ms Heather Brown as in attendance to answer any questions.

A member requested that the font of the minutes be increased to pt12 in future so that they are easier to read. Ms Heather Brown agreed to ask the Board.

Referring to section 4e of the minutes of 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013, Big Business Engagement, a Member asked if one of the main functions of the Partnership is to raise money. Ms Brown responded that it one of the aims but not the primary aim.

Ms Heather Brown drew the Committee’s attention to the forthcoming Good Living event which was due to take place at the Guildhall on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2014. This was a move from the previous venue, which had been Miele.

F73 **Audit and Performance Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee held on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee held on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2013 be approved.

F74 **Communications Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Communications Sub-Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013.

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the Communications Sub-Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013 be approved.

F75 **Grants Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes, together with any recommendations therein, of the meeting of the Grants Sub-Committee which took place on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

A Member stated that although Cllr Andrew Todd had chaired the last meeting, it was not correct to record him in the minutes as Chairman; he should have been recorded as Vice Chairman of the Sub-Committee, it then being implicit that he chaired the meeting in the absence of the Chairman and by virtue of the fact that his name as listed at the head of the attendance list.

With regard to minute 22, Joint Environmental Trust (JET), the Town Clerk explained that the JET transferred from Vale of White Horse District Council in 2010-11 with restrictions, by way of service level agreement, on how the funds could be spent. The Town Clerk suggested that the monies paid into the fund by the Town Council since that date, amounting to £10,000, should be shown in the final accounts as an earmarked reserve, rather than restricted funds, which would mean that the Council could, as with all revenue funds, retain flexibility to use funds for any legitimate purpose should the Council deem to be desirable at a later date. The restricted funds would of course be used in accordance with the service level agreement and grants awarded would be drawn from this fund in the first instance. The Committee **resolved** accordingly.

It was noted that the JET fund stands at £34,197. The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, suggested that, having regard to the need for the Council to look to make savings, the usual allocation of £5,000 which the Town Council pay in each year should cease for 2013/14 and 2014/15 whilst the balances remain healthy, and that this should be reflected in the budget estimates. The Committee **resolved** accordingly.

A Member suggested that some of the Joint Environmental Trust (JET) earmarked funding should be allocated to levelling that part of the footpath

through the closed Churchyard of St Helen, specifically outside the west door of the Church, where a puddle forms in wet weather, to the inconvenience of parishioners, those attending services at church and those walking through the churchyard. The Committee agreed this was a good idea. The Town Clerk was asked to investigate options and liaise with the Chairman in this regard and **resolved** that a sum of up to £1,000 for the repairs.

A Member suggested that a possible JET project could be the cleaning of the stonework of the historic parts of the Guildhall. Another Councillor then stated that if that was to be cleaned then it would make sense for a similar process to take place in relation to the Church. The Town Clerk was requested to establish an estimate for such work with the intention, when a price had been obtained, to then consider whether to proceed with the Guildhall and then to approach the Church. Whether the work would proceed would then depend on the likely costs and sources of funding available. Following a proposal from Cllr Marilyn Badcock, seconded by Cllr Patrick Lonergan, the Committee **resolved** accordingly.

A suggestion for future projects was to undertake work in Thames Street, where paving and street furniture was variously the responsibility of the County and District Councils. Work was required to smarten up this area.

With regard to the administration of the JET, it was noted that all Abingdon District Councillors had to be written to for comments on applications. A Member suggested that the possibility of requesting comments through the Abingdon Area Committee, which included all Abingdon District Councillors, should be explored.

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013 be approved including the following grants:

<b>Name of Applicant</b>	<b>Reason for the grant application</b>	<b>Grant awarded</b>
Abbey Brass	Additional instruments, music and other equipment.	£500 Power (a)
Abingdon Schools - Argentan French Exchange	Assistance to keep costs down for French Exchange, and if necessary to give financial assistance to the children of less well off families.	£500 Power (b)
Guideposts Independent Living Centre	Provide racking for storing equipment.	£750 Power (b)

It was **resolved** that the above 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;

F76 **Personnel Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the minutes, together with any recommendations therein, of the meeting of the Personnel Sub-Committee which took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013.

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Marilyn Badcock, stated that the Committee had undertaken a lot of work in the past three months in reviewing and introducing various staffing policies, and thanked all those involved for their hard work.

It was suggested that wording in minute 13 was incorrect and should be changed from “a few major amendments” to “a few minor amendments”. The Committee agreed that this was the case and should be referred back to the Sub-Committee for amendment.

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013, subsequent to the agreed wording change, be approved.

F77 **Matters referred**

The Town Clerk circulated Budget estimate items which are considered under agenda item 12 (Minute F78).

F78 **Financial Report including Estimates 2014/15**

1. **Schedule of Accounts**

The Committee received and considered the schedule of accounts for the period August to October 2013. It was noted that this report was supplemented by management accounts which summarised income and expenditure and compared budget estimates with actual out turn.

**Resolved:** that the schedule of accounts for the period August to October 2013 be approved.

2. **Report of the Town Clerk**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk detailing the Budget estimates for 2014/15.

The Chairman, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, suggested that the approval of the budget by Council would have to be postponed and not take place at the Council meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013. This was because the tax base and the grant (in relation to the changes subsequent to the changes which had resulted from the council tax reduction scheme) would not yet be known and this obviously had major budgetary implications for the Council. It was noted that this eventuality had been anticipated in that there was a January cycle in

the calendar of meetings, with Finance and General Purposes Committee scheduled for 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014 and a Council meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2014. In these circumstances, with no other urgent recommendations coming forward from Committees, Members considered that the meeting of the Council due to take place on 18<sup>th</sup> December was unnecessary. The Town Clerk agreed to consult with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to see if the meeting planned for 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013 could be cancelled.

The Committee considered the estimates in detail and discussed the three budget scenarios as detailed in section 8 of the report. A variety of views were expressed. Some Members believed that Council Tax should not be increased; others that consideration should be given to increasing the tax to cover the eventual loss of the grant, estimated to be £81,117 in 2014/15, but forecast to reduce by c.£20,000 over the next four years, and possibility disappearing before then. A Member stated that the Council's share of the Council Tax bill was small and there had been no increase for four years. An increase would be sensible in the light of the major project proposed for the Guildhall.

Several members felt that any rise in council tax should be limited to no more than 2.2%, in line with the Consumer Prices Index. This would mean that there would be an overall shortfall of approximately £13,000 of income against gross expenditure.

A Member suggested that the Council look to see if it could operate without the anticipated £81,117 grant and without raising Council Tax, looking at how the Council could operate spending less and avoiding placing further burdens on residents in difficult economic times. The Member also suggested that in considering capital funding of the Guildhall, the Council should consider treating the £375,000 accrued to the new cemetery fund as a bridging loan of required. He emphasised that he was not suggesting that the money be taken away from the new cemetery but that it be effectively borrowed if required.

The Chairman requested to the Town Clerk that a list of potential savings be drawn up to cover the budget deficits which would arise from adopting the various funding scenarios. It was then suggested that a further list of potential savings to cover the council tax reduction scheme grant, estimated to be £81,117. The Committee **resolved** accordingly.

Members asked that the earmarked grants awarded to Citizens Advice Bureau and The Bridge should not be considered amongst any potential cost savings.

**Resolved:** that further consideration of the budget estimates by this Committee be deferred until the meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014 and that the approval of the budget estimates by the Full Council be deferred until the meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

F79      **Market Place**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Market Place Co-ordinator. Members discussed the application to hold the Oxfordshire Chilli Festival in the Market Place on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2014. It was **resolved** that this should go ahead but for the organisers to be charged an appropriate rate. The agreement of charges was delegated to the Town Clerk,

A Member disagreed with the recommendation in section 2 of the report, not to charge deposits on larger events, and knew of two incidents where the Market Place had not been left in a tidy condition and clean up was needed. Another member agreed that a deposit scheme should be put in place. It was agreed to ask the Market Place Co-ordinator to suggest an alternative proposal

**Resolved:** that a further report be requested from the Market Place Co-ordinator with a proposal for a deposit scheme for larger events.

F80      **Community Governance Review Consultation**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk. It was agreed this would be considered again at the next Committee meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014 and then taken to Full Council Meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

Members were concerned that the names which had been adopted for the new wards were simply wrong in that some did not relate to the areas which they were purported to describe.

A Member suggested that the Council should simply submit the proposals which it had made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

**Resolved:** that this report be considered in full at the next Committee meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

F81      **Publicity**

No items considered.

F82      **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.

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

### F83 **Confidential appendix**

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

**Resolved:** that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### F84 **Matters Arising**

None.

### F85 **Property Matters**

#### (i) **Michaelmas and Runaway Fairs**

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

**Resolved:** that the recommendations of the Town Clerk be approved.

#### (ii) **Royse Court Project**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Head of Service Delivery. Members **resolved** to approve the expenditure of approximately £10,000 works to the ground floor (Registry Office) plus the cost of recarpeting.

#### (iii) **Abbey Meadows Outdoor Swimming Pool Final Operating report**

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

Members requested that the Town Clerk request the following from the District Council:

1. The likely costs required to open the pool during 2014, in terms of repair/maintenance and capital items, and how these would be funded;
2. A report on the condition of the pool, and likely costs required in coming years in terms of repair/ maintenance and capital items and how these would be funded.

The matter would then be considered at the January 2014 meeting of this Committee.

### The Market Place

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Market Place Co-ordinator. Please see confidential appendix in this regard.

#### F86 **Abingdon-on-Thames Portal**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Deputy Town Clerk. Please see confidential appendix.

#### F87 **Twinning**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Twinning Officer.

**Resolved:** that due to budgetary considerations, the Town Council is unable to host and fund a conference in 2014.

#### F88 **Choose Abingdon Partnership**

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

Cllr Samantha Bowring, Mayor of Abingdon on Thames, joined the meeting at this point, it being 9:40pm.

#### F89 **Staffing Matters**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report in relation to the above. See confidential annex to minutes.

The meeting rose at 10.25 pm.