

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
held at 7.00 pm on 10th June 2014
in the Bear Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present

Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Chairman
Cllr Alison Rooke	Vice Chairman
Cllr Michael Badcock	Chairman, Planning and Highways Committee
Cllr Iain Littlejohn	Chairman, Audit & Performance Committee Sub-C
Cllr Monica Lovatt	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Helen Pighills	Chairman of Amenities & Recreation Committee

In Attendance

Ms Heather Brown	Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mrs Susan Whipp	Treasurer

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Marilyn Badcock, Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer and Cllr Angela Lawrence (ex-officio, Mayor).

F2 **Declarations of interest**

None.

F3 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 4th March 2014.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 4th March 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F4 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

F5 **Statements and Questions from the Public**

None.

F6 **Audit and Performance Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the draft minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee held on 27th May 2014.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee held on 27th May 2014 be approved.

F7 **Grants Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the draft minutes of the meeting of the Grant Sub-Committee held on 2nd June 2014.

In relation to minute 6, it was noted that some years ago the former Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust (JET) awarded a sum of £400 towards the installation of a blue plaque in the High Street (the former Hathaway's premises). This plaque would commemorate Arthur Preston. It was understood that matters had been delayed over concerns regarding whether a plaque could be too heavy for the wall of the property. The Town Clerk had written to the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board as requested and following an offer from Cllr Michael Badcock, the Committee authorised Cllr Badcock to follow matters up.

Cllr Michael Badcock relayed a message from the Stroke Association. They now had charity status and expressed their thanks to the Council for the grant awarded to them.

A Member asked whether the Council receives evidence that grants are spent on items they were requested for. The Town Clerk explained that the Council's policy was not to require such evidence. The legal position was that we should receive the financial statements of those bodies which we have awarded grants of more than £2,000 to. Sometimes, especially with larger grants in relation to specific projects, funds are not released until an order is placed or an invoice received. Another Member stated that if a grant was not used for the purpose for which it had been awarded it was highly likely that this would in any case come to the attention of Members as they were engaged with what was going on in the town.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee held on 2nd June 2014 be approved.

The grants approved are listed below:

Name of Applicant	Reason for the grant application	Grant awarded
Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) – Abingdon Darby and Joan Club (a)	Pay overheads for the club and contribution towards speakers	£400
Friends of Abingdon (d)	Heritage Open Weekend publicity	£600
Abingdon-on-Thames Chamber of Commerce (a)	Christmas in Abingdon Brochure	£500

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.

F8 Matters referred from other standing committees

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above. It was reported that at Member briefings held on 29th May and 2nd June 2014, Members considered revised plans from the architects and costings from the cost and quantity surveyor. Members appeared content that the plans as presented were a good basis on which to proceed. The Guildhall Committee concurred with this view.

The revised plans for the Guildhall project had been made available at these briefings and the Guildhall Committee had made three recommendations to the Council, via the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The Chairman of the Guildhall Committee, Cllr Iain Littlejohn explained that the revised plans retain the core functionality of the original scheme but was more affordable. They offered greater flexibility in that part of the scheme could be taken out or new items added in. Cllr Littlejohn also stressed that the proposals should not be viewed as the final plans, it was likely that there would be changes before the Council applied for planning permission.

The Committee considered the need for the architects to present to full Council. It was agreed this was not necessary as there had already been the 2 presentations to which all councillors had been invited. Instead, it was agreed that a full copy of the revised scheme be sent to all councillors who did not attend a briefing and Cllr Iain Littlejohn would respond to any subsequent questions.

It was **recommended** to the Council:

- (1) That the Council approve the architectural plans and associated costings for the Guildhall phase 2 scheme (the revised core scheme), as detailed in the plans attached to these minutes and the costing document dated June 2014, as the basis to proceed.
- (2) The Committee further recommended that the core scheme include an external lift for DDA access to the historic rooms and the work outlined in options 2 (enhancement of lower ground floor to form bar and café area and convert 2nd floor areas) and options 3 (opening up of the historic face of the Bear Room) and 4 (enclosed link through existing service area), noting that the cost range estimate for this work is £3,500,000 to £4,000,000. In considering these options it was noted that different parts of the proposed scheme were subject to different potential funding streams and the completion of the scheme in its totality, as outlined above, would be subject to successful funding applications.
- (3) That an additional sum of £25,000 be released from the Council's pooled property fund for professional fees to enable the plans to be further developed, authority to incur expenditure from this budget to be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of both the Guildhall committee (as the spending Committee) and Finance and General Purposes (as committee as the finance committee). It was further recommended that, as sums are released, all Members be informed of the allocation of these sums.

In relation to proposals related to the operation of a cinema, it was noted that the Guildhall Committee had resolved: *“To authorise the Chairman of the Guildhall Committee, Mr Inglis (Mayfield Arts) and the Town Clerk to meet with the two operators identified in the report (and in the confidential appendix to these minutes) to report back to the Guildhall Committee through the Future Operations Working Group.”* A Member stated that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee should also be invited to these meetings. In discussion, the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, stated that he had no objection to attending but also stated that these meetings would not be making any financial commitments and he would wish to be careful not to be part of any group receiving bids as he would likely be part of the decision-making process later. the Chairman of the Guildhall Committee, Cllr Iain Littlejohn had no objection to extending the size of the Group but stated that the Council needed to be careful not to be seen to be going “mob-handed” and coming over as unprofessional. The Vice-Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, Cllr Alison Rooke, stated that she would see her attendance at such meetings as going along to listen. Following full consideration, the Committee asked that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee should also be invited to these meetings.

The Committee also discussed the copy of The Monks Map which is being produced. Cllr Michael Badcock proposed that a further copy be obtained and be sent to Abingdon, Virginia. They valued their link with Abingdon and he considered that this would be much appreciated by them. The Committee **resolved** to agree this proposal and to allocate a sum of up to £500 from the civic budget for that purpose.

Finally, the recent work and report of the Museum Curator regarding the reorganisation of the wall paintings in the Guildhall was discussed. The Committee all found the paper extremely useful and requested that their thanks be passed onto the Curator. Members requested that this paper be circulated to all Members in a printed colour format and **recommended** that the Council approves the proposals set out in the report. It was suggested that postcards could be produced of some of the paintings.

F9 **Choose Abingdon Partnership (ChAPs)**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board meetings of 28th January and 11th March 2014, and the combined annual report of the Chairman and the Manager for 2013/14. It was noted that, in accordance with the constitution of the Partnership, the draft minutes of the meeting of 29th April 2014 are circulated as a confidential paper.

Ms Heather Brown, Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager gave a verbal report on the recent Annual General Meeting. The meeting was not quorate as there were not representatives from all relevant councils. An Extraordinary General Meeting will therefore have to take place immediately before the next ChAPs Board meeting on 24th June 2014.

The committee discussed progress on the BID (Business Improvement District) project. In response to a question from a Member, Ms Brown detailed the membership of the "Proposal Group" and the "Governance Group," both of which had roles in leading the BID.

Cllr Iain Littlejohn, as a member of the Proposal Group, made two points. Firstly the Council would need to, as a ratepayer in the BID area, decide on how to vote. It was suggested that a presentation could be made to the Committee, to which all Members would be invited. He also drew the committee's attention to a future decision which would need to be made on the future of the Choose Abingdon Partnership, if the BID application were to be successful. It was **resolved** that this matter be placed on the agenda for a future meeting and Cllr Littlejohn agreed to forward to the Town Clerk for circulation a set of questions for members to consider.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board meetings of 28th January, 11th March and 29th April 2014 (confidential draft), and the combined annual report of the Chairman and the Manager for 2013/14 be noted by the Committee.

F10 **Financial Report**

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

It was noted that payment schedules for February to April 2014 and management accounts for 2013/14 would be circulated separately before the next meeting, with any queries being dealt with directly and any unresolved queries from Members being brought forward to the next meeting.

It was noted that the financial accounts and annual return for the year ending 31st March 2014 would be considered directly by the Council at its meeting of 25th June 2014. This would include earmarked reserve movements. Approval would be sought for funding of expenditure on Guildhall Improvement Project, totalling £46,477, to be met from the pooled property fund. It was noted that the Fund balance at 31st March 2014 was £64,352; the budgeted 2014/15 contribution was £88,000. The Committee **recommended** accordingly.

In relation to the bank mandate for cheque payments, it was **resolved** that this should be amended to read as follows:

Cheque payments to require any two signatories from list A and one from list B OR any three signatories from list A:

List A: All Members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee;

List B: Town Clerk; Treasurer.

F11 **General Report of the Town Clerk (including civic matters)**

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

The committee discussed potential events to commemorate the outbreak of the Great War. Members **resolved** that an event should take place in the evening of Monday 4th August 2014.

Cllr Michael Badcock drew Members attention to the lights out campaign, an invitation to everyone in the UK to turn off their lights from 10pm until 11pm on 4th August, leaving on a single light or candle for a shared moment of reflection. Other ideas included a vigil at the War Memorial, the reading out of the names in the roll of honour, the playing of the last post by Alison Rich and a section on the portal.

Members agreed that a working group should be appointed with Cllr Michael Badcock taking the lead. **The Town Council to appoint this Working Group at its June meeting.** The Working Group would need to be given delegated powers and a budget.

The Town Clerk circulated details of a booklet produced in another parish which lists local men and their involvement in the Great War. Members agreed to

consider producing a similar booklet for the Abingdon area as part of the commemorations, which would continue for a four year period. It was noted that Mr Bob Frampton had written a book in conjunction with Abingdon County Hall Museum and this should be promoted.

F12 **Publicity**

The Committee considered 2 areas:

1. The Guildhall project – Cllr Iain Littlejohn explained that he had spoken to the press regarding changes to the proposed Guildhall improvement works and it was agreed that no further press releases were needed yet. The Guildhall Manager should be requested to update the Guildhall part of the website to reflect the latest position.
2. Events marking the Great War – the committee agreed publicity would be required once the events had been agreed.

SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)

F13 **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.

F14 **Confidential Appendix**

Resolved that the confidential appendix of the meeting of 4th March 2014 be approved as a correct record.

F15 **Matters Arising**

See confidential appendix to the meeting.

F16 **Property Matters**

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

F17 **Staffing matters**

The received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above. See confidential appendix to the meeting.

The meeting rose at 9.00 pm.