

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
Draft Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held at 7.10 pm
on 9th September 2014
in the Bear Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present

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

In Attendance

Ms Heather Brown	Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager
Mr Steve Rich	Head of Services
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mrs Susan Whipp	Treasurer (Clerk to the meeting)
Mr Bryan Brown	Chairman of Choose Abingdon Partnership Board

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F18 **Apologies**

None.

F19 **Declarations of interest**

None.

F20 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 10th June 2014.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 10th June 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F21 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising which were not covered elsewhere on the

agenda.

F22 **Statements and Questions from the Public**

None.

Cllr Alison Rooke, together with the Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager, joined the meeting at this point, it being 7:15pm.

F23 **Communications Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the draft minutes of the meeting of the Communications Sub-Committee held on 10th July 2014.

Cllr Marilyn Badcock gave a verbal update on the key issues in the minutes, it being noted that work was ongoing on the Portal and the next meeting would also be considering the future of the Town Crier.

It was noted that Cllr Samantha Bowring had been elected Vice Chair of the Sub-Committee, not Chairman as stated in the minutes. It was noted that Cllr Bowring wished to be known as the Vice-Chair.

Resolved: that subject to the correction noted above, the minutes of the Communications Sub-Committee held on 10th July 2014 be approved

F24 **Grants Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the draft minutes of the meeting of the Grant Sub-Committee held on 1st September 2014.

Cllr Sandy Lovatt drew the Committee's attention to the recommendations on page 18 of the agenda and it was **resolved** that the following grants be approved from the general grants fund:

Applicant	Purpose of grant	Amount approved
Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action (b)	Providing the service as outlined in the application form	£200
Abingdon Street Pastors (c)	Providing the service as outlined in the application form	£1,000
St John Ambulance Abingdon (b)	Purchase of gazebos/ treatment centre	£633, being the cost of the shelter/ roof. <i>Comment: Make organisation aware of District Council grants scheme</i>

Preston Road Community Centre (g)	New curtains and curtain rails for ten windows	£800
Abingdon Concert Band (a)	Remembrance Day Charity Concert at Abingdon Guildhall	£250

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.

The Committee considered an application for funding which the Sub-Committee felt should be drawn from the funds administered in relation to the former Joint Environmental Trust. It was **resolved** that a grant be awarded to the MG Car Club for the cost of the a Blue Plaque at the Boundary House to commemorate Cecil Kimber in the sum of up to £600 on the production of receipts for the work. In writing to the Club it was suggested that they be asked whether they have or should approach the Boundary House for assistance in this matter.

The Committee discussed section 10c of the minutes regarding the fixing of the plaque to commemorate Arthur Preston in the High Street. Cllr Michael Badcock expressed his concerns over the delay and had as Chairman of the District Council had raised this matter with the Chairman of the Blue Plaques Board. A Member suggested that if the difficulties could not be overcome then the plaque be fixed on an alternative building in the town as she understood from the Honorary Archivist, Jackie Smith, that there were several other buildings which are linked to Arthur Preston, although none perhaps as suitable. The Committee agreed to keep the matter under review.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Grants Sub-Committee held on 1st September 2014 and the grants listed above be approved.

F25 **Choose Abingdon Partnership (ChAPs)**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board meetings from 3rd April, 29th April and 4th June 2014.

Cllr Iain Littlejohn explained that it had been reported at the ChAPs meeting which had taken place earlier in the evening that the proposed "Isis Project" at Nags Head Island was no longer proceeding in its current form.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board meetings of 3rd April, 29th April and 4th June 2014 be noted by the Committee.

F26 **Proposal for Business Improvement District**

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

The Town Clerk explained that the Committee were being asked this evening to agree whether to vote in favour of the Business Improvement District. The Town Council have one vote for each eligible hereditament within the town centre. The Town Clerk confirmed these were Roysse Court 1st floor, Market Place, County Hall Museum and Guildhall. The Council also pay business rates on 63a Stert Street but this is below the threshold. The financial implications amounted to £1,953.44 in the first year.

Bryan Brown, Chairman of the Choose Abingdon Partnership Board attended the meeting and was invited to address the Committee. He explained the process and the BID. The proposal was being consulted on in the town and the general feeling amongst the local businesses was positive. Nationwide there were approximately 200 BIDs now in operation.

Heather Brown, Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager, confirmed that the proposed levy percentages had now been agreed. She also confirmed that if the BID were successful the Vale of White Horse District Council have agreed to administer the collection of the levies and cover the collection costs.

A Member stated that whilst the Council would have four votes and a rateable value for the weighted vote based on £111,625 the BID area as a whole had 350 hereditaments which would be eligible for a vote and rateable values of over £8,000,000.

A Member asked what will happen to existing Choose Abingdon Partnership projects such as the community shops. Heather Brown replied that the Board would be considering the future of ChAPs and its projects following the BID vote.

The levies set for the first year, amounting to 1.75%, were then subject to a 2% increase each year. Cllr Alison Rooke asked what would happen if inflation rose by more than 2%. The ChAPs Manager stated that it was felt to

be too complicated to apply an increase linked to inflation within the scheme rules and so the BID board would have to cover any shortfall if this happens.

The Committee also discussed the democratic accountability of the proposed BID Board and whether the Council would be represented. The ChAPs Manager explained that as the funding of the BID would be coming from the local businesses and not public funds then the focus and accountability of the BID would be different to that of Choose Abingdon Partnership. It was usual, however, for local councils to be represented on the boards of BIDs, either as an elected member of the Board or as a partner. A number of opinions were expressed regarding this and whether the Council should know about the governance proposals ahead of any vote but there was general agreement that the any BID Board would need to work with local authorities in implementing its programme. Cllr Iain Littlejohn, as a member of the group leading on the BID proposal, confirmed that the governance arrangements of the BID had not been agreed yet as this would be one of the key set up activities if the BID were approved. He also confirmed that, contrary to some reports, that the Council, in exercising its vote, would have the option to vote yes or no or to abstain.

Cllr Sandy Lovatt expressed his personal opinion that the BID would be positive for Abingdon and encouraged members of the Committee to vote in favour of the BID. He thanked Bryan Brown for attending the meeting.

It was proposed by Cllr Patrick Lonergan, seconded by Cllr Monica Lovatt and **recommended**: that the Council vote in favour of the BID and that a delegation is granted to the Town Clerk to cast this vote on behalf of the Council.

The Chairman of ChAPs, Bryan Brown, left the meeting at 7:50pm.

F27 **Financial Report**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer.

Cllr Marilyn Badcock asked a question about the management accounts on page 50. This showed that the Museum have spent £3,076 on publicity and marketing, compared to a full year budget of £2,000. The Town Clerk would look into this matter and a full explanation will be emailed to all members of the Committee.

Resolved: that report of the Treasurer, including the schedule of accounts for the period May to July 2014 and the management accounts for Council cost centres for the financial year to date, be approved.

F28 **Matters referred from other standing committees**

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

Cinema at the Guildhall: Cllr Iain Littlejohn reported back on meetings with two potential cinema operators for the Guildhall improvement project. The meetings were positive but it was stressed that no commitments had been made. The proposals from the Guildhall Committee sought to explore further the possibility of attracting a cinema operator as a partner for the Project.

The proposed tendering process detailed in the report was discussed. The Town Clerk believed that it would be unlikely that the tendering process is subject to European procurement rules but this would be confirmed as part of the process.

A Member expressed her concerns over any potential leases of the new part of the Guildhall to an operator including the kitchen area, which could then limit the council's own use of the kitchen and ability to operate the historic buildings. The Council needed a kitchen to use; Members agreed this must be considered fully. Any leases for part of the Guildhall would need to ensure that community use is maintained along with the rights of the Town Council.

The Committee endorsed the recommendation of the Guildhall Committee and **recommended:**

1. Advertisements be placed for "Expressions of Interest" (EOI) in the Guildhall Project in relevant trade press and online, from 18th September 2014. This to be drafted by the Future Operations Working Group, together with a brief in accordance with that outlined in the confidential report of the Town Clerk and a pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) and that these documents are sent to the Guildhall Committee for comment and also copied to all Councillors one week ahead of its intended publication.
2. That a budget of £1,500 be allocated for this purpose (*subsequent suggestion from Town Clerk – vire from marketing*).
3. That the closing date for the EOIs be 28th October 2014.
4. That the Future Operations Working Group draft the specification for an operator, based on the two scenarios outlined in the confidential report of the Town Clerk and that this be presented to a special meeting of the Guildhall Committee for approval on Wednesday 5th November at 6pm. At this meeting the Guildhall Committee would also shortlist a maximum of six operators to receive the full specifications for tender.
5. That tenders from potential operators be required by 30th November 2014 and that interviews for operators be held from 9am to 4pm on Friday 5th December 2014. This will not be a formal meeting of the Guildhall Committee but the Committee will act as the interview panel. Non-Committee Members to be invited to attend as observers.
6. That the Guildhall Committee decide at its meeting on Thursday 11th December 2014 on a preferred operator, if any, and that a recommendation

then be made through to the Council meeting on 28th January 2015, via the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

7. That an additional £5,000 be allocated from the Pooled Property Fund for additional assistance, principally from Mayfield Arts, to assist in the above process.

(Note: see Guildhall Committee minutes for further details).

Date to which bookings are taken in the Guildhall

The Guildhall Committee had previously taken bookings to May 2015 but having regard to the latest developments this had been reviewed. The recommendation of the Guildhall Committee was endorsed and it was **recommended:**

1. That having due regard to likely timescales, that no further bookings of the Guildhall be taken after 30th June 2015.
2. That the position be reviewed together with the arrangements for any closure of all or part of the building, at the meeting of the Guildhall Committee on 11th December 2014, at which the officers will bring forward a report outlining the options and the financial implications.

F29 General Report of the Town Clerk

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

1. Community Fund

The Town Clerk updated the figures included in the report previously circulated and stated that the amount currently in the Community Fund was £16,500.

The grant application from South and Vale Carers was discussed in detail. Among the points made were the following:

- Support for the work of the organisation but concerns that the organisation was depleting its level of reserves in order to fund its day to day expenditure.
- There was acknowledgement of the efforts made to increase fundraising activities but is still concerned about the long term viability.
- Council could consider an annual grant in the base budget.
- Release £3,000 now and then £2,500 following a report being presented on how the organisation is intending to meet its future financial requirements.
- Would be helpful for the organisation to report back to either a future meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee or

the Council. The Committee allowed for more in depth discussion and exploration of issues whereas full Council would reach more Members.

- A Member stated that requiring the organisation to attend a council meeting would add an additional burden for them to meet; Members could always attend their AGM or similar meeting.

Cllr Alison Rooke proposed that the full grant requested be awarded on condition that the organisation attends the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting on 10th March 2015 to make a presentation regarding the purpose to which the grant was being put and also to present their financial strategy, plans and budgets for the future. This was seconded by Cllr Monica Lovatt.

The Committee then voted on this proposal and it was **resolved** by 7 votes in favour, 0 against and 2 abstentions that the full grant requested in the sum of £5,500 be awarded to South and Vale Carers on condition that a representative attend the Finance and General Purposes as outlined above.

2. Commonwealth Day

The Head of Services asked if a request be taken back to the County Hall Museum Management Committee to consider purchasing a new flagpole for the museum roof. The current flagpole is too short and causes the flags to become damaged. Members concurred and Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, Chairman of the County Hall Museum Management Committee acknowledged the request and explained that the shorter flagpole had been purchased initially due to cost.

It was agreed that an estimate of the cost of a new flagpole be obtained and the matter then brought forward in the budget cycle.

Recommended: that the Council register for the Commonwealth Flag and agree its continued flying on appropriate occasions.

3. Markets

Resolved: that the following markets be approved -
Local Excellence Markets on 22nd November 2014, 31st January 2015, 30th May 2015, 29th August 2015 and 31st October 2015;
Craft Markets on 13th December 2014, 13th June 2015 and 12th December 2015.

4. Corporate Military Covenant

Recommended: that the Council sign up to the Corporate Military Covenant and that this is signed at the Civic reception on Remembrance Day, Sunday 9th November 2014.

Cllr Patrick Lonergan left the meeting at this point, it being 8:30pm.

F30 **National Association of Local Councils Larger Councils' Committee**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above. Cllr Angela Lawrence's term of office on the NALC Larger Councils Committee ended in November 2014 at which point elections were being held for members to serve a two year term.

Cllr Alison Rooke expressed her thanks to Cllr Angela Lawrence for her work on NALC. The Committee acknowledged her efforts.

Cllr Marilyn Badcock and Cllr Alison Rooke both proposed that Cllr Angela Lawrence be nominated by the Council to stand for election as a representative on the National Association of Local Council's Larger Councils Committee. This was seconded by Cllr Monica Lovatt.

Resolved: that Cllr Angela Lawrence be nominated by Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council to serve on the NALC Larger Councils Committee and that the Town Clerk make arrangements for her nomination to go forward.

For clarity it was confirmed that the Council was nominating Cllr Lawrence for election and should her name go forward then she would be subject to an election process amongst the larger councils and if elected would be a member of that committee in her own right as opposed to representing the Town Council. To serve on the Committee a member had to be a Councillor and if this status changed then they would automatically retire from the Committee.

F31 **Abingdon Michaelmas and Runaway Fairs**

The Committee received and considered a report from the Head of Service Delivery.

A Member asked whether it was planned for security services for the Fairs to be subject to tendering. The Head of Services explained that he believed that the service from the current provider R & R Frontline Security is very reliable. The Council had very good working relationships with them and it would be difficult to find another supplier who could exceed the current service levels. Members noted this but **resolved** that a report be presented to this Committee regarding this matter, detailing the current services provided and making a recommendation regarding its provision for 2015.

F32 **Publicity**

It was **resolved** that, subject to Council agreement of the recommendation above, that publicity be given to the Council signing the military covenant.

SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)

F33 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.

F34 Confidential Appendix

Resolved that the confidential appendix of the meeting of 10th June 2014 be approved as a correct record.

F35 Matters Arising

The Chairman of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, stated that there was a recommendation in the staffing review that the Committee structure should be reviewed following the re-organisation of staffing resources.

Members debated this matter and there was agreement this review was necessary. There was agreement that as a new Council would be elected in May 2015, this was a good time for this review to take place but some debate over exact timing. Members agreed that the position should be reached so that the new structure was in place to enable appointments to the new committees to be made at the Annual Meeting.

It was intended that the new structure would align budgets and staffing resources with the committees and ensure that ambiguities over committee responsibilities be minimised. It was agreed that the review should look at how the current committee structure could be streamlined.

Members considered that this matter should come forward to members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee in January 2015. The Town Clerk confirmed that whilst committee terms of reference were not included in standing orders, the titles and numbers of Councillors serving on standing committees were included in standing orders and therefore a change to standing orders would be required. To be undertaken by this Council any motion would need to be moved and then stand adjourned at the January Council 2015 meeting to then be debated and voted on in March 2015.

It was proposed by Cllr Iain Littlejohn, seconded and **recommended** that the Town Clerk undertake a review of the Council's Committee structure in line with the above and report to the Finance and General Purposes Committee at its meeting of 13th January 2015 so that the matter may be further considered.

F36 **Matters referred from other standing committees**

See confidential appendix in relation to a staffing matter and resolution.

F37 **Communications Sub-Committee**

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Communications Sub-Committee held on 10th July 2014.

Resolved: that subject to the confidential appendix to the minutes of the Communications Sub-Committee held on 10th July 2014 be approved

F36 **Property Matters**

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

Cllr Iain Littlejohn left the meeting at this point, it being 9:05pm.

F37 **Markets and events**

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

Members considered a proposal by a company to provide an event on the Market Place in December 2014. This had been circulated to all Members following its receipt following the issuing of the report from the Town Clerk.

Whilst Members were keen to encourage more activity on the Market Place they were concerned that the approach to the Council had been made only three months ahead of the proposed event. Members were concerned as to whether there was time for the event to be properly organised in this time in order to provide an event which would be enjoyed fully by residents and visitors. The proposal itself was lacking in detail and therefore ambiguous in places, leaving too many unanswered questions. It appeared to make assumptions regarding community involvement, which again would prove challenging to organise in the time available, and there was concern that there was not adequate time now to other clarify matters and to consult with town centre traders. The proposal stated that the company would "actively involve the Council in the event" and it was not clear whether this was a request for the Council to devote resources to the event or not.

However Members were keen to explore similar projects with this or another company in future years subject to a full proposal being received.

It was **recommended** that the proposal outlined in confidential report of the Town Clerk not be proceeded with, for the reasons detailed above.

F38 **Staffing matters**

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

The meeting rose at 9:15pm.

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