

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on Wednesday 13 January 2021 at 7:00pm

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was held online in accordance with The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 ("the 2020 Regulations")

Present

Cllr Samantha Bowring	Chair
Cllr Jim Halliday	Vice-Chair and Chair of Amenities & Recreation Committee
Cllr Gabby Barody	
Cllr Charlie Birks	
Cllr Neil Fawcett	Chair of Community Services Committee
Cllr Andy Foulsham	
Cllr Pat Lonergan	Chair of County Hall Museum Management Committee
Cllr Lorraine Oates	Chair of Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee
Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom	

In Attendance

Andy Crick	Committee Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)
Victoria Moore	Properties Officer
Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Susan Whipp	Deputy Town Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F116 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Margaret Crick and Cllr Eric de la Harpe

F117 **Declarations of interest**

Interests were declared by:

Cllr Gabby Barody	Volunteer at The Abingdon Bridge, which receives grant funding from the Town Council
Cllr Samantha Bowring	Trustee of Abingdon Carousel, which receives grant funding from the Town Council
Cllr Jim Halliday	Chairman and Town Council representative on of Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust to which the Town Council gives a grant
Cllr Charlie Birks	Governor of Christ's Hospital
Nigel Warner (Town Clerk)	Clerk to Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust

F118 **Minutes**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 8 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

F119 **Matters arising**

None.

The Committee Clerk was asked to add page numbers to the minutes to aid councillors in reviewing them.

Cllr Lonergan referred to the record in the minutes about training people to use technology and noted that it is not possible to offer training until procedures are finalised. Cllr Bowring expected the systems to have been finalised shortly but recommended that any councillors who experienced any difficulties with systems should contact a colleague or a member of staff.

F120 **Statements and Questions from the public**

None.

F121 **Matters referred**

None

F122 **Actions Register**

Cllr Halliday noted that the third action regarding a press release had his initials but he had been unaware that it was an action for him. Cllr Foulsham advised that this had been dealt with: a press release on the work of the Covid response group had been prepared and would be issued shortly.

The Committee Clerk would look at the actions register and provide a clearer system for identifying who is responsible for each action.

The Properties Officer provided an update on lifts. The lift at the Roysse Court entrance has been repaired and is functioning properly. A new lift has been installed in the cinema lobby has been installed and is now operational. Cllr Birks said that a power supply issue to the new lift would be looked at this week.

Cllr Rowbottom requested that the record include timings for actions and updates for items which had not yet been achieved. She suggested a 'traffic

light' system to highlight progress and completed actions. The Committee Clerk would look into this.

F123 Financial report

The Committee considered a report from the Deputy Town Clerk / RFO

1. Committee management accounts and council accounts

The Deputy Town Clerk / RFO advised that this was a standing item to request that management accounts to the end of November 2020 be approved. There have been a number of additional Covid-related costs which total £23,000. The overall position is that £435,000 has been spent from a budget of £846,000 for this committee. **The accounts were approved.**

2. Appendix B: management accounts for full council

This is a summary of the detailed management accounts for each committee to the end of November 2020 which have already gone to each committee. The precept is the main income source for the Town Council and this has now been received in full for the year. Expenditure to the end of November was £975,000 out of the planned budget of £2,000,000 to the end of the financial year. This needs the approval of the committee. **The accounts were approved.**

Cllr Bowring thanked the Deputy Town Clerk / RFO for her work on the accounts, in particular during lockdown.

3. Payment schedule

This report details all of the payments from 1 September to 30 November 2020, of which all of the larger payments have been approved by Cllr Birks and Cllr Lonergan. **The schedule of payments was approved.**

4. Internal Audit Report

This is the Autumn visit of the Town Council's internal auditors. The audit was conducted virtually but with the usual level of testing and no problems or concerns were raised. **The report was approved.**

F124 Estimates 2021/22

The committee considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk / RFO which included the proposed estimates for 2021-22. Regarding the expenditure requirement, it was proposed by Cllr Neil Fawcett and seconded by Cllr Pat Lonergan that the annual contribution towards the new cemetery fund be reduced from £75,000 to £25,000 for 2021-22. Cllr Jim Halliday suggested a further amendment to the proposed estimates, that being that the net cost of the annual Abingdon fairs be reduced by £3,500. Cllr Fawcett accepted this amendment and the committee voted unanimously to accept these changes.

The committee also considered the potential financial impact of COVID-19 for 2021-22. The Deputy Town Clerk reported that the annual cost for 2020-21

(additional cost and lost income) has been estimated at £85,000 and suggested that a similar amount be added to the budget. It was proposed by Cllr Samantha Bowring, seconded by Cllr Pat Lonergan and agreed unanimously.

Cllr Neil Fawcett reminded members that at the previous meeting it was resolved that the Council would aim to limit any increases in (band D) council tax to 6%. Cllr Fawcett then proposed and Cllr Pat Lonergan seconded that the precept be set so that band D council tax for the parish would increase by no more than 6% (from 2021-22 £123.65 to 2022-21 £140.60). The committee agreed unanimously with this proposal.

It was recommended to Full Council that:

- i. A net revenue expenditure budget be set at £1,791,379
- ii. The net revenue expenditure budget include £85,000 to cover potential COVID-19 costs but if needed these be funded from reserves.
- iii. The net revenue expenditure budget include the three proposed budget bids (£30,000 Youth Strategy, £5,000 Platinum Jubilee project, £20,000 play areas)
- iv. The net revenue budget be funded by way of:
 - (a) A precept, based on a 6% increase in band D council tax be set at £1,737,703 (tax base 12359.2 and band D council tax £140.60)
 - (b) Use of general reserve of £53,676.

The Deputy Town Clerk / RFO pointed out other areas to consider and make recommendations on:

Section 7: fees and charges: a recommendation to full council is required. Recommendations have been made by other committees:

- Community Services Committee recommended no increases in market tolls and other Market Place charges except for electricity charges, which were recommended to increase from £12.60 to £13. All other charges to stay the same.
- The Community Services Committee also recommended that the proposal agreed in the last year to reduce rates for market traders who were moving towards reducing single use plastics be reviewed once the market reopened.
- Cemetery rates would be considered at the Amenities and Recreation Committee and then formally recommended to full council if this committee agrees. Cllr Halliday hoped to agree this at the March meeting of the Amenities and Recreation Committee for agreement in April and the Deputy Town Clerk / RFO confirmed that this would be allowed as fees needed to be formally agreed once a year.

The Recommendations on fishing charges and market charges were agreed by the committee.

- The committee agreed to keep 'certificates of life' at the same level.

Section 8: Members' allowances

- Members allowances: Cllr Halliday recommended proposing to maintain the current formula of 20% of the Vale allowance, Cllr Fawcett seconded and the proposal to go with 20% of Vale allowances was agreed.

- Travel and subsistence: councillors agreed that the rates for travel outside of Abingdon should continue to reflect the national rate.
- Mayor's allowance: it was agreed to keep this at £3,500, of which £500 would be given to the deputy mayor.

It was recommended to Full Council that:

- i. Monday Market tolls remain as 2020-21 rates
- ii. Farmers' Market tolls remain as 2020-21 rates
- iii. Use of electricity on the Market Place increase from £12.60 to £13.00
- iv. Permission to sell alcohol at a market event where the organiser provides a personal licence holder remain as 2020-21 rates
- v. Permission to sell alcohol at a market event where the organiser does not provide a personal licence holder remain as 2020-21 rates
- vi. Fishing charges remain as 2020-21 rates
- vii. Certifications for Abingdon parishioners remain as 2020-21 rates
- viii. Certifications for those outside the parish remain as 2020-21 rates
- ix. Members allowance – remain as 20% of the Vale of White Horse District Council basic allowance
- x. Travel and subsistence rates for members travelling outside of Abingdon remain the same as national rates
- xi. The Mayor's allowance to remain unchanged at £3,500

F125 Base Budget Grants

A Report was received from 'Be Free Young Carers'. Cllr Halliday had planned to look at this but has not yet. This does not have to be considered at this meeting.

The Budget will go to the Town Council meeting with all the large grants identified as individual items. Committee members were invited to review these if they wished to ensure that the organisations funded reflect the aims and objectives of the Town Council.

F126 Forward Plan

The Town Clerk presented a report on the Forward Plan, asked the committee to consider this and to allow the Forward Plan as agreed and amended by the Chairs of the committees to go to full council for approval. **It was agreed that the Forward Plan be recommended to the Town Council.**

F127 Covid-19 Response Working Group

Cllr Foulsham updated the committee on the working group. The working group met recently and reviewed the support being offered. The meeting agreed to provide funding of £250 to provide bottled water and quick to grab and go snacks for NHS staff working in intensive care at the John Radcliffe Hospital.

The working group continues to meet weekly to review changes in restrictions and the support offered in Abingdon. A draft press release was prepared by the Communications, Marketing and Events Officer and Cllr Barody. Cllr Foulsham confirmed that the working group had enough funding to meet the grant requests received.

F128 **Environmental implications**

No items to raise.

F129 **Town Centre PCSO priorities**

The Town Clerk reported that an annual update was expected from the PCSOs in March.

F130 **Publicity**

Cllr Birks suggested that the new stairlift in the Guildhall cinema could be publicised.

F131 **Meetings for 2020/21 future meetings**

The committee noted the dates of the future meetings:

9 February 2021
30 March 2021
15 June 2021

F132 **Exclusion of the public, including the press**

It was moved 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.

[The meeting paused at 20.30 and reconvened at 20.35]

Cllr Rowbottom sent her apologies for the confidential session.

F133 **Property matters – Confidential Report of the Town Clerk**

The Town Clerk presented a report to the meeting in relation to property matters. Please refer to the confidential appendix to the minutes.

F134 **Property matters – Confidential report of the Properties Officer**

The Properties Officer presented a report to the meeting in relation to property matters. Please refer to the confidential appendix to the minutes.

The meeting rose at 9.22pm.

Chair.....

Date.....