

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
held on Tuesday 15th January 2019 at 7:00pm
in the Royse Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present

Cllr Mike Badcock	Chairman
Cllr Dennis Garrett	Vice-Chairman and Chairman of Guildhall Committee
Cllr Alice Badcock	Chairman of Amenities & Recreation Committee
Cllr Samantha Bowring	
Cllr Margaret Crick	Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames (Ex-officio)
Cllr Vicky Jenkins	Chairman of Community Services Committee
Cllr Monica Lovatt	Chairman of CH Museum Management Committee
Cllr Sandy Lovatt	
Cllr Andrew Todd	

In Attendance

Mr Steve Rich	Assistant Town Clerk / Head of Services
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mrs Susan Whipp	Treasurer/Responsible Financial Officer (Clerk to the meeting)

3 Members of the public.

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F35 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Helen Pighills and David Pope.

F36 **Declarations of interest**

Minute F41: Finance Report and Estimates 2019/20

Cllr Alice Badcock declared a non-pecuniary interest in the matter of the new Cemetery Fund due to her being a Cabinet Member of the Vale of White Horse District Council. Cllr Alice Badcock left the meeting during discussions on the likelihood of land becoming available from the District Council for the purpose of building a new cemetery, in which case it would be the Cabinet which decided the terms of any transfer.

F37 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 2nd October 2018.

Regarding the recommendation to install three flagpoles in Roysse Court Gardens (minute F25), the Leader confirmed that, following discussions at the meeting, this recommendation was withdrawn at Full Council at its meeting on 17th October 2018 and so will not go ahead.

With reference to minute F28, the Town Clerk confirmed that radar keys for the Space for Change disabled toilet, will be available to purchase from the Roysse Court offices.

It was **resolved** that, subject to the correction of some minor spelling / grammar mistakes identified prior to the meeting, the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 2nd October 2018 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F38 **Statements and Questions from the public**

The meeting was attended by Mr John Tabor, Director of Be Free Young Carers. Mr Tabor updated the Committee on the charity's recent work and improvements to their funding position. Mr Tabor urged the Committee to support the charity's grant application (agenda item 5). See Minute F39.

[Cllr Samantha Bowring entered the meeting, the time being 7:07pm].

Mr. Tabor and the other members of the public left the meeting at this point.

F39 **Matters referred**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to matters referred from the Amenities and Recreation Committee and matters referred from the Community Services Committee.

Amenities Committee Meeting 28th November 2018

Members considered the recommendation that two works team vehicles (Suzuki Carry OU02WWE and Nissan Kubistar RO56TYX) be replaced with one new vehicle. The estimated cost was £15,000 and there was a sum of £5,450 in the vehicle and equipment repair/ renewals fund. The required additional funding was being sought from the 2019/20 capital equipment budget. This budget is shown at 4844/499 and is under the responsibility of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

It was **resolved** that funding of £5,450 from the vehicle and equipment repair/ renewals fund and £9,550 from the 2019/20 capital equipment budget (4844/499) towards the cost of replacing the two vehicles (Suzuki Carry OU02WWE and Nissan Kubistar RO56TYX) for one new vehicle be approved.

Community Services Committee Meeting 11th December 2018

A grant application from Be Free Young Carers for £7,000 had been considered by the Community Services Committee. The Committee had referred this to the Finance and General Committee for consideration from the Community Fund.

Cllr Vicky Jenkins, Chairman of the Community Services Committee, confirmed that the recommendation from that Committee was for a grant be awarded.

It was **resolved** that a grant of £7,000 be awarded to Be Free Young Carers, to be funded from the Community Fund.

F40 Finance Report: Payment Schedules and Internal Audit Report

Members received and considered the report of the Treasurer /RFO.

Regarding the Internal Audit Report, Cllr Sandy Lovatt drew Member's attention to the auditor's conclusion that "*the current RFO and her staff are to be commended for the quality of work and documentation provided for the purposes of this interim audit.*" He endorsed the comments of the auditor and requested that this comment be minuted. The Committee concurred and thanked the Treasurer/ RFO for her hard work and professionalism.

It was **resolved** that the Finance Report, and the recommendations contained therein, (i) to approve the schedule of accounts for the period 1st September to 30th November 2018 and (ii) to approve the report of the Internal Auditor, be agreed.

F41 Financial report and Estimates 2019/20

The Committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer / RFO.

Management Accounts

There were no questions regarding the Management Accounts for the period to 30th November 2018 and these were **approved**.

Projected position

Members then noted the projected overspend of this Committee for the full year of £16,219 and the Full Council projected underspend of £110,957.

Finance and General Purposes Committee Budget 2019/20

The Committee then considered the budget for 2019/20. It was proposed by Cllr Mike Badcock, seconded by Cllr Dennis Garrett and **resolved** that a net expenditure budget of £781,828 (as detailed in Appendix C of the Report) for this Committee be agreed as part of the main budget recommendation (v), detailed below.

Earmarked reserve balances

In relation to the current balances of the earmarked reserves, Cllr Sandy Lovatt asked for an update on the status of the Joint Environmental Trust (JET) funds (earmarked reserve 325).

The Town Clerk reminded Members that the balance showing of £31,139.44 in Appendix F of the report was a mixture of funds originally contributed by the Vale of White Horse District Council and the Town Council. When there were suggestions to the spend the remaining funds then the terms of the Joint Environmental Trust mean that the Town Clerk would be required to seek agreement from the District Council. When the Trust was wound down, the Town Council then continued to allocate £5,000 a year for the next two years towards JET funds. This is shown as a separate reserve, ATC Environmental Projects and this reserve of £10,000 may be spent without requiring agreement from the District Council. The Town Clerk then explained that there are proposals to install a public drinking water fountain on the wall in Roysse Court Gardens, the funding of which could be taken from this earmarked reserve. (See Minute F44 for more on this matter).

Members then discussed the New Cemetery Fund (earmarked reserve 344). *Cllr Alice Badcock declared an interest due to her being a Cabinet Member of Vale of White Horse District Council and left the meeting.* Cllr Mike Badcock (Leader) explained that there is an area of land west of Masefield Crescent which has been identified as a potential site for a new cemetery. The land is currently owned by Vale of White Horse District Council who are determining whether the land should be classified as “community” or “commercial use”. Once this decision is made by the District Council this will allow discussions to continue regarding the cost and suitability for a new cemetery. Cllr Dennis Garrett asked whether there would be a legal restriction on spending the earmarked reserve on something else, if the land did not become available, or financially viable, and whether the monies should be passed back to the taxpayers. The Treasurer reminded Members that there is no legal restriction; earmarked reserves can be spent on any areas within the Council’s remit, or dissolved and the money taken back into the general reserve (to reduce precept requirement, defray other costs or remain in balances) but such changes would require Full Council approval.

[Cllr Alice Badcock returned to the meeting, the time being 7:29pm].

Recommendations from other spending Committees – matters referred

Members then considered the recommendations from the other spending Committees (Appendix D of the Report).

Cllr Mike Badcock explained that by accepting these recommendations along with the recommended budget for the Finance and General Purposes Committee this would mean no increase in band D council tax for 2019/20.

It was proposed by Cllr Mike Badcock and seconded by Cllr Dennis Garrett that these budgets be approved by this Committee (see recommendation (v) detailed below).

Fees and Charges

The Committee then discussed proposed fees and charges for 2019/20. In relation to cemetery charges, Cllr Samantha Bowring raised concerns that cemetery fees were too low when balanced against the future cost to potentially finance a new cemetery. Cllr Alice Badcock (Chairman of Amenities and Recreation Committee) assured the Committee that work had been carried out to review the Council's cemetery charges and, following increases over a number of years, she confirmed that the charges are now more in line with other local parishes. It was proposed by Cllr Mike Badcock and seconded by Cllr Dennis Garrett that the proposed fees and charges as detailed in the report be approved (see budget recommendation (i) below).

Members Allowances

Note: under the Code of Conduct there is a general dispensation that Members are able to consider this item.

It was proposed by Cllr Mike Badcock and seconded by Cllr Dennis Garrett that Members Allowances for 2019/20 be 20% of the District Council basic allowance (see budget recommendation (ii) below).

Mayor's Allowance

It was proposed by Cllr Mike Badcock and seconded by Cllr Dennis Garrett that a Mayor's Allowance of £3,270 be awarded for 2019/20 (see budget recommendation (iv) below).

It was **RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL** that:

- (i) All recommendations included within the Treasurer's Report regarding fees and charges be approved;
- (ii) A Members Allowance equal to 20% of the District Council basic allowance be awarded for 2019/20;
- (iii) The authority to pay travel and subsistence expenses for duties outside of the parish be delegated to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the RFO, and considered on a case by case basis;
- (iv) A Mayor's Allowance of £3,270 be awarded for 2019/20;
- (v) The draft budget estimates for 2019/20 be approved in the sum of £1,549,607 (net expenditure);
- (vi) The total net spending provided in the estimates for 2019/20 amounting to £1,549,607 be funded by way of precept;
- (vii) The Council request the District Council to levy a precept, for Town Council purposes, amounting to £1,549,607 for the financial year 2019/20, resulting in a Band D Council Tax for parish purposes of £126.33, the same as for 2018/19 (based on the draft Council Tax base).

F42 Honorary Archivist – Annual Report 2017/18

The Committee received and considered the report of Mrs. Jackie Smith, Honorary Archivist.

The Committee noted the report and commented on the outstanding role Mrs. Smith continues to fulfil for the Council. The Committee requested that a vote of thanks be passed on to Mrs. Smith for all her hard work and dedication.

Cllr Sandy Lovatt asked for an update on the accommodation arrangements for the Archivist in the newly built Muniment Room. Cllr Mike Badcock explained that the fit-out of the new room is in-hand.

It was **resolved** that the Annual Report of the Honorary Archivist be approved.

F43 **Draft Calendar of Meetings 2019/20**

The Committee received and considered the Report of the Town Clerk in relation to the draft calendar of meetings for the forthcoming year. Cllr Alice Badcock remarked that the proposed meeting on 5th June 2019 was very close to the Fun / Music in Park event planned for Saturday 1st June 2019 and this could cause workload issues for officers. It was suggested that perhaps the meeting of the Guildhall Committee proposed for 23rd May 2019 could instead take place on 6th June 2019 and then the Amenities and Recreation Committee meeting could take place on 22nd May 2019.

It was agreed that the Town Clerk would bring forward an amended Calendar of Meetings to the Full Council meeting on 23rd January 2019.

F44 **Guildhall and Abbey Hall Improvement Project**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk updated Members on additional works and associated costs since the previous report and also the overall funding position for the entire project.

It was proposed by Cllr Dennis Garrett, seconded by Cllr Mike Badcock and **resolved** that:

- (i) The revised budget estimates in relation to the Guildhall Project, both capital and revenue (appendices A and C of the Report contained within the agenda papers), including the transfers between the budget lines as reported, be noted and endorsed;
- (ii) The financial update and the funding position in relation to the Guildhall related projects – the Abbey Hall / cinema and Roysse Court (appendices B and C of the Report contained within the agenda papers) – be approved;
- (iii) The use of £100,000 of the deferred grant (received from Vale of White District Council) for the Abbey Hall project be approved;
- (iv) The financial update in relation to the building project / contract with Inside Out Developments (appendix D of the Report contained within the agenda papers), and all related variation in the project to date, be noted and endorsed.

The Committee then considered the proposal for the installation of a public

drinking water fountain, the budget for this works being £10,000.

The Town Clerk had explained earlier in the meeting that there were sufficient funds available within the Town Council element of the former Joint Environmental Trust earmarked reserve to finance this work, or a request could be made to the Vale of White Horse District Council to release funds from the former Trust's Fund (held by the Town Council). Release of the latter funds would require the consent of Abingdon ward members of the Vale of White Horse DC.

It was **RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL** that:

- (i) A public drinking water fountain be installed in the wall at Roysse Court Gardens;
- (ii) A budget of £10,000 be approved for this work;
- (iii) The Town Clerk write to Abingdon ward members of the Vale of White Horse District Council seeking their consent to release of monies from the former Joint Environmental Trust Fund to cover the cost.

Members then considered the revenue budgets for both Guildhall and Abbey Hall, which are part of the budget recommendation detailed above. The Town Clerk reported that the proposed budget estimates for 2019/20 would mean a reduction in net revenue expenditure of £60,218 compared with the budget set aside for 2018/19. Within the estimates there was an increased budget for property repair and maintenance amounting to £52,200 (increased from £17,800 [2018/19] to £70,000 [2019/2020]). If the added-value of the increased property allocation is discounted, the revenue saving in relation to the Guildhall and the Abbey Hall increased to £112,418.

It was **resolved** that the report of the Town Clerk be approved.

F45 **Old Magistrates' Court**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk regarding a proposal from Regal Evesham. The Town Clerk explained that this was being brought to this Committee's attention for two reasons: (1) The proposal was in relation to the use of one of the Council's buildings and therefore was a property matter, requiring consideration by this Committee as well as the Guildhall Committee (as service committee); (2) The proposal was received after the Guildhall Committee meeting, and required an expedient response if matters were to proceed in a timely manner. Cllr Dennis Garrett (Chairman of Guildhall Committee) asked whether it would be appropriate for the Guildhall Committee to have a special meeting prior to the Full Council meeting next week. The Town Clerk suggested that instead, the Full Council could consider the principle of the proposal and delegate authority to the Guildhall Committee to agree further details.

Mr. Ian and Mrs. Sue Wiper of Regal Evesham were invited to enter the

meeting, the time being 7:55pm. Mr. and Mrs. Wiper then proceeded to give a presentation on their proposal of using the Old Magistrates Court for a further cinema screen room. The main points of the proposal were:

- Regal Evesham would invest £80,000 to provide AV equipment in the Old Magistrates' Court;
- Regal Evesham requesting use of the Old Magistrates' Court on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings from 6pm, two mid-week evenings, two mid-week afternoons and weekend daytime during term time;
- Regal Evesham requesting full use of the Old Magistrates' Court during school holidays;
- Members of the public able to book use of the remaining sessions up to two months ahead, and Regal Evesham to have the right to book any additional sessions not allocated to the public
- Proposal to pay commercial rates for use of Old Magistrates Court plus 25% uplift, meaning proposed income to the Guildhall of £29,280 per year
- In line with the agreement for outsourcing the running of the Guildhall to Regal Evesham, and based on the above use, the Town Council will receive 40% of room booking income, which would be £11,712
- At the end of the agreement Regal Evesham would remove the AV equipment.

Mr. and Mrs. Wiper acknowledged there would be some hurdles to overcome. These include managing potential noise disturbance in the Council Chamber and amendments to the premises licence to enable cinema use. Mr. and Mrs. Wiper stated they would welcome an early decision in order to manage lead times and market the facilities early in 2019.

[Cllr Margaret Crick, Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, entered the meeting, the time being 8:15pm].

Cllr Mike Badcock (Leader) thanked Mr. and Mrs. Wiper for their proposal and they left the meeting (the time being 8:16pm). It was agreed that the Committee would continue their discussions in the confidential section of the meeting due to the commercial and financial elements of the proposal. See Minute F47.

Exclusion of the public, including the press

The Chairman 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.

F46 **Report of the Town Clerk**

The Committee received and considered the Confidential Report of the Town Clerk.

Matters Referred – Guildhall Committee 13th December 2018

The Town Clerk gave an update on the building contract with Inside Out Development, in particular any additional cost for preliminaries which the Council may incur. The Town Clerk explained these would be due to the increase in scope of the project since the contract was agreed and the subsequent prolongation of the work. It was noted that the agreement of additional preliminaries be delegated to the Guildhall Development Working Group.

It was **resolved** that the report be noted and endorsed.

Council Insurance Policy renewal

The Town Clerk reported that the Council's insurance policy was due for renewal at 31st March 2019. The policy covered the Council's substantial, wide and varied requirements. The Town Clerk had sought some renewal quotes with the current provider and explained to Members alternative courses of action to be considered.

It was proposed by Cllr Mike Badcock, seconded by Cllr Sandy Lovatt and **resolved** that:

- (i) the renewal with Zurich Insurance should be accepted based on the five-year agreement, at a cost of £33,322 per annum.
- (ii) A tendering exercise should commence after three years of this new arrangement to ensure sufficient time to complete.

F47 **Old Magistrates' Court**

The Committee then returned to considering the proposal from the Regal Evesham. Cllr Samantha Bowring raised concerns over the level of use they were proposing and the availability of the space to other potential users, especially during the school holidays. Cllr Mike Badcock replied that there were alternative rooms the public can hire but agreed that it was crucial to balance this offer against ensuring sufficient availability for community use. Cllr Badcock reminded Members that should the proposal be approved this would be a policy change in relation the use of the Old Magistrates Court.

In addition to the premises licence, the Town Clerk reminded Members that the proposed use would also require a planning application for change of use and that there were lead times on these applications.

It was **RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL** that:

- (i) The proposal made be Regal Evesham in relation to use of the Old Magistrates Court be approved in principle;
- (ii) Authority be delegated to the Town Clerk to make necessary applications for premises licence/ planning change of use to enable the implementation of the proposal.
- (iii) Authority be delegated to the Guildhall Committee to approve the details of any resulting agreement with the Regal Evesham, with direction to the Committee to consider the balance between community and cinema use, and the charges to the Regal in relation to use of the Old Magistrates' Court.

The meeting rose at 8:45pm.

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Chairman

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Date