

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
held on Tuesday 18th June 2019 at 7:00pm
in the Roysse Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present

Cllr Samantha Bowring	Chair
Cllr Jim Halliday	Vice-Chair and Chair of Amenities & Recreation Committee
Cllr Gabby Barody	
Cllr Margaret Crick	Chair of Guildhall Committee
Cllr Eric de la Harpe	
Cllr Neil Fawcett	Chair of Community Services Committee
Cllr Jeanette Halliday	Chair of Planning, Highways & Consultations Committee
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	Chair of County Hall Museum Management Committee
Cllr Helen Pighills	Substituting for Cllr Andy Foulsham
Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom	

In Attendance

Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mr Steve Rich	Assistant Town Clerk / Head of Services
Mrs Susan Whipp	Treasurer/Responsible Financial Officer (Clerk to the meeting)
Cllr Alex Greenaway	
Cllr Robert Maddison	
Cllr Andrew Skinner	

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F5 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Charlie Birks, Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames (ex-officio) and Cllr Andy Foulsham. Cllr Helen Pighills was substituting for Cllr Foulsham.

F6 **Declarations of interest**

None.

F7 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 5th March 2019 and 13th May 2019.

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 5th March 2019 and 13th May 2019 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F8 **Statements and Questions from the public**

There were no statements or questions from the public.

F9 **Terms of Reference**

The Committee received and noted the Terms of Reference.

(Cllr Samantha Bowring entered the meeting, the time being 7:03pm).

The meeting was then suspended and the Town Clerk and RFO presented an introduction to the council's finances. The RFO had written a brief guide and this was circulated to members present for reference. The RFO reminded members that she could be contacted at any time with any questions. Members were also reminded that external training is available via OALC and members should contact the Town Clerk if they were interested in attending any of those sessions. A copy of the information booklet circulated to members present is attached to these minutes.

(Cllr Alex Greenaway entered the meeting, the time being 7:14pm).

(Cllr Neil Fawcett entered the meeting, the time being 7:45pm).

The meeting reconvened, the time being 7:57pm. *(Cllr Robert Maddison left the meeting).*

F10 **Personnel Sub-Committee**

The committee considered the appointment of a Personnel Sub-Committee. Cllr Bowring informed new members of the purpose of such a committee and asked if anyone present would be interested in being a member of the sub-committee. The sub-committee would consist of five members. Cllr Jim Halliday expressed an interest.

It was agreed that this would be taken to Full Council to allow other members, not on this committee, the opportunity of volunteering for the role.

(Cllrs Patrick Lonergan and Andrew Skinner left the meeting, the time being 8:03pm).

F11 **Matter referred**

The committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk. Cllr Jeanette Halliday commented that she had not had sufficient time to read the report as it had not been issued with the agenda. It was requested by the committee that all reports are issued at the same time as the agenda. The Chair, Cllr Samantha Bowring, asked those officers present if all agendas and reports could be issued five days prior to each meeting. The Town Clerk reminded members that the legal requirement is three clear working days but agreed that officers would do their best to accommodate this request. The Town Clerk explained that the recent period had been a particularly busy time, and the workloads of senior officers had been high.

Some members commented that they had not received copies of papers in the post, despite requesting them. The Town Clerk agreed to check with Mrs Nina Ozdemir, PA to Town Clerk.

(i) Community Services Committee 21st May 2019

The committee noted that a Communications review group has been set up which will be referred to the meeting of the Town Council on 26th June 2019 to agree membership.

(ii) Guildhall Committee 30th May 2019

The committee considered the Town Clerk's report on options for improving access within the Guildhall complex. Members agreed that whilst this was important, the council should not proceed with any particular option until they had fully considered all approaches in detail. The present suite of rooms allows disabled access to some of the rooms and members felt that was appropriate, at least in the short term.

It was **resolved** to recommend to Guildhall Committee that further costings and usage information be obtained, but this should not be high priority in the immediate future.

(iii) Amenities and Recreation Committee 11th June 2019

The committee considered the recommendation to purchase three bus shelters, to be partly funded by use of up to £10,000 from the earmarked reserve for street furniture (any use of an earmarked reserve requires recommendation by this committee and approval by Full Council).

It was **recommended to Full Council** that three bus shelters be purchased, for the locations identified, and up to £10,000 of the street furniture earmarked reserve be used.

The committee also considered the new cemetery project. Members were reminded that this project was currently under the responsibility of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and it was suggested that this would better

sit under the Amenities and Recreation Committee. (It had previously been under that committee). Cllr Neil Fawcett asked the Town Clerk for previous correspondence with the District Council to be shared with members. The Town Clerk agreed to do so. Cllr Jim Halliday, Chair of Amenities and Recreation Committee, agreed that if this project was returned to that committee, he would commence background investigations regarding costings and potential future need, and would report back to Finance and General Purposes Committee.

It was **recommended to Full Council** that the new cemetery project be transferred back to within the responsibility of Amenities and Recreation Committee.

F12 **Finance Report**

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

It was **resolved** that the Finance Report, and the following be approved:

- (i) The schedule of accounts for the period 1st March 2019 to 31st May 2019
- (ii) The management accounts for the full 2018-19 year, for both this committee and the Full Council
- (iii) The management accounts for this committee and for the Full Council, for the month of April 2019
- (iv) The report of the Internal Auditor.

Member training

Members considered training needs of new (and existing) members and the Town Clerk reminded the committee that there is currently no specific budget available for this. It was agreed that training was required, but this could mean external training, in-house, peer sharing or online. Cllr Jim Halliday reminded members that external training is available via OALC and Cllr Helen Pighills added that she had undertaken some online training sessions on the LGA website and suggested that new members may find that useful. However it was noted that many courses during normal working hours.

It was **recommended to Full Council** that a budget of £5,000 be set aside for member training by way of supplementary estimate.

Financial Plan

The committee then discussed the recommendation that a five-year (rolling) plan be produced, for adoption as part of the budget making process later in the year. Cllr Neil Fawcett reminded members that legally a council can only set an annual budget but it would be useful to consider the budget needs and plans for future years at the same time. If a forward plan were to be adopted it was pointed out that details could be changed in the future.

The committee voted on this proposal and it was **resolved** (9 votes for, 1 abstention) that a five-year rolling financial plan be produced.

Banking arrangements

The Treasurer / RFO explained the current regime is that all payments (with the exception of some utilities and salaries) are made by cheque, with all cheques requiring signature by two members and the Treasurer / RFO or Town Clerk. The Treasurer / RFO recommended that the arrangements be amended to allow some payments to be made by the Town Clerk or Treasurer / RFO without requiring prior approval by two members. She explained that other similar sized town councils have moved to this arrangement and suggested a limit of any payments up to a value of £5,000 being able to be made in this way. Members approved in principle but agreed that a lower limit of £2,500 would be more appropriate, in the first instance.

It was **recommended to Full Council** that:

- (i) The approval (and payment) of all invoices up to £2,500 be delegated to the Town Clerk and RFO, with listings of such payments being presented to the next ordinary meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee;
- (ii) Invoices for £2,500 or more continue to be approved by two members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee;
- (iii) Payments approved by the Town Clerk and RFO be made by cheque;
- (iv) Payments approved by two members be paid either by electronic banking transfer, or cheque, depending on individual requirement;
- (v) It be delegated to the Town Clerk and RFO to set up an additional bank account to enable the issue of cheques signed only by the Town Clerk and RFO.

F13 **Guildhall and Abbey Hall Improvement Project**

The committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk. Following discussion, Cllr Margaret Crick, Chair of Guildhall Committee explained that the key reason for the increased costs of the building work was the increase in scope.

The committee noted the report but due to its late circulation it was agreed that the report should be considered at the next Full Council meeting. Cllr Bowring asked that the report be re-circulated to all members.

F14 **General report of the Town Clerk**

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

One Public Estate

Members discussed the future use of the Abbey Hall and the arrangements with The Abbey Cinema. Cllr Neil Fawcett stated that he believed the Abbey Hall should be transferred back to being under the responsibility of the Guildhall Committee, rather than Finance and General Purposes Committee. Cllr Samantha Bowring asked members if they would be happy with this proposal,

and for discussions to resume with The Abbey Cinema regarding their plans and aspirations for the future.

It was **recommended to Full Council** that the Abbey Hall be transferred back to the responsibility of the Guildhall Committee.

Location of Information Centre

Cllr Bowring reminded members of the issues regarding the current (1st floor) location of the Information Centre, in the County Hall Museum. Members agreed that the location should be considered both as a short-term issue (ground floor access) and as a longer term permanent location for the service. In the short term it was being suggested that the ground floor reading room in Roysse Court would be a suitable alternative. It was acknowledged that the reading room is primarily for use by the Archivist but at present this usage is limited due the town's archives remaining offsite until the new muniment room has dried out. Cllr Helen Pighills stated that there could perhaps be other suitable locations in the newly refurbished Guildhall complex for the Information Centre, particularly with the improved internal corridors linking to Roysse Court offices.

It was **resolved** that in the short term, the Information Centre be relocated to the ground floor reading room within the Roysse Court offices, and a report be presented back to the Finance and General Purposes Committee in September 2019, including information on usage figures (over the last five years if available). The report would also include archives visitor numbers and website usage.

It was agreed that the Information Centre would be relocated as soon as practicably possible for officers and appropriate temporary signage would be installed to ensure visitors are able to find the new location, authority in this regard delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Leader.

Bus service no 41

The committee discussed the no 41 bus service which commenced in October 2018. It was agreed that a working group be set up to consider the current arrangements. The purpose of the working group would be to consider the need for a bus service, potential changes / expansion of the route, and any alternative approaches to providing the service. This work would involve consultation both with the public and with the bus service providers. Cllr Bowring suggested that the working group would consist of at least:

- One county councillor
- Two town councillors
- One district councillor

District Councillor Mike Pighills had already expressed an interest in being part of the working group.

It was **agreed** that this be taken to Full Council to agree the membership.

F15 **Publicity**

Members considered items for publicity and it was agreed that the following items should be publicised:

1. The new temporary location of the Information Centre;
2. The opening of the Space for Change toilet facility;
3. The installation of the defibrillator.

It was suggested that the Space for Change facility could be opened officially by the Mayor and the Town Clerk agreed to consider this. Cllr Jeanette Halliday thanked the Town Clerk for arranging the installation of the defibrillator so promptly.

F16 **Meeting dates 2019/20**

The committee noted the dates of the following meetings:

- 18th September 2019
- 14th January 2020
- 21st January 2020
- 17th March 2020
- 16th June 2020

SECTION II (Confidential)

F17 **IT infrastructure**

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

It was **resolved** that the issues highlighted in the report be delegated for full consideration by the IT working group, and the working group to report back to the Finance and General Purposes Committee on their recommendations.

The meeting rose at 10:27pm.

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Chair

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Date