

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on
Tuesday 14th January 2020 at 7:00pm
in the Old Magistrate's Court, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames

Present

Cllr Samantha Bowring	Chair
Cllr Jim Halliday	Vice-Chair and Chair of Amenities & Recreation Committee
Cllr Gabby Barody	
Cllr Charlie Birks	Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames (ex-officio)
Cllr Eric de la Harpe	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	Chair of County Hall Museum Management Committee
Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom	

In Attendance

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

One member of the public.

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F39 *The meeting was attended by Abingdon resident Dr Les Clyne. The committee agreed to suspend standing orders to allow Dr Clyne to address the meeting. Dr Clyne raised his concerns on the draft 2020-21 budget proposals.*

F40 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Margaret Crick, Andy Foulsham, Jeanette Halliday and Neil Fawcett.

F41 **Declarations of interest**

The following declarations of non-pecuniary interests were made, with particular regard to the discussions relating to grants included in the proposed 2020-21 estimates:

Cllr Charlie Birks	Nominative Governor of Christ's Hospital of Abingdon
Cllr Samantha Bowring	Trustee of Abingdon Carousel and Vale of White Horse District Councillor
Cllr Jim Halliday	Trustee of Albert Memorial Trust
Cllr Eric de la Harpe	Trustee of Albert Memorial Trust

F42 **Statements and Questions from the public**

There were no further statements or questions from the public.

F43 **Financial report and Estimates 2020/21**

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

It was **resolved** that the management accounts for the period 1st April 2019 to 30th November 2019 be approved.

The committee noted the projected outturn for 31st March 2020 and then considered the estimates for 2020/21. Cllr Samantha Bowring, Chair, reminded members that the committee was required to make a budget recommendation for the cost centres directly within the responsibility of this committee, and then agree a recommendation regarding a budget for the Full Council. During the discussions on this committee's own budget the following points were raised:

- (i) Cost centre 311 – Cllr Jim Halliday asked about the role of the PCSOs. The Town Clerk reported that PCSO Ali Blood would be attending the next meeting of this committee to provide an update on their work
- (ii) Cost centre 401 – Cllr Jim Halliday asked whether the suggested budget for election expenses was sufficient, given the higher than expected costs for the May 2019 elections. The Treasurer reported that the proposed budget of £7,000 would mean a reserve of £28,000 could be built up over four years, which was in line with this year's costs
- (iii) Cost centre 411 – Cllr Pat Lonergan queried the new account code 4265 *Transport Initiatives*. Cllr Bowring explained this would be to fund a range of transport / travel initiatives which are still to be determined. The committee agreed that a more suitable name would be *Green travel initiatives* and that this should be changed within the budget reports.
- (iv) Cost centre 411 – Cllr Bowring updated members on a request from Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice to increase the funding awarded from the Town Council by an additional £3,000 per year. This had not been included in the draft estimates. It was proposed by Cllr Bowring, seconded by Cllr Halliday and **recommended, as part of the budget, that the annual funding awarded to Oxford South and Vale be increased for 2020/21 from £15,100 to £18,100.**

The committee then considered the budget recommendations from each of the other spending committees:

County Hall Museum Management Committee

Cllr Pat Lonergan (Chair of the Committee) updated members with an adjustment to the recommended budget shown in Appendix D of the Treasurer's Report. This had been agreed at the County Hall Museum Management Committee meeting held on 8th January 2020, which had taken place after the draft budget papers had been circulated. Cllr Lonergan explained that the committee requested that the Museum Maintenance earmarked reserve balance of £5,630 be released and used to offset the funding requirement for the museum's recommended budget. This would reduce the recommended net expenditure of this committee for 2020/21 to £219,847.

The committee discussed the museum café and the Treasurer / RFO was requested to provide a briefing paper on café user numbers for the next meeting of the committee, to be held on 21st January 2020.

Amenities and Recreation Committee

Cllr Jim Halliday reminded members that the recommended budget included some significant savings due to a review of earmarked reserves and planned works having been undertaken by the committee. Cllr Halliday stated that such a budget saving cannot be expected in future years. The recommended net expenditure for this committee for 2020/21 was £389,563.

Guildhall Committee

In the absence of Cllr Margaret Crick (Chair), the Town Clerk outlined the recommended 2020/21 budget. The Town Clerk explained that there was a significant increase recommended, to ensure that the budget was sufficient to fund necessary on-going maintenance works. The majority of the budget related to property / equipment. The recommended net expenditure for this committee for 2020/21 was £198,480.

At this point in the meeting, Dr Les Clyne interrupted the meeting and Cllr Bowring (Chair) suspended the meeting [the time being 7:55pm]. Dr Clyne left the meeting and the meeting was resumed [the time being 7:58pm].

Community Services Committee

In the absence of Cllr Neil Fawcett (Chair), Cllr Bowring gave an update on the budget recommended by this committee. The committee considered the split of costs between Fun and Music in the Park events and it the Community Services Committee was requested to consider the apportionment of costs between events later in the year. The recommended net expenditure for this committee for 2020/21 was £49,912.

Fees and Charges

The committee then considered the proposed fees and charges as attached in Appendix E of the Treasurer's Report. Regarding market tolls, the Town Clerk circulated a paper showing tolls charged at other nearby market towns. Cllr Bowring proposed that market traders could be given a financial incentive to cut single used plastics. Cllr Birks raised questions on the policing of such a scheme and suggested working with other community groups such as Abingdon Cuts Plastic to encourage this. It was agreed that the period of consultation with the market traders would continue, and the findings to be considered at the committee meeting in June 2020, with the aim of offering a discount from 1st September 2020. It was proposed by Cllr Jim Halliday, seconded by Cllr Pat Lonergan and **RECOMMENDED** that the following market tolls be charged with effect from 1st April 2020:

Monday regular market	£11.70 per 10-foot stall
Farmers' Market	£12.50 per stall

Regarding cemetery fees, allotments and fishing fees, the committee **RECOMMENDED** the proposed charges as per Appendix E of the Treasurer's Report.

The committee also **RECOMMENDED** the following charges for 2020/21:

Permission to sell alcohol at a market event

- 1) Where the organiser provides a personal licence holder £12.50 (inc VAT)
- 2) Where the organiser does not provide a licence holder £105.00 (inc VAT)

Use of electricity on the Market Place £12.80 (inc VAT)

Pension Certifications for Abingdon parishioners £5.00 (inc VAT)

Pension Certifications for those outside the parish £15.00 (inc VAT)

Members' allowances

Cllr Bowring stated that she believed that for those dual-hatted (town and district councillors), the current allowance of 20% of the district allowance was disproportionate to the workload. The committee agreed that the current arrangements should be looked at in the future. It was proposed by Cllr Pat Lonergan, seconded by Cllr Samantha Bowring and **RECOMMENDED** that the members' allowance for 2020/21 continue to be 20% of the district council allowance.

Mileage allowance

It was proposed by Cllr Samantha Bowring, seconded by Cllr Charlie Birks and **RECOMMENDED** that the following mileage rates be used for members' travel outside of the parish, being in line with the current HMRC rates:

Cars	45p per mile
Motorcycle	24p per mile
Bicycle	20p per mile

Mayor's allowance

Members considered the current arrangements, in particular the local arrangement for the mayor to allocate £250 per year from their allowance towards the expenses of the deputy mayor. The committee felt this was too low and it was proposed by Cllr Samantha Bowring, seconded by Cllr Charlie Birks and **RECOMMENDED** (unanimously) that this arrangement be increased to £300.

The committee then considered the mayor's allowance and it was proposed by Cllr Pat Lonergan, seconded by Cllr Charlie Birks and **RECOMMENDED** (4 votes to 3) that the allowance for 2020/21 be increased to £3,500.

Areas of new spend

Cllr Gabby Barody raised a question on behalf of Cllr Grace Clifton, regarding the potential for the Council to sell off any existing land it no longer required, and purchase any new land. The committee agreed this was not an area of new spend for this budget.

Cllr Eric de la Harpe raised the environmental issue regarding cooking facilities at both the museum café and the Guildhall. The Town Clerk explained that gas is no longer used at the museum and that the majority of the commercial kitchen

facilities at the Guildhall use electricity, with the one exception of one gas hob. It was agreed that the main issue is the existing gas heating. Cllr Samantha Bowring suggested that this was a longer-term issue and should be addressed as part of the work being funded by the property / maintenance budget of the Guildhall. The Guildhall Committee should then give due priority to improvements which would have the best environmental impact. Cllr de la Harpe agreed.

Members also considered the spending of monies from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and it was agreed a corporate policy should be considered during the June 2020 cycle of council meetings.

Funding of 2020/21 budget requirement

Taking into account the proposed changes to the draft 2020/21 estimates as recommended above, the committee **RECOMMENDED** a net expenditure £1,678,456.

Members considered how this should be funded. It was noted that the current level of general reserve had been accumulated as a result of savings made against the Guildhall budget. A significant part of the Guildhall 2020/21 budget related to property and therefore drawing from the general reserve was justified.

It was proposed by Cllr Pat Lonergan, seconded by Cllr Charlie Birks and **RECOMMENDED** that £100,000 in total be used from earmarked reserves and the general reserve. The committee then reviewed the current balances of the earmarked reserves and **RECOMMENDED** that the following reserves be deleted and the funds be released into the general reserve to part-fund next year's budget requirement:

342 Fun / Music in Park	- £10,462	No longer required, sufficient in-year budget
354 Children's Centre	- £15,000	This is no longer needed to be held as now ongoing, annual funding

Budget recommendation

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

- (i) All recommendations included within the Treasurer's Report, subject to the amendments and the fees and charges, detailed above, be approved;
- (ii) A Members Allowance equal to 20% of the District Council basic allowance be awarded for 2020/21;
- (iii) Travel expenses for travel outside of the parish be awarded at 45p, 24p or 20p per mile for cars, motorcycle or bicycle respectively;
- (iv) A Mayor's Allowance of £3,500 be awarded for 2020/21;
- (v) The draft budget estimates for 2020/21 be approved in the sum of £1,678,456 (net expenditure);
- (vi) The total net spending provided in the estimates for 2020/21 amounting to £1,678,456 be funded by way of release of reserves of £100,000 and precept of £1,578,456;

- (vii) The Council request the District Council to levy a precept, for Town Council purposes, amounting to £1,578,456 for the financial year 2020/21, resulting in a Band D Council Tax for parish purposes of £128.21 (based on the draft Council Tax base).

During the discussions on earmarked reserves the committee considered the delegation of the spending of earmarked reserves to relevant spending committees. It was **RECOMMENDED** to Full Council that the following earmarked reserves be transferred to the committee specified below, and any future spending of these reserves will no longer require individual approval by Full Council:

Emr 326	County Hall Improvement Fund	- delegate to CHMMC
Emr 357	Bob Frampton Prize Fund	- delegate to CHMMC
Emr 330	Abingdon in Bloom	- delegate to Amenities & Recreation Cttee
Emr 331	Allotments	- delegate to Amenities & Recreation Cttee
Emr 339	Fisheries	- delegate to Amenities & Recreation Cttee
Emr 341	Footpaths	- delegate to Amenities & Recreation Cttee
Emr 345	Play equipment	- delegate to Amenities & Recreation Cttee
Emr 352	Cemetery impr'ts	- delegate to Amenities & Recreation Cttee
Emr 353	Arboriculture	- delegate to Amenities & Recreation Cttee
Emr 356	Christmas lights	- delegate to Amenities & Recreation Cttee
Emr 349	Website	- delegate to Community Services Cttee
Emr 351	Media	- delegate to Community Services Cttee

F44 **Environmental implications**

No matters not already discussed as part of the budget setting process were identified.

F45 **Publicity**

It was agreed that a budget press release be issued and included in the Town Crier Magazine and on the website. A pdf version would also be circulated to all members.

F46 **Dates of meetings**

The committee noted the dates of the next meetings as:

21st January 2020

17th March 2020

16th June 2020

The meeting rose at 9:55pm.

Chair.....

Date.....