

**Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on**  
**Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> 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 Neil Fawcett	Chair of Community Services Committee
Cllr Andy Foulsham	
Cllr Lorraine Oates	Substitute for Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom

**In Attendance**

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

PCSO Ali Blood  
Trainee PCSO Maddy Hymore  
Six members of the public

**SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)**

**F47 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Margaret Crick, Jeanette Halliday, Pat Lonergan and Ulrike Rowbottom. Cllr Lorraine Oates was substituting for Cllr Rowbottom.

**F48 Declarations of interest**

The following declarations of non-pecuniary interests were made:

Cllr Charlie Birks	Nominative Governor of Christ's Hospital of Abingdon
Cllr Samantha Bowring	Vale of White Horse District Councillor
Cllr Neil Fawcett	Oxfordshire County Council Councillor and Vale of White Horse District Councillor
Cllr Andy Foulsham	Vale of White Horse District Councillor
Cllr Jim Halliday	Member of Friends of Abingdon Civic Society, and Trustee of Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust
Cllr Eric de la Harpe	Trustee of Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust, and Vale of White Horse District Councillor

Nigel Warner Town Clerk Clerk to the Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust

F49 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2019, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019 and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2019, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019 and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

F50 **Matters arising**

Regarding minute F43 from the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020, Cllr Neil Fawcett asked whether there had been a robust discussion on the use of the general reserve to part fund the 2020-21 recommended budget. The Chair, Cllr Samantha Bowring, replied that members had carefully considered the funding of the 2020-21 budget, additional and expected costs, and each of the reserves. Members had agreed that a significant share of the underspend in recent years related to the Guildhall budget. She further explained that as £100,000 in the recommended 2020-21 budget related to additional expected costs of Guildhall planned maintenance / improvement works and therefore the committee (on the advice of the Treasurer / RFO) felt it was justified to use some of the underspend in previous years to cover these costs. Cllr Jim Halliday reminded members that the current level of the general reserve exceeded the level recommended by the auditor.

Cllr Neil Fawcett also explained that the purpose of retaining unspent budgets (in an earmarked reserve) in relation to the Fun in the Park / Music in the Park event was to provide a buffer if ticket sales in future years were lower, say, due to adverse weather conditions. Cllr Fawcett was content with the earmarked reserve being released but stated this could mean that the event would have a higher level of net cost in a future year, now that the earmarked reserve could not be utilized to offset any additional costs.

F51 **Statements and Questions from the public**

(i) **Mr. John Tabor – Be Free Young Carers**

Mr. John Tabor gave a presentation on the current work undertaken by Be Free Young Carers. He stated that much of their work involved improving the mental wellbeing of young carers, addressing their issues of isolation and improving their self-confidence. He outlined the volunteer-based befriending service and the social activities for young carers.

*Members were reminded that a grant application from this charity would be considered at agenda item 7, Matters Referred (Minute F53).*

Cllr Gabby Barody asked how many children / young adults were accessing the services. Mr Tabor replied that it is in excess of 500, with the charity receiving an average of three referrals per week, mainly from schools or families directly.

Cllr Andy Foulsham thanked the charity for the work undertaken, explaining he had personal experience of a similar charity and appreciated the role such organisations play.

Cllr Jim Halliday noted that in the supporting accounts included in the grant application, it appeared that donations from Parish and Town Councils had fallen significantly since 2018, from approximately £25,000 to £10,000 in each respective year. Mr Tabor explained this was due to the way in which the accounts had been drafted, the Notes to the Accounts had been calculated differently by the charity's accountants.

The committee thanked Mr. Tabor for attending the meeting.

(ii) Mr. Bryan Brown – Chairman, Friends of Abingdon, Abbey Buildings Trust

Mr. Brown gave a presentation on the history of the Friends of Abingdon, the reasons behind the recent decision to split the Friends of Abingdon in to two community interest companies into two and the future plans and aspirations for The Abbey Buildings. The plans would improve access and environmental standards; an objective was to become carbon neutral. The Friends were keen on increasing community engagement and were involved in working with schools and The Abingdon Bridge.

*Members were reminded that a grant application would be considered at agenda item 7, Matters Referred (Minute F53).*

The committee thanked Mr. Brown for attending.

F52 **Police Community Support Officer**

The meeting was attended by PCSO Ali Blood and trainee PCSO Maddy Hymore. PCSO Blood updated the committee on the role of the PCSOs in Abingdon and recent activity. There were resource limitations and they were aware that the Council wished more enforcement to take place in relation to illegal parking. They stated that they did undertake this work and would continue to do as much as they could in this regard. They referred to the work which it was understood was ongoing for the County and District Councils to take responsibility for on-street parking through decriminalisation of parking offences; this would improve the level of enforcement.

Cllr Charlie Birks stated that he had received comments from visitors to the town stating how safe they felt in the town and thanked the PCSOs for their role in this. Cllr Birks asked whether there was any impact from "county lines" in the town. PCSO Blood replied that there was some evidence of this and explained that there is a dedicated team whose full-time focus is drug issues and who have made some important breakthroughs in this area.

Cllr Andy Foulsham asked whether the CCTV coverage in Abingdon was sufficient. PCSO Blood replied that there are a few areas where it could be extended but on the whole coverage was good.

Cllr Neil Fawcett asked how the Town Council could assist in improving the town, either directly or lobbying other councils. PCSO Blood replied that the main area of complaints is regarding parking and street lighting and recognised that neither area was the responsibility of the Town Council.

Cllr Charlie Birks asked if there were sufficient facilities in the town centre for young people. PCSO Blood replied that there was not, and explained that she had sought to arrange an outreach programme to help with this but nothing was forthcoming as yet.

Cllr Eric de la Harpe referred to issues with on street parking in the vicinity of Abingdon School on Saturday mornings, which were causing concern to local residents. PCSO Blood stated that she would make a visit to look at the situation.

Cllr Samantha Bowring asked if there were any specific priorities which the Town Council could work on. PCSO Blood explained that the PCSO Team's priorities are reducing violence, anti-social behaviour and burglaries.

Cllr Bowring thanked the PCSOs for attending the meeting.  
*[PCSOs Ali Blood and Maddy Hymore left the meeting, the time being 7:50pm].*

Cllr Bowring explained that she wished to encourage closer working with the PCSOs and it was **resolved** that the role of PCSOs / establishing closer links be an agenda item for the next meeting of all committees, with a report back to the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

### F53 **Matters Referred**

#### Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee of 25<sup>th</sup> November 2019

The committee considered the recommendation that £5,000 be allocated towards the potential cost of conservation area appraisals in the future. The Town Clerk explained that there was an unspent 2019-20 budget in relation to staffing costs (included at line 605/4001 – Neighbourhood Development Plan / CLP) totalling £5,624 which it would be appropriate to transfer to a new earmarked reserve for this purpose.

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

£5,000 be transferred from the 2019/20 budget, line 605/4001 to a new earmarked reserve, for the purposes of covering future potential costs of conservation area appraisals.

Amenities & Recreation Committee of 26<sup>th</sup> November 2019

Members noted that the Amenities and Recreation Committee had made a number of recommendations regarding the use of earmarked reserves. The Town Clerk reminded the committee that at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020, it recommended to Full Council that some of the council's earmarked reserves be transferred to be under the responsibility of its spending committees. The Town Clerk explained that if the recommendations to Full Council are approved then the recommendations from the Amenities and Recreation Committee would then have been addressed. If the recommendations are not approved by Full Council then the individual recommendations from the Amenities and Recreation Committee would then have to be considered.

Members also considered the recommendation in relation to considering the disposal of the land to the north of the pedestrian subway in Stratton Way.

It was **recommended** that the Council shall consider the disposal of this piece of land and officers were requested to commence obtaining information regarding this matter.

Community Services Committee of 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019

(a) ***The committee considered a grant application from Be Free Young Carers for £7,000.***

Cllr Samantha Bowring commented that the Council regularly awards grants to this organisation and suggested that it would be better treated as an annual grant, similar to those awarded to other organisations. She was also keen to look at the requirements in relation to youth services so that these could be addressed in a strategic manner. Members were reminded that community grants are under the responsibility of the Community Services Committee (budget line 413/4251) and some specific larger annual grants are under the responsibility of the Finance and General Purposes Committee (cost centre 411).

Cllr Neil Fawcett (Chair of Community Services Committee) felt that as the application had been received in 2019-20, it was appropriate for it to be considered as a Community Grant this time, but agreed that it may be appropriate to consider as an annual (Finance and General Purposes Committee - awarded) grant for future years.

The Town Clerk reminded members that there was £6,500 available in the 2019-20 Community Grants budget, and £22,000 in the Community Fund earmarked reserve.

It was proposed by Cllr Neil Fawcett, seconded by Cllr Jim Halliday and:

- (i) **Resolved** that a grant of £6,500 be awarded to Be Free Young Carers, funded from the Community Grants 2019-20 budget;
- (ii) **Recommended** to Full Council that an additional £500 be awarded to Be Free Young Carers, funded from the Community Fund earmarked reserve.

**(b) The committee considered three grant applications under the former Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust.**

It was **recommended** to Full Council that the following grants be funded from the funds from the former Joint Environmental Trust:

1. £2,000 awarded to St Nicolas' Church Tower, for urgent repairs to the church tower (the power to award the grant is under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972);
2. A maximum grant of £11,000 awarded to Abingdon War Memorial (Abingdon Town Council), to cover 50% of the costs of undertaking repairs and replacement of certain items (the power to award the grant is under the War Memorials Act 1923);
3. A maximum grant of £5,000 awarded to The Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust, to fund expenditure in excess of £24,500, for repairs to the memorial following its periodic inspection (the power to award the grant is under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972).

*(Non-pecuniary interests in this grant application were declared as follows:*

*Cllr Jim Halliday - as a Town Council nominated member of the Trust.*

*Cllr Eric de la Harpe – as a District Council nominated member of the Trust.*

*Nigel Warner, Town Clerk – as Clerk to the Trust).*

**(c.) The committee considered a grant application from Friends of Abingdon Abbey Buildings Trust for £25,000**

The Town Clerk reminded members that the Community Services Committee had considered the grant application and had concluded that it did not meet the criteria of the former Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust (JET). However, the committee had agreed that it would qualify for funding from the Town Council only JET funds, for which there is an earmarked reserve amounting to £10,000.

Cllr Charlie Birks asked whether the grant could be enhanced by way of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies the Town Council has received. Cllr Samantha Bowring stated that she felt the Council was not in a position to award any grants from the CIL monies as the Council had not yet agreed a policy for the spending of these monies. Such a policy was to be considered in the June 2020 cycle of meetings.

Cllr Jim Halliday stated that if the Town Council awarded a grant at this stage of the project, he would not wish this to be misinterpreted as implying the Council could offer further financial support at the later, building stages of the project. Cllr Halliday noted that the grant application was requesting 7% of this initial stage of the costs, and felt that the Council would not be in a position to offer a similar percentage of the cost of the capital works.

Cllr Neil Fawcett agreed with Cllr Halliday's comments, adding that the Council would not be in a position to make any commitment of future support.

Cllr Andy Foulsham commented that he was impressed with the amount of work already undertaken by the Friends of Abingdon regarding the project and felt it was important for such rare medieval buildings to be preserved. Cllr Foulsham felt that the CIL monies could be used in this way, and this money would be topped up again at some point in the future, to fund other projects.

It was proposed by Cllr Neil Fawcett, seconded by Cllr Charlie Birks and **recommended** to Full Council that:

- (i) £10,000 be awarded to Friends of Abingdon, Abbey Buildings Trust, funded from the Town Council only JET funds (7 for: 1 abstention);
- (ii) A further £15,000 be awarded to Friends of Abingdon, Abbey Buildings Trust, funded from the Community Infrastructure Levy (6 for: 1 against: 1 abstention).

*[All members of the public left the meeting, the time being 8:18pm].*

#### F54 **Payment Schedules**

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

It was proposed by Cllr Samantha Bowring, seconded by Cllr Jim Halliday and **resolved** that the schedule of payments made between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 be approved.

#### F55 **Internal Audit Report**

The committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer / RFO, containing the Internal Audit report in relation to the interim visit carried out on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

It was **resolved** that the report of the Internal Audit be approved.

#### F56 **Council Procurement Policy**

The committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer / RFO containing a draft Procurement Policy. Cllr Samantha Bowring thanked Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom for her work producing the draft policy.

Cllr Jim Halliday recognised the value in such a policy but it would require some work in relation to the terminology used by the Town Council. Comments should also be sought by staff who purchase goods and services.

Members were requested to review the draft policy and pass any comments to the Treasurer / RFO by 29<sup>th</sup> February 2020. It was agreed that a final draft policy would be then be presented to the June 2020 of this committee.

#### **F57 Financial Update**

The committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer / RFO, which contained updates on work requested at previous meetings of the committee.

Regarding the efficiency savings suggested by staff, Cllr Fawcett commented that the suggestion of the right balance between permanent staff and contractors should be considered together with the Council's plans and objectives for the future.

Members discussed the café visitor numbers and considered short term initiatives which could improve usage of the café. Cllr Jim Halliday suggested that advertising within the museum itself could be improved, to encourage museum visitors to then visit the café. Other suggestions were arranging holiday cover to ensure the café could keep to consistent hours and linking the menus to the museum activities, exhibitions and displays.

The Town Clerk outlined the history of the café and the previous advice which he had received when interviewed as part of the County Council museum service review approximately four years ago, that the breakeven point for a Museum café was 60,000 visitors to the Museum each year; below that threshold a café would normally be expected to run at a deficit. The visitor numbers at Abingdon Museum were just under 30,000.

Cllr Lorraine Oates reminded members of the discussions at the last meeting of the County Hall Museum Management Committee, regarding the café being a requirement of the HLF funding received in 2009/10. The Town Clerk replied that he is seeking clarification on this matter.

It was **recommended** that a review is undertaken by the County Hall Museum Management Committee which would consider the purpose of the café, the use of advertising, other models for running the café, and other relevant issues and to report back to Finance and General Purposes Committee later in the year.

#### **F58 Neighbourhood Development Plan**

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

Members discussed the provisional dates included in the report for the appointment of a consultant and it was agreed that these were ambitious, given the current workload of the Town Clerk. It was agreed that a more suitable

timescale would be to publish the detailed specification of works one week later than suggested by the Town Clerk, with the appointment of a consultant being completed no later than the end of February 2020.

The Town Clerk drew members' attention to his request to have a small working group to assist the Town Clerk with the initial stages of the process and it was agreed that the Town Clerk would email all Council members inviting them to join the group.

The committee noted that the intention was for the Neighbourhood Development Plan process to be launched at the Annual Parish Meeting on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Cllr Jim Halliday suggested that a Planning Officer from the Vale of White Horse District Council be invited to attend the parish meeting, this was agreed by the committee.

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

- (i) The report of the Town Clerk be approved;
- (ii) The revised timetable be set as:
  - Publication of detailed specification of works for sending to potential contractors - Friday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020
  - Tender close date – Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2020
  - Interview of shortlisted potential contractors – Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020
  - Appointment of consultant – no later than Friday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020;
- (iii) An initial budget of £10,000 be released from the earmarked reserve in relation to the Community Led Plan process;
- (iv) Authority to approve the specification of works, appoint a consultant for the scoping stage and to administer the agreed budget either be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with one named member or be delegated to a working group of three members.

F59 **Environmental implications**

No matters not already discussed at other items in the agenda were identified.

F60 **Publicity**

Further to the recommendation at the previous meeting, members noted that that the deadline for the next edition of the Town Crier magazine was before the Full Council meeting at which the 2020-21 budget will be approved. Cllr Neil Fawcett suggested that an article on the council's services should be included a future edition. The committee agreed that such an article would be more informative for the public than the budget alone.

F61 **Dates of meetings**

The committee noted the dates of the next meetings as:  
17<sup>th</sup> March 2020  
16<sup>th</sup> June 2020

F62 **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.

F63 **Confidential appendix to the minutes**

The committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of 18<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

It was **resolved** that the confidential appendix was a correct record and should be signed by the chair.

F64 **Confidential Report of the Town Clerk**

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

*See the confidential appendix to these minutes.*

The meeting rose at 10:53pm.

Chair.....

Date.....