

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
Draft Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
on Tuesday 15th December 2015 at 7.45pm
in the Roysse Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present

Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Chairman
Cllr Michael Badcock	Vice-Chairman and Chairman of Planning, Highways & Consultations Committee
Cllr Samantha Bowring	
Cllr Dennis Garrett	Chairman of Guildhall Committee
Cllr Vicky Jenkins	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Monica Lovatt	Chairman of CH Museum Management Committee
Cllr Helen Pighills	Mayor (ex-officio)
Cllr David Pope	
Cllr Andrew Todd	Chairman of Community Services Committee

In Attendance

Cllr Margaret Crick	
Cllr Jeanette Halliday	
Cllr Robert Hall	
Cllr Jan Morter	
Cllr Lorraine Oates	
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mr Steve Rich	Head of Services/Assistant Town Clerk
Mrs Susan Whipp	Treasurer/Responsible Financial Officer
Ms Heather Brown	Community Services Officer & Clerk to the Meeting

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F47 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Alice Badcock.

At this point in the meeting a member requested that the business of the meeting be divided into two parts so that Guildhall matters be transacted earlier, followed by an adjournment, so that the Town Council meeting could be held to also transact Guildhall matters. Following this the Finance and General Purposes committee could be reconvened for the purposes of transacting other items on the agenda. This was agreed by the Chairman and members.

F48 Declarations of interest

None.

F49 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 15th September 2015.

A number of typographical edits, not materially altering to the meaning of the sentences, were agreed, and were noted in the grey copy before signing.

Resolved: that subject to the corrections, the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 15th September 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F50 **Matters Arising**

F37 – Cllr Vicky Jenkins requested further information about the Football Club loan but was advised that this would be covered at the next ordinary meeting.

F51 **Statements and Questions from the Public**

Dr James Halliday pointed out that he had been unable to submit a question in advance because the Guildhall Committee meeting had taken place just minutes before. It was requested that he bring his question to the next meeting which he agreed to do.

F52 **Matters Referred from the Guildhall Committee**

The committee received and considered a verbal report on the proceedings of the Guildhall Committee of 15th December 2015.

The recommendations of the Guildhall Committee were proposed by Cllr Dennis Garrett, seconded by Cllr Michael Badcock and **recommended** to the Town Council as follows:

- (a) To approve the Plans as detailed below and to delegate authority to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Development Working Group, to apply for planning permission in relation to these plans. The plan being as follows:
 - (i) Ground floor plan – proposed core scheme Lewandowski Architects: Drawing No 200, November 2015;
 - (ii) First floor Plan - proposed core scheme Lewandowski Architects: Drawing No 201, November 2015;
 - (iii) Second floor plan- proposed core scheme Lewandowski Architects: Drawing No 202, November 2015.
- (b) To delegate authority to the Guildhall Development Working Group to commission professional support for the Project, through to its completion and as set out in the report of the Town Clerk, with further reports to the Guildhall Committee at the following stages:

- (i) Following detailed design and ahead of building tenders being required (this to ensure proper approval of any material changes to design or costings);
 - (ii) Following receipt of building tenders, the requirement being that matters are considered by the Guildhall Committee following which the intention would be to seek approval by the Finance and General Purposes Committee and then Full Council for the commitment of funds.
- (c) To approve the cost plan for the Project in two parts follows:
- (i) Works to 1960s building - £1,953,000;
 - (ii) Works to historic building - £231,000)
 - (iii) Total £2,184,000.
- (d) To agree, in principle, the funding for the Project as follows:
- (i) Deferred grants: Use of the remaining amount of the deferred grant (capital improvement sum) from the District Council, amounting to £1,019,000. In pursuance of this, that the Town Clerk be authorised to write to the Vale of White Horse District Council to inform it of this Council's intention to undertake the works set out in paragraphs (a) and (c) (above) and to seek its confirmation that it views those works as being within the definition of Capital Improvement Works, as set out in the contract for the sale of the Guildhall and transfer of management functions, dated 1st April 2011.
 - (ii) Loan. Raising a loan to cover the remaining sum in relation to the 1960s building, estimated to be £934,000 but in principle up to £1,000,000. The Council to note that a formal resolution to apply for loan sanction would be required at a later date when the Council has all information in place to make a final decision. That authority be delegated to the Development Working Group to undertake any necessary public consultation in this regard.
 - (iii) Revenue budget. To utilise the Council's revenue budget to fund the works to the historic building, this being funded from the Council's revenue funds, a combination of earmarked reserves, the pooled property fund and the Guildhall revenue budget.

SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)

F53 Exclusion of the public, including the press

Resolved that the Chairman move:

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.

F54 Matters Referred from the Guildhall Committee

The committee received and considered a verbal report on the proceedings of the Guildhall Committee of 15th December 2015.

The recommendations of the Guildhall Committee were proposed by Cllr Dennis Garrett, seconded by Cllr Michael Badcock and **recommended** to the Town Council as follows:

- (a) That work continue on the Business Plan and that the Development Working Group be tasked with completing the Business Plan and that authority be delegated to the Working Group so that the Plan is ready for publication by 27th January 2016.
- (b) That the decision regarding whether the part opening of the historic rooms ahead of completion of works in the 1960s building be made following the building tender exercise, programmed to take place in June 2016.
- (c) that the Council temporarily relocates its archives assisted by its close working partners at the Berkshire County Archive. That the Council reiterate that a new muniment room will be created as part of the Guildhall development and that the Town Council remains committed to retaining its archives for the benefit of the people of Abingdon.
- (d) That authority be delegated to the Town Clerk to enter in to an agreement to allow for the temporary relocation of the town's archives during the Guildhall development works, the costs of which would be funded from savings against the revenue budget during this period.
- (e) the Council invest in sturdy fireproof cabinets which would enable some archival material to be retained for use in Abingdon during the period of temporary relocation.

- (f) That the Town Clerk bring forward to the Guildhall Committee proposals in relation to plans for conservation/ display of treasures, works of art and archives, including fundraising for this purpose.

At this point the meeting was adjourned, the time being 8.00pm to enable a Special Meeting of the Town Council to consider the recommendations of the Committee.

The meeting was reconvened at 8.22pm, in open session. Cllrs Jeanette Halliday, Jan Morter, Margaret Crick and Lorraine Oates did not attend the reconvened session.

F55 Financial Report and Estimates 2016-17

The Committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer/RFO. The Chairman, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, explained that the budget estimates were being presented as a draft stage and to give members a chance to raise matters with officers. There was no requirement to agree the budget to recommend to the Town Council until the next meeting in January 2016.

It was resolved that the management accounts for the period ending 30th November 2015 be approved.

The committee noted the proposed revenue estimates for the financial year 2016-17. Cllr Samantha Bowring asked if this was potentially a useful time to mention some fundamental points that the Liberal Democrat group would like to raise about budget setting in general. The Chairman welcomed the input and asked the group to provide details, which were as follows:

- a. It was suggested that budgets should be presented on a rolling five year basis rather than on a year to year basis. It was fully appreciated that this could not be achieved in time for this budget but could perhaps be phased in as a way of reporting and planning in the future, and could be started possibly in one or two areas this year. The Chairman agreed that the point had merit and that the five year planning method was used by District and County Councils but expressed concern about staff workload when the Guildhall project was already a high priority requiring extra staff effort. The Town Clerk indicated that the Business Plan for the Guildhall will be a five year plan. The Treasurer/RFO explained that many of the budget lines are already based on projections for future years. These have been considered jointly by the Treasurer/RFO and the Town Clerk as part of the budget setting process but the Treasurer/RFO acknowledged that these assumptions are not fully communicated to members. It was agreed that the idea of five year planning should be further considered at the next Finance and General Purposes meeting as a recommendation for Full Council which could approve this in 2016 so that staff could implement it in time for budget setting in Autumn 2016.

- b. Cllr Patrick Lonergan expressed his concern that the proposed full council estimates would mean an increase to the precept and felt that individual committees which have recommended their budgets to the Finance & General Purposes Committee had done so without trying to identify additional savings. The Member felt that, for example, savings could be made by reducing the amount included in the revenue estimates for earmarked reserves such as the new cemetery reserve. Cllr Samantha Bowring also expressed concern that the Town Council was not consciously looking for savings and she suggested that staff are briefed to come up with savings suggestions with a target of 2% as she believed that they are best placed to know where there is the potential in the back office functions to work more efficiently. The Chairman, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, said that he agreed with the principle of the idea but felt that the time was wrong, again because this would require major staff input just at the time they had been asked to focus on the Guildhall as a priority project. Cllr Samantha Bowring felt that this moment of opportunity should not be lost as the Guildhall project will encompass some key opportunities to improve efficiency through, for example, combining staff and functions between the Guildhall and other sections. The Chairman of the Guildhall Committee, Cllr Dennis Garrett, stated that these matters would be addressed in the Business Plan for the Guildhall although the Vice Chairman of that committee, Cllr Michael Badcock, also noted that actions relating to staffing organisation may not be possible until the building re-opens to the public. The Chairman advised that bringing the proposal to the next Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting might be the best way to initiate a cost saving exercise. The Town Clerk welcomed any cost-saving initiative but asked members to remember any matters which may involve staffing are not quickly or simply actioned, as there are procedures and legislation in place. The Chairman, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, reminded members that the Guildhall Business Plan will be developed under the authority of the Working Group and then be circulated to all Members by 27th January 2016 but that even after this the Finance and General Purposes Committee would be free to explore further detail and try to improve the plan in the March meeting.
- c. Cllr Patrick Lonergan proposed that some of the proposed revenue expenditure for the new cemetery's earmarked reserve be moved to a new cost centre for a Neighbourhood Plan. A member queried whether this would be sufficient funds and expressed concern about the inability to control costs once a Neighbourhood Plan starts. It was suggested that it could be run outside of the Town Council staff resource so that there could be no "mission-creep" of resource into the project. Cllr Samantha Bowring also reminded members that the cemetery decisions had been taken a long time ago and therefore it may be that a review of this proposed spend would be timely. The

Vice Chairman, Cllr Michael Badcock, advised that the Town Clerk had undertaken to produce a report about Neighbourhood Planning in January and therefore it would make sense to defer continuation of this discussion until this has been circulated. He also reminded members that the production of a Neighbourhood Plan had not yet been resolved by Council. The Chairman, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, advised that he was in favour of including budget for Neighbourhood Planning into the 2017 budgets.

The Committee did not consider at this stage fees and charges (section 9 of the Treasurer/RFO's report) nor the reserve balances (section 10 of the Treasurer/RFO's report). These would be considered at the next meeting of Finance & General Purposes Committee on 12th January 2016.

No further budget work was requested from the officers at this stage.

It was **resolved** that the report of the Treasurer/ RFO and the proposed revenue estimates 2016-17 (including reviewing fees and charges and the reserves balances) be reconsidered at the next meeting of Finance & General Purposes Committee on 12th January 2016.

F56 **Business Improvement District (BID)**

A copy of the letter from the Abingdon BID team, which had been sent to all business ratepayers, was circulated and councillors were asked to comment on whether they wished to nominate a representative from the Town Council to stand for election to the BID board.

There were concerns that to nominate a Member might send the wrong message that the new organisation was in some way part of the council but these concerns were balanced by concerns that an opportunity to work together could be missed. The Chairman, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, asked whether the Council should consider nominating the Community Services Officer. Members expressed concern that this may involve an officer of the Council being asked to stand for election and potentially becoming a company director and these were both felt to be matters which could make it inappropriate for either a councillor or an officer to take on such a role.

Having considered matters carefully it was proposed by the Chairman, Cllr Sandy Lovatt and seconded by the Vice Chairman, Cllr Michael Badcock and **resolved** that, at this time, the Council would not nominate an individual to stand for election to the BID Board but every effort to work together with the BID team in other ways would be encouraged.

F57 **Dates of next meetings**

Members noted the dates of the next meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee:

- 12th January 2016 (Budget)
- 8th March 2016

SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)

F58 Exclusion of the public, including the press

Resolved that the Chairman move:

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.

F59 Confidential Appendix

The confidential appendix to the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 15th September 2015 were considered.

Resolved: that the confidential appendix of the meeting of 15th September 2015 be approved as a correct record.

F60 Matters Arising

See confidential appendix.

F61 Matters referred from other committees

Confidential items from Guildhall report - this item had been covered in F54 following the agreed rearrangement of the meeting. See also confidential appendix.

The meeting rose at 9.10 pm.