

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

GUILDHALL COMMITTEE

19th MARCH 2018

REPORT OF THE TOWN CLERK

Agenda item 10 – Old Magistrates’ Court: Proposal for Changing Places Toilet

Standard accessible toilets, previously referred to as disabled toilets, do not meet the needs of all people with a disability. According to the website, www.changing-places.org *“people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well as people with other physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, Muscular Dystrophy and Multiple Sclerosis often need extra equipment and space to allow them to use the toilet safely and comfortably. These needs are met by Changing Places toilets.”* Changing Places toilets provide and require the right equipment, enough space and a safe and clean environment.

There is a move to provide more of these valuable facilities. Across the UK there are 1089 Changing Places toilets but locally they are only provided at the Cornerstone at Didcot, the Vines in Abingdon Road, Cumnor, the Westgate Centre in Oxford and the Windrush Leisure Centre in Witney.

Previously the Guildhall Committee has discussed the potential for a Changing Places toilet as part of the Guildhall development. Unfortunately there was not sufficient space to provide for such a facility as part of the toilets being built as part of the extension to the east of the Roysse Room. However, the Council has discussed the potential to provide a Changing Places toilet as part of works to the Old Magistrates’ Court and I am now bringing forward plans in this regard.

The proposed toilet would be accessed via the door which led to the cells and I attach a plan from the Council’s Surveyor. Having looked at the space available and the alterations which would be required it is understood that it is feasible to locate a Changing Places toilet in this location. It can also be built so that the facility can be self-contained and therefore made available to the public 24 hours a day through the RADAR Keys Scheme.

A draft plan is attached. Note that the door will need to be widened further to comply with the guidance.

The Committee is now requested to formally consider this matter and approve the draft plans as presented for further consideration by the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

With the building work ongoing at the Guildhall I have requested that the surveyor ask “Inside Out Developments” to provide a quote for this work which, subject to evaluation by the quantity surveyor, I would then intend to bring forward to the Finance & General Purposes Committee for approval together with proposals in relation to capital and revenue funding. In relation to capital funding the recommendation will be that this work be financed from the Council’s pooled property fund.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
16th March 2018

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Agenda item 10a - Publication of previously confidential Appendices to Minutes

Public rights to attend meetings Under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 all Council meetings are open to the public but the Council has the power to exclude the public when confidential business is to be transacted. However, this Act did not apply to the Committees of the Council and consequently it was common practice in the 1960s and 1970s for a council, when it wished to discuss confidential matters, to simply resolve that it was acting as a committee, hence the phrase “Council in Committee”. This was changed by the Local Government Act 1972 which made council committees open to the public but again with the provision to exclude the public if confidential business were to be transacted.

For town and parish councils, what may be considered confidential business is not prescribed in law but good practice is that such powers should be used only when necessary and typically relate to matters such as discussions regarding staff, contracts and legal advice.

There is sometimes a tension between transparency and acting in a sensible commercial manner. For instance, if the Council is looking at a building contract it will clearly take advice from professionals regarding the likely estimates for such contracts but to publish the detail of such estimates prior to going to tender could result in prices coming back higher than they may have done.

Minutes and confidential appendices This Council’s practice is that all minutes are open to the public. In recent years matters which have been discussed in confidential session are nonetheless minuted as far as possible in open session. However, where discussions include confidential matters then typically a confidential appendix is produced and this is not available to the public.

Over the years this Council, like all local authorities, has increased its transparency and matters which were discussed in confidential session some 20 years ago would now be routinely considered in open session.

At the recent public meetings queries were raised over the treatment of confidential matters and the Leader of the Council, Cllr Mike Badcock, requested that the Committee publish previously confidential appendices to its minutes.

Publishing confidential appendices With the passage of time there will now be matters which a few years ago were confidential which can now be made public. However, some information, for instance, in relation to staffing matters, would still need to remain confidential and other information would need to be released in a redacted form. It would be necessary to go through the confidential appendices carefully to ensure that sensitive information in relation to individuals or businesses is not disclosed.

In progressing matters, it should be remembered that confidential appendices to minutes were made confidential by the resolution of the Guildhall Committee. Consequently, it requires a resolution of this Committee to change the status of these documents.

If Members are agreeable, it is therefore **recommended** that this Committee resolve to instruct the Town Clerk to review the confidential appendices to the minutes of this Committee from 1st April 2012 and delegate to the Town Clerk authority to release into the public domain all those confidential appendices or parts thereof which, following detailed review, he considers no longer require to be treated as confidential.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
16th March 2018