

**Draft minutes of the Council of the Town of Abingdon-on-Thames held on
Wednesday 29th January 2020
in the Roysse Room, Guildhall, Bridge Street, Abingdon**

Present

Cllr Charlie Birks Mayor
Cllr Gabby Barody
Cllr Samantha Bowring
Cllr Grace Clifton
Cllr Eric de la Harpe
Cllr Neil Fawcett
Cllr Andy Foulsham
Cllr Alex Greenaway
Cllr Jim Halliday
Cllr Patrick Lonergan
Cllr Rob Maddison
Cllr Lorraine Oates
Cllr Helen Pighills
Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom
Cllr Andrew Skinner

In Attendance

Mr Nigel Luker Macebearer
Revd Dr Charles Miller Rector of Abingdon
Mr Steve Rich Assistant Town Clerk / Head of Services
Mr Nigel Warner Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)
Mrs Susan Whipp Treasurer/ Responsible Financial Officer

12 members of the public and the press.

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

C71 **Prayers**

Revd Dr Charles Miller led the meeting in prayer.

C72 **Public Participation**

a) **Presentation of Grant Cheques to Local Organisations**

The Mayor, Cllr Charlie Birks, stated that the Council, through the Community Services Committee, had awarded grants to a number of local organisations

and was pleased to present cheques to those organisations as follows:

	Name of Applicant	Purpose of grant, as summarised in the grant application	Grant awarded
1	Abbey Brass Band	Towards the cost of Equipment	£1,000
2	ATOM Festival of Science	Towards the cost of the 2020 ATOM Festival	£1,000
3	Dance Creative	Towards the cost of the 'Dance for life Abingdon' project which is a creative health project for older people living in Abingdon.	£200
4	My Life My Choice	Venue Hire and transport costs for group meetings	£900
5	Oxford Association for the Blind	Towards the costs of the OAB's dedicated telephone and email helpline for people with sight loss.	£1,000

Note: Autism Family Support Oxfordshire were unable to attend the meeting to receive a grant award of £500 to help establish the county's first centre for Autism based in Abingdon. The payment for £500 was sent to them following the meeting.

- (b) There was a presentation to the meeting by John Bright, Director South and Vale Citizens' Advice Bureau followed by an opportunity to ask questions.

C73 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Cheryl Briggs (Deputy Mayor), Andrew Coveney, Margaret Crick and Jeanette Halliday.

C74 Declarations of Interest

None.

C75 Minutes

Resolved that the draft minutes of the Council of Abingdon-on-Thames held on 25th September and 18th November 2019 be adopted and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

Matters arising

Page 20: Report from Oxfordshire County Council

An enquiry was made regarding progress in relation to the Lodge Hill Diamond slip road scheme. Cllr Neil Fawcett, County Councillor Abingdon South, stated that he understood that there had been some further slippage on the timescales but not by a large amount. A Member referred to a meeting of the liaison group which he had attended at the North East Abingdon Community Association and he understood that the Highways Agency had been somewhat “nit picking.” He also referred to various drawings which had been presented in relation to matters such as roundabouts and traffic lights and these would need to be looked at very carefully.

C76 Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames: Engagements and Announcements

The Mayor, Cllr Charlie Birks, presented his schedule of engagements since the last meeting of the Council, as circulated with the agenda.

The Mayor’s end of year event would take place on Friday 27th March 2020, in the Abbey Hall.

C77 Oxfordshire County Council Report

Members received and considered the report from County Councillor Neil Fawcett.

The report was noted.

C78 Vale of White Horse District Council Report

Members received and considered the report from District Councillor Rob Maddison.

The report was noted.

C79 Reports from Outside Bodies

Council’s Parish Transport Representative.

It was proposed by Cllr Lorraine Oates, seconded by Cllr Pat Lonergan and **resolved:** that Cllr Gabby Barody be appointed the Council’s Transport Representative until the Annual Meeting of the Council.

C80 Questions under Standing Order 10

None.

C81 **Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee**

It was proposed by Cllr Lorraine Oates and seconded by Cllr Pat Lonergan that the Council receive and consider the minutes of the Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee meetings held on 23rd September, 14th October, 4th November and 16th December 2019 and the draft minutes of 6th January 2020, as circulated with the agenda.

Cllr Jim Halliday stated that he understood that the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government is currently consulting about its plans the Future Homes Standard, including proposed options to increase the energy efficiency requirements for new homes in 2020, and how new build homes could be future-proofed with low carbon heating and world-leading levels of energy efficiency; and that the first stage of the consultation closes at 11.45pm on Friday 7th February 2020. He therefore proposed that the Town Clerk (in consultation with appropriate members) submits a formal response from Abingdon Town Council. The proposal was seconded by Cllr Alex Greenaway and the Council **resolved** accordingly.

Resolved that the minutes of the Planning, Highways & Consultations Committee held on 23rd September 14th October 4th November and 16th December 2019 and the draft minutes of 6th January 2020 be approved, together with any recommendations contained therein.

C82 **Green Advisory & Scrutiny Committee**

It was proposed by Cllr Eric de la Harpe and seconded by Cllr Gabby Barody that the Council receive and consider the minutes of the Green Advisory & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21st October 2019 and the draft minutes of the meeting held on 3rd December 2019, as circulated with the agenda.

Resolved that the minutes of the Green Advisory & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21st October 2019 and the draft minutes of 3rd December 2019 be approved, together with any recommendations contained therein.

C83 **Traffic Advisory Committee**

It was proposed by Cllr Jim Halliday and seconded by Cllr Pat Lonergan that the Council receive and consider the minutes of the Traffic Advisory Committee held on 13th November 2019, as circulated with the agenda.

Resolved that the draft minutes of the Traffic Advisory Committee held on held on 13th November 2019 be approved, together with any recommendations contained therein.

C84 **Finance and General Purposes Committee**

It was proposed by Cllr Samantha Bowring and seconded by Cllr Jim Halliday that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 18th November 2019 and

14th January 2020, and the draft minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2020, as circulated with the agenda.

Meeting of 14th January 2020

Minute F43: Financial report and estimates 2020/21 **Grant to Citizens' Advice Bureau**

Resolved: as part of the budget, that the annual funding awarded to Oxford South and Vale Citizens' Advice Bureau be increased for 2020/21 from £15,100 to £18,100.

Fees and Charges

Resolved: 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

Resolved: that the charges in relation to the cemetery, allotments and fishing be agreed as detailed in Appendix E of the Treasurer's Report to the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of 14th January 2020.

Resolved: the following charges be agreed for 2020/21 in relation to Market Place events, all fees being inclusive of VAT:

Permission to sell alcohol at a market event

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

Use of electricity on the Market Place £12.80

Pension Certifications for Abingdon parishioners £5.00
Pension Certifications for those outside the parish £15.00

Members' allowances

Resolved: that the members' allowance for 2020/21 continue to be 20% of the district council allowance.

Resolved: 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

The Finance and General Purposes Committee had 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. In accordance with the recommendation of the Committee it was **resolved** that this arrangement be increased to £300.

Resolved: that the Mayor's Allowance for 2020/21 be £3,500.

Funding of 2020/21 budget requirement

Earmarked reserves

The Finance and General Purposes Committee had reviewed the earmarked reserves and made a number of recommendations. These were accepted and it was **resolved** 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
354 Children's Centre - £15,000

It was **resolved** 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

Budget 2020-2021

The Finance and General Purposes Committee had recommended as follows:

- (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).

The Leader, Cllr Samantha Bowring, detailed the Council's budget. Her speech is included as appendix A. Cllr Samantha Bowring moved the following amendment, seconded by Cllr Jim Halliday and resolved unanimously:

To replace the wording at (vi) and (vii) above as follows:

- (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 £45,296 and precept of £1,633,160.
- (vii) The Council request the District Council to levy a precept, for Town Council purposes, amounting to £1,633,160 for the financial year 2020/21, resulting in a Band D Council Tax for parish purposes of £132.65 (based on the draft Council Tax base).

The substantive motion was then put to the vote and it was **resolved** unanimously:

- (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 £45,296 and precept of £1,633,160
- (vii) The Council request the District Council to levy a precept, for Town Council purposes, amounting to £1,633,160 for the financial year 2020/21, resulting in a Band D Council Tax for parish purposes of £132.65 (based on the draft Council Tax base).

Meeting of 21st January 2020

Minute F53 Matters Referred

Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee of 25th November 2019

Resolved: 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 and Recreation Committee of 26th November 2019

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 **resolved** that the Council shall further consider the disposal of this piece of land and that officers commence obtaining information regarding this matter.

Community Services Committee of 17th December 2019

It was noted that the Finance and General Purposes Committee had awarded a grant of £6,500 from the Community Fund to Be Free Young Carers. The grant application had been in the sum of £7,000.

Resolved:

that an additional £500 be awarded to Be Free Young Carers, funded from the Community Fund earmarked reserve.

It was **resolved** that the following grants be funded from the funds from the former Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust:

1. A grant of £2,000 to St Nicolas' Church, 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 grant of up to £11,000 to Abingdon Town Council to cover 50% of the costs of undertaking repairs and replacement of certain items in relation to the War Memorial (the power to award the grant is under the War Memorials Act 1923);
3. A grant of up to £5,000 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).

Grant application from Friends of Abingdon, Abbey Buildings Trust.

Resolved that :

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

Members asked that the Friends of Abingdon, Abbey Buildings Trust be informed that whilst the Council was pleased to be able to support the project at this time it should not be taken that the Council would be able to support the next stage of the project by the same percentage.

Minute F57 - Financial Update

Resolved: 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.

Neighbourhood Development Plan

Resolved:

- (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 31st January 2020
 - Tender close date – Friday 14th February 2020
 - Interview of shortlisted potential contractors – Thursday 27th February 2020
 - Appointment of consultant – no later than Friday 28th 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 Cllrs Samantha Bowring, Helen Pighills and Andrew Skinner.

Resolved: that subject to the above the draft minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 18th November 2019 and 14th January 2020, and the draft minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2020 be approved, together with any recommendations contained therein.

C85 Amenities and Recreation Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Jim Halliday and seconded by Cllr Grace Clifton that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the meeting of the Amenities and Recreation Committee held on 26th November 2019, as circulated with the agenda.

Resolved that the draft minutes of the Amenities and Recreation Committee held on 26th November 2019 be approved., together with any recommendations contained therein.

C86 Guildhall Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Grace Clifton and seconded by Cllr Neil Fawcett that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 5th December 2019, as circulated with the agenda.

Resolved that the minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on 5th December 2019 be approved, together with any recommendations contained therein.

C87 **Community Services Committee**

It was proposed by Cllr Alex Greenaway and seconded by Cllr Jim Halliday that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the meeting of the Community Services Committee held on 17th December 2019, as circulated with the agenda.

Resolved that the draft minutes of the Community Services Committee held on 17th December 2019 be approved, together with any recommendations contained therein.

C88 **County Hall Museum Management Committee**

It was proposed by Cllr Patrick Lonergan and seconded by Cllr Helen Pighills that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the meeting of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held 8th January 2020.

Resolved that the draft minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee of 8th January 2020 be approved, together with any recommendations contained therein.

C89 **Exclusion of the public including the press**

The Mayor moved:

“That in accordance with section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted as summarised below.”

SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)

C90 **Amenities and Recreation Committee**

The Council received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the Amenities and Recreation Committee of 26th November 2019.

Resolved: that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Amenities and Recreation Committee of 26th November 2019 be approved.

C91 **Guildhall Committee**

The Council received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the Guildhall Committee of 5th September 2019.

Resolved: that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee of 19th August 2019 be approved.

C92 County Hall Museum Management Committee

The Council received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee 8th January 2020.

Resolved: that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the County Hall Museum Management Committee 8th January 2020 be approved.

C93 Finance and General Purposes Committee

The Council received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of 21st January 2020.

Resolved: that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of 21st January 2020 be approved together with the recommendations contained therein.

The meeting rose at 8.49pm.

Speech by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Samantha Bowring
introducing the proposed 2020/21 Budget to the Town Council

Minute C84 – Finance and General Purposes Committee of 14th January 2020
Minute F43 – Estimates

Mr Mayor and colleagues

I am pleased to present the budget to the Council for approval.

The current administration was elected in May 2019 and has worked hard since then.

Before going into the specifics of next year's budget I would like to make some general points.

We are keen that we operate all our services in the most effective and efficient manner and since May we have been working closely with staff in this regard. As with many organizations much of our expenditure relates to staffing costs. For this council they amount to 44% of costs, perhaps somewhat lower than you might expect. We pay all our employees more than the living wage and the gender pay gap is not significant, being 1% in favour of women. As the Council's needs change, we work with the staff to implement the best outcome. A recent example is at the Museum, when a member of staff left, we talked with staff then thought how best to adapt with them, so adopted a new structure which represents an improvement for the service, and the staff, and also saves money.

We know that in any organization there are efficiencies which can be made and recognise that we must look at ourselves regarding this, we have undertaken work on procurement and made significant savings since May in procuring IT software directly with suppliers. The Council is working on a procurement policy which will help guide us in the future. We have also consulted with staff regarding their suggestions to make savings and many of these ideas are now being taken up.

We also realise that it is not just about saving money today. Sometimes you need to spend in order to save down the line— this is a major part of our budget for continued Guildhall property improvements.

We have also looked at the way in which some of our costs are represented within the budget in order to drill down more accurately to service costs. This has means that it looks like some costs have risen higher than what might be expected when in fact it is because we have worked hard in how those costs have been apportioned. We are looking to build on this work by allocating office staff costs, which had been discontinued by a previous administration in 2012. By doing this we will more accurately know the cost of our services.

The Council works through a delegated committee system, with service areas divided between committees, which have the power and responsibility then to manage the services. During these last few months members of the various Committees have considered their requirements for next year and the input of all councillors has been welcome. This work has resulted in the recommendation before the Council this evening proposes a net budget for 2020/21 of £1,678,456.

Next year's budget will support a wide range of existing services. We have significant property responsibilities for a town council and this includes the Guildhall, the Museum, the outside areas – open spaces, parks, floral displays and woodlands- and the cemetery. The budget makes provision for the good stewardship of these assets.

We also provide the Information Office, events, markets and fairs, Christmas lights, the town centre residents parking scheme and many other services. Our budget provides for the continued operation of these services.

However we are making some significant changes. In November 2019 the Council adopted its vision and its key strategic objectives which will guide our priorities and spending over the coming years. The vision and objectives are detailed on page 2 of the agenda. Each of our committees has been addressing how these priorities should be reflected in service and budget provision. Our budget is an ambitious one and grasps our progressive agenda in a number of ways.

We will respond effectively and speedily to the climate emergency. Our major property asset, the Guildhall, requires major improvements in order to become greener and to manage the asset efficiently. Whilst some work was done by the previous administration we inherited much more to do and we have provided within the budget an additional £100,000 for property improvements in the revenue budget which will over the next five years include replacing the Abbey Hall roof, which at present has next to no insulation as part of this work possibly introducing solar panels; improving lighting with better and more efficient LEDs throughout the building; double glazing; and replacing the entire heating system. This work is vital if we are to be able to continue to provide the Guildhall and the cinema. With 70% of our energy costs relating to the Guildhall, addressing the problems of this building is our most urgent action in addressing the climate emergency.

Other budget priorities for a greener Abingdon include an additional £15,000 for green transport initiatives and a net budget for next year of £28,000 towards the production of a Neighbourhood Plan. The Liberal Democrat group first proposed a Neighbourhood Plan way back in 2012. We have fallen behind as a town without one, being unable to have our say as effectively as we should have done on the new developments in the north of the town. That is what we missed but there will be others. We now need to work with the community to create a neighbourhood plan in order to meet our objective to develop a resilient, sustainable town which will provide a home for residents now and in the future.

Linked to this, in meeting the needs of the community we realise that we need to improve our communication. We have now adopted a strategy and have re-introduced the popular town crier magazine and our budget allows for the magazine to be delivered to every household in the town four times a year. We are making better use of social media and the budget allows for a revamp of our website, its last major update being almost 7 years ago.

Last, and by no means least, our budget will allow us to work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity. Early in the administration we led on the Abingdon Pride event. This is an example of how we would like to work with the community as the event is now being taken forward by an independent community group. We know that austerity has had a negative impact on our communities and so our budget provides support for organisations who are there to support the community's needs and fill the gaps created by the cuts. There are grants for Abingdon Carousel (£30,000), Abingdon Bridge (£5,300) and the Citizens Advice Bureau. You will have heard earlier regarding the good work undertaken by the CAB and following a request from them, our budget allows for an increase in their grant to £18,100. We will continue to provide a Community Fund, which has allowed us to recommend later in the meeting grant aid

the “Be Free Young Carers” with £7,000 this year, and we have increased our small grants allocation from £18,000 to £20,000.

The budget has been gone through carefully and in detail. Having established our spending requirements, we now need to agree on how to fund the budget. We have revised the fees and charges which meet a relatively small part of our spending requirements. However the bulk of the budget must be financed from the Council Tax, and a contribution from reserves. We are aware that times are difficult and although our share of the council tax is the lowest – about 6% of the bill – we are keen not to unduly add to the financial pressures on residents. The Council has significant reserves. We have considered reserve levels carefully. We consider that there is some leeway for a contribution from reserves to the 2020/21 budget but that we need to limit the contribution from reserves if we are to be prudent and give ourselves the flexibility to roll out further initiatives in future years.

I therefore move the budget recommendations with the following amendments to budget recommendations (vi) and (vii):

- (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 £45,296 and precept of £1,633,160.
- (vii) The Council request the District Council to levy a precept, for Town Council purposes, amounting to £1,633,160 for the financial year 2020/21, resulting in a Band D Council Tax for parish purposes of £132.65 (based on the draft Council Tax base).

I am pleased to move this budget which continues to deliver the town’s services and make substantial improvements in provision of the annual sum of £132.65 for a Band D property, about 36 pence a day.