

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of Abingdon-on-Thames held on Wednesday 27 January 2021

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was held online in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulation 2020 (“the 2020 Regulations”)

Present

Cllr Charlie Birks	Mayor
Cllr Cheryl Briggs	Deputy Mayor
Cllr Gabby Barody	
Cllr Samantha Bowring	
Cllr Grace Clifton	
Cllr Andrew Coveney	
Cllr Margaret Crick	
Cllr Neil Fawcett	
Cllr Andy Foulsham	
Cllr Alex Greenaway	
Cllr Jim Halliday	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Lorraine Oates	
Cllr Helen Pighills	
Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom	
Cllr Andrew Skinner	

In Attendance

Cllr Emily Smith	Oxfordshire County Council
Mr Andy Crick	Committee Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)
Rev Dr Charles Miller	
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mrs Susan Whipp	Deputy Town Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

C92 Prayers

The Rector, Rev Dr Charles Miller, opened the meeting with prayers. He left the meeting at 7.15pm

C93 Public Participation

None

C94 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Eric de la Harpe and Cllr Rob Maddison.

C95 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Gabby Barody	Volunteer coach with The Abingdon Bridge which receives a grant from the Town Council
Cllr Charlie Birks	Governor of Christ's Hospital
Cllr Samantha Bowring	Vale of White Horse District Councillor and trustee at the Abingdon Carousel, which receives a grant from the Town Council
Cllr Cheryl Briggs	Member of the Christ's Hospital board and a Vale of White Horse District Councillor
Cllr Margaret Crick	Member of the Christ's Hospital board, a Vale of White Horse District Councillor and a trustee of the Abingdon Carousel, which receives a grant from the Town Council
Cllr Andy Foulsham	Vale of White Horse District Councillor
Cllr Jim Halliday	Trustee of Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust
Cllr Helen Pighills	Governor of Christ's Hospital and a Vale of White Horse District Councillor
The Town Clerk	Clerk to the Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust which receives an annual grant from the Town Council.

C96 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2020 be adopted and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

C97 Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames: Engagements and Announcements

The Mayor, Cllr Charlie Birks, gave members an update on his work since the last meeting. Cllr Birks reminded the meeting that 27 January is Holocaust Memorial Day.

C98 Oxfordshire County Council Report

The Council received and considered the report from Cllr Emily Smith, County Councillor for Abingdon North Division, in relation to the above, as circulated ahead of the meeting. See Appendix 1.

Cllr Smith reported on progress on the Lodge Hill junction and will be meeting with officers to discuss the design. A virtual exhibition is planned and the Town Council will be asked to comment before it goes public. The next stage will be a planning application.

A planning application has been submitted for a new Aldi supermarket and Cllr Smith is looking at this with regard to transport and active travel and would welcome comments from town councillors on this. The application will be considered by the planning committee at its next meeting on 1 Feb 2021.

Cllr Birks commented that residents would welcome a timetable for the work on the Lodge Hill junction. He also noted that the Information on the County Council website is not up to date. Cllr Birks also asked if the planned exhibition could be held in the Market Place to take account of current restrictions on meetings in enclosed spaces. Cllr Smith would look into this.

The report was noted.

Cllr Smith left the meeting at 7.20pm

C99 Vale of White Horse District Council Report

Members received and considered the report from Cllr Helen Pighills, District Councillor for Abingdon Abbey Northcourt Ward, in relation to the above, as circulated ahead of the meeting. See Appendix 2.

Cllr Lonergan asked about the current suspension of the brown bin service and asked what period the remaining planned collections would cover, as the Vale of White Horse District Council contract is for 20 collections through the year. Cllr Pighills would look into this.

Cllr Birks asked for an update on the sale of Old Abbey House. Cllr Pighills said the process is ongoing and a press release is planned once an agreement has been reached.

The report was noted.

C100 Questions under Standing Order 10

The following motion was proposed by Cllr Charlie Birks, Mayor of Abingdon and seconded by Cllr Andy Foulsham, Chair of Covid Response Working Group:

The Council notes that during this pandemic organisations and residents in the town have worked together effectively to help many people.

One of the Council's four key objectives is "to work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity."

A major problem in relation to social inclusivity during lockdown is that at a time when most school children have to work from home there are many who have no or very limited access to a suitable device. This is a massive barrier to their learning at home and further disadvantages already disadvantaged students.

Government funding to provide devices has been limited and so the council is delighted that, through the schools, our local charity Christ's Hospital of Abingdon have agreed to fund laptops and Chromebooks for any children who require them. This is a major financial commitment for the charity but one which will enable the schools in Abingdon to support more children and enable them to access the wide range of on-line and remote learning. It is noted that Christ's Hospital have been a major charitable benefactor for many people in need since 1553; through the years they have supported the town and worked in partnership with the Council and in recognition of this they hold the highest honour the town can bestow the Freedom of Abingdon.

This Council has been pleased to work closely with Christ's Hospital and the schools in the town on this project.

This motion:

1. Thanks Christ's Hospital of Abingdon for their generosity in funding devices which will enable children to work from home;
2. Asks the Town Clerk to write to Christ's Hospital to formally thank them on behalf of the town.

The motion was agreed unanimously.

Reports (minutes) of Council Committees, for adoption

C101 Traffic Advisory Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Coveney and seconded by Cllr Lonergan that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the Traffic Advisory Committee meeting held on 26 November 2020. Cllr Coveney noted that much of the planned work of the committee had been disrupted by the pandemic but it was hoped that the work would proceed in the coming year.

Cllr Lonergan asked about the safety of people volunteering to take part in speed checks across Abingdon. Cllr Coveney had asked about this and Thames Valley Police had advised that all proposed sites were thoroughly safety checked before members of the public were allowed to use them.

Minute T16,: Cllr Birks noted that cycling is permitted in both directions over the wharf and the bridge. The minute may not make that clear.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved.

C102 Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Oates and seconded by Cllr Greenaway that the Council receive and consider the minutes of the Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee meetings held on 21 December 2020 and draft minutes of the meeting on 11 January 2021.

Cllr Birks commented on the Taurus House planning application, which is in the Vale's conservation area. He noted the lack of parking provision and cycling provision. Cllr Pighills had raised this with planning officers who advised that this is permitted development from an office to domestic development and has assumed permission. Planning departments consequently have no powers to require parking or cycling provision. Cllr Pighills said that it is still important for the Town Council to make its views known on such developments, a view supported by Cllr Oates.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved.

C103 Community Services Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Rowbottom and seconded by Cllr Foulsham that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the Community Services Committee meeting held on 12 January 2020.

Cllr Fawcett noted that the committee had made a formal decision that 'Fun and Music in the Park' would not be held this year due to the current situation.

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft minutes be approved.

C104 Finance and General Purposes Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Bowring and seconded by Cllr Halliday that the Council receive and consider the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 13 January 2021.

Cllr Bowring made a statement on the proposed budget and the full text of the leader's comments can be found in appendix 3 of these minutes.

The Council considered the recommendations from the committee as follows:

Minute F124

Estimates

It was recommended to Full Council that:

- i. A net revenue expenditure budget be set at £1,791,379
- ii. The net revenue expenditure budget include £85,000 to cover potential COVID-19 costs
- iii. The net revenue expenditure budget include the three proposed budget bids (£30,000 Youth Strategy, £5,000 Platinum Jubilee project, £20,000 play areas)
- iv. The net revenue budget be funded by way of:

- (a) A precept, based on a 6% increase in band D council tax be set at £1,737,703 (tax base 12359.2 and band D council tax £140.60)
- (b) Use of general reserve of £53,676.

Fees and charges

It was recommended to Full Council that:

- i. Monday Market tolls remain as 2020-21 rates
- ii. Farmers' Market tolls remain as 2020-21 rates
- iii. Use of electricity on the Market Place increase from £12.60 to £13.00
- iv. Permission to sell alcohol at a market event where the organiser provides a personal licence holder remain as 2020-21 rates
- v. Permission to sell alcohol at a market event where the organiser does not provide a personal licence holder remain as 2020-21 rates
- vi. Fishing charges remain as 2020-21 rates
- vii. Certifications for Abingdon parishioners remain as 2020-21 rates
- viii. Certifications for those outside the parish remain as 2020-21 rates

Allowances

It was recommended to Full Council that:

- i. Members allowances remain as 20% of the Vale of White Horse District Council basic allowance
- ii. Travel and subsistence rates for members travelling outside of Abingdon remain the same as national rates
- iii. The Mayor's allowance remain unchanged at £3,500

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on January 13 2021, together with the recommendations therein, be approved by the Council.

C105 Amenities and Recreation Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Halliday and seconded by Cllr Clifton that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the meeting of the Amenities and Recreation Committee held on 20 January 2021.

Cllr Halliday commented on the work of the committee, which has funded a number of improvements in the town, facilitated by the Town Council's outdoor team. These have included new noticeboards at Roysse Court and in Bath Street, new bus shelters at Boundary House and the Vineyard. A new cycle rack will shortly be installed outside the Guildhall. The most recent meeting of

the committee approved improvements to paths in the Chilton Close area. The committee is planning to replace damaged bollards in the Market Place and around the County Hall. Cllr Halliday thanked the outside team for all their extra work in the winter, in particular with regard to litter in the Market Place and for their work at the cemetery. Visitors to the cemetery were always complimentary about it. Cllr Halliday asked the council to formally note its thanks to the outside team for their work.

The Council considered the recommendations from the committee as follows:

Minute A54

Fees and charges – **It was recommended to Full Council that** the schedule of proposed cemetery fees and charges for 2021/22, as per the appendix to minutes, be approved (no increases from current rates).

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft minutes of the Amenities and Recreation Committee held on January 20 2021, together with the recommendations therein, be approved by the Council.

Reports

C106 Forward Plan, Democratic and Governance Matters

The Council received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

Forward plan

The Forward Plan has been reviewed by committees in the most recent cycle and the latest version is available to view on the website and sharepoint. The Town Clerk asked the meeting to adopt the plan.

Cllr Birks proposed, Cllr Bowring seconded and it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the plan.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has met and considered draft terms of reference which require the approval of the council. The Steering Group effectively becomes an advisory committee to the council so the Town Council needs to adopt the terms of reference.

Cllr Clifton noted that future meetings of the steering group would be held monthly from now on, with task, finish and action groups meeting as required. The steering group was aiming to get the first draft written within twelve months and she was ambitious to achieve this more quickly if possible. The steering group had tried to make sure that there was representation from all communities and backgrounds across the town.

The terms of reference were proposed by Cllr Lonergan, seconded by Cllr Briggs and were agreed by the meeting.

The members of the steering group would be:

Cllr Grace Clifton
Jim Driscoll
Hester Hand
Simon Hills
Angharad Saunders
Robin Tucker
Paul White
James Wigmore

The members were proposed by Cllr Birks, seconded by Cllr Foulsham and were agreed by the meeting

Democratic and governance matters

The governance review has started and all members were recommended to partake.

The report of the Town Clerk was noted.

Exclusion of the Public, Including the Press

RESOLVED:

“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.”

There was a short break in the meeting at 8.15 pm

Cllr Rowbottom gave her apologies for the confidential section of the meeting.

The meeting reconvened at 8.27 pm

C107 Confidential appendices to the minutes of meetings

The Council received and considered the confidential appendices to the draft minutes of the following committees and any recommendations contained therein:

- (i) Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting of 13 January 2021
- (ii) Amenities and Recreation Committee meeting of 20 January 2021

Cllr Pighills asked if the material to be used for the repair of the Chilton Close paths would be recycled. Cllr Halliday would check.

The meeting noted the confidential appendices to the minutes.

The meeting rose at 8.32 pm.

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Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames

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Date

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL**WEDNESDAY 27 JANUARY 2021****Minute C98: County Council report**

County Councillor Report to Abingdon Town Council
Cllr Emily Smith, Abingdon North Division, Oxfordshire County Council

Lodge Hill Update

I am pleased to report that after much work, campaigning and pushing by councillors, council officers, residents and our MP, work on the diamond junction at Lodge Hill is moving forward and a planning application is due to be submitted in April.

The County Council will be holding a 'virtual public exhibition' in early March to show people the planned designs and to make any changes before the planning process begins. Ahead of the public exhibition, the plan is to share the exhibition information with the Town Council and parish councils that are impacted so that Cllrs have the details before the public exhibition begins.

North-West Abingdon Development Highways Safety

The County Council, and me as the local member, formally objected to an amendment to the planning permission for the North-West Abingdon Site for 30 of the 200 homes to be occupied before highways works were complete. There were a number of objections on Highways Safety grounds and the developer withdrew their application, which is a positive outcome.

County Budget Setting

Local government finance continues to be a challenging, with Covid adding to the funding pressures and uncertainty caused by the now multi-year delay to a Fair Funding Review for councils. The County Council Cabinet met on 19th Jan to agree a budget which includes a general council tax increase and an additional rise to help cover rising costs in Adults Social Care. The budget will now be debated by full council on 9th Feb. The budget papers as approved by Cabinet are available at: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=5929&Ve r=4>

Covid Update

The County and District Councils continue to work very closely together and with NHS partners on the response to Covid. The Director of Public Health is employed by the County Council and is leading the collective effort in Oxfordshire.

Covid case continue to rise across the county. The lockdown has slowed the rises a little but we still have 4 times the number of cases that we had at the start of December and the number of Covid patients in hospital beds continues to rise sharply. The number of deaths since Christmas have also risen sharply.

The County Council has taken on many more Home Care cases to enable people to leave hospital earlier than the usually would to free up beds in ICU and are working across the Oxfordshire System to coordinate Covid Secure businesses, Test and

Trace and support the vaccination rollout. Please keep encouraging people to stick to the lockdown rules and ask for support to isolate if needed.

Free School Meals and Winter Support Grant

I have had a number of queries about Free School Meals from parents. In Oxfordshire, the County is using the Winter Covid Support Grant provided by government in two ways: the county is giving most of the grant funds to local schools funds to pay for food parcels or in most cases vouchers to families entitled to free school meals during the holidays. This was operational over Christmas and will be in place at half term and Easter. The rest of the Winter Covid Support Grant has been passed to District Councils who are working closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide top up grants for families as well and funds for adults in need of food, cooking equipment or financial advice as a result of Covid.

Families entitled to free school meals should talk to their school for more information and others can contact the district council's community hub or the CAB directly.

I submitted a question to the County Cabinet member for Education about the quality of the food parcels and how the quality is being managed by the Council and encouraging the council to issue vouchers rather than food parcels. The question and answer which talks in more detail about what's available is available in the Addenda to the Cabinet Papers:

<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/b19343/Addenda%20Tuesday%2019-Jan-2021%2014.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=9>

Councillor Priority Fund Spend

Cllrs Rooke, Fawcett and I thought you might like to see which groups we have supported with our Priority Funds over this financial year. The grant scheme has now closed and while there a couple of applications still to be processed we will have used all of our total £45k allocation for this year to support organisation and residents from Abingdon – most but not all of the projects this year have been providing local support to people through the pandemic.

- Abingdon Foodbank
- Abingdon Community Fridge
- Be Free Young Carers
- Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale (IT equipment to expand remote service provision)
- Farm Ability (supporting people with disabilities to access learning remotely)
- Maggie's Cancer Support
- Earth Trust (Redesign of the education and outreach provision)
- The Abingdon Bridge (COVID-19 Emergency Support Programme)
- 2nd Abingdon Scout Group (Covid-safe activities)
- Oxford Care Leavers Association (Christmas gifts for care leavers)
- St Nicolas Primary School (Laptops for remote learning)
- County Council Laptops for pupils scheme (Abingdon area)
- County Council Highways measures: Northcourt Lane speed survey, new road markings on the Clevelands/Northcourt Lane junction and 'slow' signs on Norman Ave, bollards outside St Nicholas Church in Abingdon Town centre
- Abingdon Carousel Children's Centre

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 27 JANUARY 2021

Minute C99: District Council report

VALE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT TO ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

27 JANUARY 2021

GARDEN WASTE COLLECTIONS

Councillors will be aware that Garden Waste collections have not restart as expected after the normal Christmas break. This is due to Biffa staff shortages caused by staff being ill or having to self-isolate.

Despite the delay, the council is confident that residents will still get the 20 collections during the year that are offered in the Garden Waste collection contract.

The situation is being reviewed weekly and when the service is able to restart customers will be notified via the Vale website and social media.

If residents have any Christmas trees they need to dispose of these can be taken to any Oxfordshire Waste Recycling centre or can be kept until garden waste collections resume.

COMMUNITY COVID TESTING.

Vale council has been working closely with public health colleagues to set up a community testing centre in South and Vale as part of a plan for a number of centres across the county. It has been announced that a testing centre will be based in Wantage.

This centre will open in February and will provide lateral flow testing and will be for asymptomatic people only who need to work. Appointments will be required and the centre will be prioritising workers such as fire and police officers. People who display symptoms should not attend any of these community testing centres but should book a test via the national scheme.

COVID WINTER SUPPORT GRANT SCHEME

These grants are now available via Citizens Advice and Wantage Independent Advice Centre. They are available to help with food purchases via supermarket vouchers and for payment of fuel bills in cases of hardship due to Covid.

VALE ACTIVE COMMUNITIES - COUCH to 5km

Councillors will be aware that Leisure Centres are closed during lockdown. To help people stay fit and healthy the Vale Active Communities team are launching an online support group for anyone doing the Couch to 5km programme. It started on 22nd January – but if anyone wants to join, head to the Active Communities Facebook page or email Ashley.chapman@southandvale.gov.uk for more information.

PLANNING APPEAL

I have been notified that the planning appeal hearing for the application to build 9 apartments on the former cricket pitch at Northcourt Road will resume on 8th March 2021. This appeal hearing was started in January 2020 and was then adjourned.

The hearing will continue from where it was left off and will not be repeating matters discussed at the last session. The appeal for the application to build 10 flats on the same site, which was being considered at the same hearing has been withdrawn.

Helen Pighills
Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities
Vale Councillor for Abingdon Abbey Northcourt Ward

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 27 JANUARY 2021

Minute C104: Leader's Budget Speech

As a town, Abingdon has been through much: wars, famines and plagues but it has been a long time since there has been a crisis like the one we presently face, which affects absolutely every resident in the town.

The Covid-19 crisis struck just before the start of the 2020-21 civic and financial year and became something that lasted the entire year. This has been an unprecedented challenge to staff and councillors and has led to many changes in how we work. This council is committed to working with other authorities to respond to this, for example we have offered our staff and buildings for use via the local resilience framework and we are offering grants and administrative support to community volunteers.

For the coming year, we are budgeting for a turnover of £2,004,465.

SERVICES

We will use this to manage our services, including eight play areas, recreation areas, football pitches, cemeteries, the Guildhall complex including the popular Abbey Cinema, and the County Hall building in which our museum is housed. We are still running the Monday market within Covid guidance rules and we are exploring ways of delivering other events and community support in new ways.

STAFFING

37.2% of our budget goes on staff. We have increased staff capacity this year, knowing that new development is set to increase the number of homes in Abingdon by over 1,000 in the next three or four years. This will more than cover the cost for increased staffing but more importantly it gives us the capacity to service these communities from the start. This is part of our approach to budgeting over multi-years rather than just twelve months ahead.

We currently employ 12 full time and 13 part time staff.

We are committed to paying the living wage. We do not discriminate based on age or sex, we pay staff under 25 the living wage and we reward experience through our increment scheme. And I am very pleased that this year we have promoted five members of staff to take on more senior roles.

Our gender pay gap this year is 3% in favour of women and the ratio between the highest and lowest paid members of staff is 3.25.

SERVICE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

We have this year rolled out our procurement policy and investment strategy as part of our commitment to manage our finances well.

We have modernised our payment processes. this year we will bring in options for residents to pay fees by card, online and by phone. This is indicative of our commitment to fiscal responsibility, modernisation and efficiency.

We will continue to keep our assets in a good state of repair and will continue to improve the Guildhall building to make it both financially and ecologically more sustainable. Already capital investment last year in the Guildhall building is reflected as a revenue saving in energy in this year and all subsequent years' budgets. Although the payback will take several years, this does not deter us from investing in this way as long-term planning rather than a quick political pay back is this council's approach.

We are committed to improving bio-diversity and taking into account the climate emergency in our stewardship of the green areas.

THE BUDGET FOR 2021-22

Putting together this budget has not been easy. We don't know how the Covid crisis will play out this year. We are budgeting for what we are certain to need from precept. We don't want to take more than we have to in council tax and have tried to minimise the rise but in case the pandemic does continue far into the new budget year we have estimated a maximum that could be necessary and put it in as a figure to be drawn from reserves as needed.

The main impact of Covid upon our budget is loss of revenue but there is some spending including enhanced stewarding of the Monday market, security of buildings and supporting staff and councillors to work remotely. We have also committed funding for Covid related grants to help the community support each other.

When we can we work with community partners. For example, we have just heard how by working with Christ's Hospital and local businesses we have helped to enable schools to provide a laptop to every child that needs one. Thanks to Cllr Foulsham and Cllr Barody and to everyone who made that happen.

This reflects the Town Council's core mission to work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity.

This strand has been woven thought this budget.

SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY

The impact of the pandemic since March has intensified issues such as domestic violence, parents' mental health and alcohol and substance abuse – all factors that put children at greater risk. When schools and other places children normally go are closed, the most vulnerable children become invisible. I am therefore pleased to say that we will continue to provide the core funding for Abingdon Carousel Family Centre for their work supporting families with young children.

We know that for some the pandemic has meant a reduction or even loss of income for many. We are committed to continuing our support for Abingdon Citizens' Advice, who can offer help navigating the complex world of benefits claims, advise on rent and tenancy matters and the myriad problems which have grown because of the Covid crisis.

We will continue to support Be Free Young Carers to help support their work with children who have the extra load of caring for an immediate family member on a daily basis. During lockdown, when we add isolation to needing to provide care for a relative, I think it is self-evident why it is so important to support these children.

We are supporting the neighbourhood plan, which gives residents rather than the council a say in future development of this town.

When children cannot access sports clubs or do P.E. at school, when adults are not walking as part of their commute and cannot go to gym or fitness classes - our recreation areas become more important than ever. We will continue to maintain them and have a budget bid to add an additional £20,000 of capital money to the reserve for playground and outdoor gym equipment with a view to enhancing some of our areas used for exercise and leisure which is so important for the physical and mental health of our residents.

We also have a small budget bid of £5,000 to seed fund a community project to raise funds to install a bandstand in honour of the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. This is very different to our other budget bids but we believe it is important to still look forward with positivity - for these troubling times will not be forever. We want Abingdon to emerge from the present crisis as a vibrant town with cultural and leisure opportunities. This is a beacon of hope to bring people together and supporting community arts.

YOUTH SERVICES

Youth services have not traditionally been part of this council's remit. However, we have watched as decreasing levels of government funding for youth support have slashed budgets for all kinds of reasons. We have watched as the NHS has defunded the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services and we have watched as schools take on ever more complex issues outside of tradition learning and teaching.

I am not talking about young people not getting a new ping pong table for the youth club or missing out on a trip, I am talking about vital support for vulnerable young people, support for students with additional needs and a crisis in young people's mental health as they navigate a world way more complicated than the one I grew up in.

And that was before the Covid crisis struck.

Imagine being in your final year of school having worked towards exams that would no longer be sat and then being asked to make decisions about your future. Imagine that you were expecting to look for work to a course but instead found yourself in lockdown. How do you start a first job, or commence university or a vocational course? How do you contribute to society when you are shut away at home? What if home is

not a safe haven, or you have to care for younger siblings not at school so your parents can still work, or you have to care for your parent and the only place you can go for information and socialising is the internet where not everyone has good intentions and not everything is true?

A couple of weeks ago, the Prince's Trust annual survey of young people's happiness and confidence returned the worst findings in its 12-year history. Jonathan Townsend, the trust's UK chief executive. said "The pandemic has taken a devastating toll on young people's mental health and wellbeing. Many believe they are missing out on being young and sadly we know that the impact of the pandemic on their employment prospects and overall wellbeing could continue far into their futures." More than half said they always or often felt anxious, rising to 64% among those not in work, education or training.

I call upon Oxfordshire County Council to reinstate adequate funding for youth services but in the meantime, I am proposing a new budget line of £30,000 for supporting young people. We plan to work with community partners with Abingdon Bridge and Damascus taking a lead to develop ways of supporting young people in this town.

Alongside this, we will be setting up a youth forum or youth council - the details will be decided by the young people themselves; we're not telling them what to do. We are committed to listening to what comes out of this and taking it into account when we set this council's plans.

CONCLUSION

Council, I ask you to agree this budget which continues to deliver the town's services, reflecting the additional pressures caused by Covid-19 and to invest more in young people for the annual sum of £140.60 for a Band D property, about 38.5 pence a day.

Councillor Samantha Bowring
Leader, Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
27 January 2021