

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL
FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 28 APRIL 2021
AGENDA ITEM 20: REPORT OF THE TOWN CLERK

Abingdon Covid Recovery & Lockdown Easing

1. At the meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee of Members considered a report in relation to council actions and initiatives in relation to Abingdon Covid Recovery and Lockdown Easing.
2. Members approved the plans outlined for changes to services as the lockdown is eased. The matter of meetings post 7 May 2021 is considered at agenda item 17.

Lockdown easing initiatives

3. The Committee considered the section of the report regarding its response to assisting the community more widely over the coming months as the acute period of the pandemic eases. The committee noted this section of the report and the Town Clerk was asked to prepare a report for Full Council on options to support residents as the lockdown eases based on the ideas brought forward at the meeting. I have also asked for further member feedback by e-mail and initiatives were discussed by the Covid-19 response group. The matter was also discussed by the council's Management Team.
4. Three broad initiatives have been proposed :
 - (i) Improving our public open spaces (KO 1, 2 & 3)
 - (ii) Working with the community (KO 2, 3 & 4)
 - (iii) Working with business (KO 2 & 3).
5. In addressing the initiatives the council should be ensure that they are all in accordance with its vision and key objectives; I believe they would and have noted the relevant numbers above:

Our Vision: to develop an inclusive community so that Abingdon is the place where everyone wants to live and where the wellbeing of residents is prioritised. In developing this community, the town will be one which is environmentally sustainable, vibrant, resilient and safe.

Our key objectives:

- 1. To respond effectively and speedily to the climate emergency*
- 2. To develop a resilient, sustainable town which will provide a home for residents now and in the future*
- 3. To manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet for the needs of the community now and in the future*
- 4. To work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity.*

Budget

6. During 2020/21 a budget was created from general reserves to allow for Covid-19 based grants and initiatives of which £6,517 was spent; the remaining sum returns to reserves. In addition Members will be aware from previous reports that there was considerable additional cost in terms of additional expenditure to support services and reduced revenue.
7. For 2021/22 the Council has created a budget of £85,000 towards the additional costs of the pandemic. This is intended to cover the range from additional costs (e.g. grants, market and event stewarding, Covid-secure measures) to lost revenue against services.

Improving our public open spaces

8. The objective is to make public spaces more accessible and tackle some of the additional challenges of the pandemic.
9. There is a desire for more outdoor seating in appropriate locations, which would require careful liaison with local members and our Outdoor Services Manager.
10. The matter of the increase in disposable coffee cups especially in relation to the Market Place has been raised at a number of committees, most recently at the Covid-19 Response Group, where it was recommended that these bins be obtained. Your officers have undertaken some research in this matter and the Outdoor Services Manager has reported as follows:

“From what I can find “stacking” bins (those that save on the capacity of our traditional street bins) are designed for internal restaurant use rather than for the more demanding street scene. If the council are considering moving forward with this idea I feel it would be better to purchase this style of bin for the coffee shops to put out daily or install on their premises. Maybe with our name on as a sponsor that could be emptied by their staff. The individual shops could then monitor whether the bins fill up during the day (and empty them) as well as dispose of their own waste through the trade waste service. “

Working with the community

11. The objective would be to support those most adversely affected by the pandemic and encourage Covid-secure events as lockdown eases. The primary way of doing this has been suggested through the grants scheme.
12. The council could consider whether there would be events in the Guildhall or Market Place perhaps promoting what is open and where in the town. The council would also look to support events that are already being planned – e.g. the ATOM Festival, Heritage Open Day.
13. Any events organised would be, until at least 21 June, subject to restrictions and we have recently received advice for event organisers from the district council in this regard. It is clear from this that much thought will need to be given as to how events are organised and any event organisers will need to be realistic in their expectations and prepared to alter plans quickly.

Working with business

14. Members have highlighted that they wish to explore how we might assist local businesses coming out of the pandemic. Following the local elections Melanie Smans, the Economic Development & Active Communities Manager, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils has offered to meet up with town council representatives and the cabinet member at the district council to discuss how this might best be taken forward. Previously my report included an update from Melanie Smans (appendix 1) detailing the work which the team at the district council has been doing during the pandemic.
15. All these projects will have an impact on staffing resource and as they are scoped I will report regularly during the next cycle regarding this and highlight any impact and decisions which would be required especially in relation to the Forward Plan. Financial budget is addressed by the recommendation at paragraph 18.

Other items

Community needs

16. It has been suggested that we should survey – online and potentially through the Town Crier, regarding how Covid-19 has affected residents and how the town council might be able to help further, e.g. isolated, lonely older people as well as younger. This will inform what further we may do going forward.

Information and communication

17. Keeping the Covid-19 section of the website updated to include a list of organisations and services within the town that could assist residents should remain a priority. Additional information provided in future Printed media and the Town noticeboards, including those at the museum should also be considered.

Suggested course of action in relation to the above

18. I recommend:
 - (i) The Covid Response Group be the responsible group to take forward all the work outlined above, subject to ensuring that the chairs of the parent committees who have an interest are fully consulted i.e. Amenities & Recreation (improving public spaces); Community Services (working with the community) and Finance & General Purposes (working with business). I recommend that the council approve a delegation to the Group in this regard, subject to this having to be exercised by the proposed Urgency Committee or the Town Clerk (for speed) should virtual decision-making meetings not be permitted.
 - (ii) That a sum of £15,000 be allowed from the Council's Covid-19 response budget for the above projects.

19. A Member will need to propose and second the above recommendations or any other proposals coming forward relating to this matter, so they can be voted on and adopted by the council.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
27 April 2021