



ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

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Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee, 13 October 2022 DRAFT MINUTES

Present in person:

Cllr Samantha Bowring - Chair
Cllr Jim Halliday - Vice-Chair
Cllr Gabby Barody
Cllr Andrew Skinner

In attendance in person:

Cherrie Curruthers - Finance Officer (temporary)
Victoria Moore - Properties Officer
Nigel Warner - Town Clerk/ RFO

In attendance online:

Cllr Neil Fawcett
Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom
Dan Sancisi Museum Manager

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F34/22. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Andy Foulsham (Mayor, ex-officio).

F35/22. Declarations of interest

Minute F38/22 Matters referred from Community Committee, grant application from 30th Abingdon Scouts. Cllr Samantha Bowring declared a personal non-pecuniary interest in this matter as a trustee of the Abingdon Baptist Church, who owned the land on which the Scout hut was situated.

F36/22. Statements and Questions from the Public

None.

F37/22. Minutes

It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Skinner, and **RESOLVED** that, the minutes of the meeting of the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee of 26 July 2022 be **APPROVED** and be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

F38/22. Matters referred from other committees

5.1 Community Committee:

Cllr Neil Fawcett, Chair of the Community Committee, explained the background to the two matters referred.

i. Meeting of 12 July 2022- Minute C25/22

The Community Committee had awarded a grant of £4,000 to the Friends of Carswell County Primary School to replace the Astro Turf on a sports facility with new materials “which will last for years to come.” It was noted that Carswell was the only state school in Abingdon which did not have their own playing fields hence the Astro turf facility has been developed. They then referred the application to the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee to see if they had any more money which the Town Council could grant. The original grant application had been in the sum of £10,000.

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 19: recreational facilities gives councils powers to award grants for this purpose.

Cllr Jim Halliday stated that he had heard that the organisation had now raised the additional funds from elsewhere but would support the application if this could be checked and if the money was still required.

It was **RESOLVED** that an additional grant of £6,000 be awarded to the Friends of Carswell County Primary School in order to replace the Astro Turf sports facility, subject to checking with the organisation that this money was still required. It was further resolved that this be funded from the Council’s Community Infrastructure Levy Funds and subsequent to the Council’s powers under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 19.

ii. Meeting of 6 September 2022 - Minute C39/22

The Community Committee had awarded a grant of £2,000 to 30th Abingdon Scouts for a new scout hut to replace an old one which is no longer fit for purpose. This was awarded using powers under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 19 (recreational facilities).

The Community Committee had also recommended to the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee that funding of £3,000 from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding be awarded to support their project.

It was **RESOLVED** that an additional grant of £3,000 be awarded to 30th Abingdon Scouts in order to the scout hut, which it was noted was also used by the wider community. It was further resolved that this be funded from the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy Funds and subsequent to the Council's powers under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, section 19.

(Cllr Samantha Bowring declared a personal, personal non-pecuniary interest in this matter as a trustee of the Abingdon Baptist Church, who owned the land on which the Scout hut was situated).

5.2 Environment and Amenities Committee of 5 October 2022

Minute E93/22: Proposed Sustrans cycle and pedestrian map

The Chair of the Environment and Amenities Committee, Cllr Gabby Barody, reported that the Committee had recommended to the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee (FGAM):

- 1 to accept the project and
- 2 that they consider that the cost of up to £3,300 be allocated from the Community Woodlands/Green small projects budget which they hold.

This initiative had come from the Green Forum and the map linked with the LCWIP and the Neighbourhood Plan. It was intended that the map would be completed by 28 February 2023. The funding suggestion was on the basis that the Community Woodland/ Green small projects fund would not be required in its entirety this year.

The Chair, Cllr Samantha Bowring, had expressed reservations at the Environment and Recreation Committee that this is under the terms of reference of the Town Infrastructure Committee, which is responsible for active travel and has the budgetary provision for such a project. In further discussion it was stated:

- If a decision is not made this evening then the project will be delayed.
- Querying of the timescale and urgency. In future if groups have deadlines then we need to know.
- Cllr Andrew Skinner as Chair of the Town Infrastructure Committee considered that this was a matter for his committee but did not wish to delay matters.
- The wording of the proposal allowed for alternative budgetary allocation later.
- The terms of reference meant that there was the potential for committee responsibilities overlapping – Town Infrastructure had a responsibility for infrastructure whilst Environment and Recreation had powers in relation to green matters. This needed to be looked at when reviewing committee structure and in the meantime chairs would need to liaise.
- The Finance Officer stated that this could qualify for Community Infrastructure Levy funding and that this may be a more appropriate

source of funding as it would leave the Community Woodland/ small projects budgets intact.

It was proposed by Cllr Gabby Barody, seconded by Cllr Jim Halliday and **RESOLVED:**

- 1 to accept the project and
- 2 that they consider that the cost of up to £3,300 be allocated from the Community Infrastructure Levy.

F39/22. **Forward Plan**

- i) The committee reviewed and noted Forward Plan which was **AGREED**.

Item 1: Surplus and review of town council land. Noted there was a forward plan update in confidential session. It was agreed that the matter be referred back to the Environment and Recreation Committee for their view regarding whether the land in question had any amenity value. If not then the matter would then be further considered by the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee, for potential disposal.

Item 4: It was noted that the Abbey Hall lease had been extended to 30 September 2023 rather than 30 September 2022, the date given in the officer report. This was pending agreement of a new 15-year lease on the property.

Item 5: Museum basement/ Climate Emergency Centre. Concern had been expressed by the Climate Emergency Centre(CEC) regarding the costs of public liability insurance in the sum of £10million. The Town Clerk stated that whilst the Town Council insured the building the public liability cover would protect the CEC should any of their actions result in loss or damage to buildings or people, which the Council's insurers might otherwise seek to recover from the CEC. The matter had been referred to the Council's insurers, Zurich Municipal, for advice and the matter was delegated to officers to progress.

It was noted that a new 5-year licence was in preparation with Slade Legal. It was further noted that either party can withdraw from the license agreement with one month's written notice. The officers recommended that the Council agree this licence on the same terms and conditions as the current license.

Further to the recommendation in the report it was **RESOLVED** that the Council conclude a 5-year licence with the Climate Emergency Centre on the same terms and conditions as the current licence, allowing for either party to withdraw given one-month's written notice.

The committee had no proposals at this stage regarding budgets for 2023-24 and the Forward Plan.

F40/22. Actions Register

The committee reviewed, noted and updated the Actions Register.

Meeting with Saxton Rovers Football Club regarding lease/ licence: this is due to be arranged. The Club had raised the possibility of fencing off the pitch. In the first instance further investigation will be taking place regarding whether this was permissible having regard to the status of the area as a public recreation ground.

Guildhall drains. Council surveyors are to be requested to progress this as speedily as possible.

The WI wall-hanging is due to be hung in the Roysse Room foyer.

F41/22. Finance Report

- (i) The committee received and considered the report from the Finance Officer, it was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Bowring, and **RESOLVED that this be APPROVED.**
- (ii) The committee received and considered the Management accounts for this committee for the period ending 30 September 2022. There were no matters which the Finance Officer wished to draw to the attention of Members beyond her report. It was noted that this was the first year of the revised management accounting system and so some migrated codes would be revisited.

Insurance costs had risen by 7% above budget. The Town Clerk stated that there had been a buildings insurance revaluation earlier in the year which had resulted in an increase in the insurance values for the various properties.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Barody, and **RESOLVED that these be APPROVED.**

- (iii) The committee received and considered the Summary Management accounts for Full Council for the period ending 30 September 2022. It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Barody, and **RESOLVED that these be APPROVED.**

F42/22. Budget Planning 2023-24

The committee received and considered a report on budget setting.

The Finance Officer stated that this is the time for the committees to come forward with their budget requirements and projects for 2023/24. It was noted that additional Community Infrastructure Levy monies were due and the council had substantial reserves.

In discussion:

- It was confirmed that committees should look at revenue and capital budgets as well as reserve drawdowns. A list of existing reserves was included in the report.
- Bandstand project. Pre-planning advice had been sought regarding the potential. If it were possible to go forward then external funding would be sought but there would likely be a budget bid for council funding too.
- The Council was contracting Karen Crowhurst as Locum Projects Officer to 31 October. She had been working on a number of projects which had for a number of reasons not progressed and the committee felt that it was important that these projects progress. Funding for the post had been vired from staffing budgets. It was suggested that funding could also be available from the projects themselves.
- The Finance Officer stated that a five-year forward budget would be prepared following adoption of the 2023/24 and would be available by 31 March 2023.

The following two items were flagged for consideration for budget bids:

1. Larger grants budget. Need was likely to be increasing and this would be assessed following receipt of reports from the recipients.
2. Conversion of attic space above Roysse Room for office accommodation or storage (including Christmas lights). The Properties Officer would make enquiries regarding a “ball park” figure for conversion. The potential to use the Old Magistrates Court robing room was mentioned as a possible office space although at present this was in the Forward Plan as a civic wing. Other options could be considered. The Old Magistrates Court could also be accessed independently. This would not necessarily have to be undertaken in 2023/24.
3. Increased budget for toilets at the Museum to be used as public toilets (this would be bid from Community Services Committee).
4. The Chair asked for any other ideas and none were forthcoming.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Skinner and **RESOLVED** that the report be **APPROVED**.

F43/22. General Report from the Finance Officer

This item was moved to the confidential part of the agenda.

F44/22. IT Support

The committee received and considered a report from the Finance Officer and an appendix on the proposed baseline specification for inviting tenders for the IT and telephones.

The Finance Officer considered that IT should be looked at. At present there were many suppliers in relation to the various elements and she considered that there were savings which could be made. The Council could consider Cloud-based solutions. She had therefore produced a specification for tenders in relation to IT, telephones and broadband, which would allow for the possibility of working with one supplier for these. At present the Council were out of contract with Redsquid, the current supplier but this would in the meantime continue on a 90-day notice.

Members considered and made the following points:

- Council had retendered a few years ago and it would be worth looking at the specification produced previously. As a part of the previous tender exercise the Council had saved a considerable sum. Some concern regarding everything being in the cloud. Suggest convening IT Working Group.
- Worth looking at the democratic support system Modern Gov.
- Councillors have expertise in this area. View expressed that Council needed a better contractor.
- Need to consider hardware for Councillors.
- More use of generic e-mail addresses by staff.

Agreed: Finance Officer to review specification. IT Working Group to be convened (no timescale agreed), to move this forward.

F45/22. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

- i) The Committee considered whether the CiL monies due to be paid to the Town Council on 28 October be held by the Vale, if not the monies would be automatically transferred.
- ii) The Committee received a summary of CIL money available to the Town Council.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council request that the CIL monies due to Abingdon Town Council be paid over to the Town Council rather than retained by the District Council and that this be agreed as Council policy. It was noted that this was the District Council default position; if you do not let the District Council know, then the money is paid over anyway.
2. That a report be submitted each year regarding the position regarding CIL funding income and expenditure.

F46/22. **County Hall property matters**

The report of the Museum Manager was considered in confidential session as it included exempt information.

F47/22. **Property Matters**

The committee received and considered a report from the Properties Officer.

The Properties Officer outlined the content of her report.

The Properties Officer clarified that the WCs in the Old Magistrates Court were adjacent to the robing room and space would be available for a kitchenette area. The space could operate independently of the main building. Listed building consent would be required.

RESOLVED: that the report be approved.

F48/22. **Working Parties**

The Committee revisited the working parties set up by this committee and reviewed if they were still required.

Cllr Skinner posed the question as to whether the lease should also be considered at the full Council meeting so all members could be updated.

The Town Clerk asked to check the minutes regarding membership of the above groups and it was agreed that the membership be confirmed in the draft of these minutes.

The Properties Officer queried committee responsibility for the Guildhall historic building would report to. Operation of the service was the responsibility of the Community Services Committee; property management was the responsibility of the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee (subject to any recommendations of the Guildhall Complex Working Group).

The Chair, Cllr Samantha Bowring, asked that future consideration be given to how the working groups operate as different groups operated in different ways. There should be a consistency of operation in terms of matters such as governance, reporting, attendance and clerking. This was **agreed** as a future action.

Cllr Halliday considered that there were two types of working group – those which officers could work with to advise on actions and others which were “task and finish” groups.

The Town Clerk felt that the council should consider whether some of the groups were more appropriately established as sub-committees with full spending powers. He also outlined some of the historic background to the committees and working groups and

noted that whereas committees/ sub-committees were open to the public, working groups were not. Matters could be delegated to Sub-Committees.

Cllr Skinner stated that terms of reference were required for the working groups and this should be the starting point for all of the groups appointed.

RESOLVED:

1. that the following groups continue and be reappointed (previous membership noted in brackets) and that terms of reference be included on the next agendas of these committees:

- Abbey Hall lease (FGAM 27.10.2021 Cllrs Birks, Fawcett, Jehanli, Halliday)
- Guildhall Complex building work (March 2020: Cllrs Birks, Bowring, Crick, Fawcett, Halliday)
- Museum lift (Cllrs Bowring and Halliday)
- IT (ATC 21.05.2016 Cllrs Coveney, Foulsham, Halliday).

Note Leader and Mayor are non-voting ex-officio members of all working parties. If they are a named member then that membership has primacy.

2. That a report on how working groups operate should be brought forward to the next meeting of the Committee.

F49/22. Future Agenda items

The committee considered and proposed items for future action:

- Working groups (see above).

Any other items should be e-mailed to the Locum Deputy Town Clerk, Paula Lopez via democratic@abingdon.gov.uk

F50/22. Meetings for 2022/23 future meetings

The dates of the meetings of the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee in this municipal year were noted as below:.

- 30 November 2022 (Wednesday)
- 17 January 2023 (Tuesday)
- 15 March 2023 (Wednesday)

F51/22. Exclusion of the public, including the press

The Chair moved 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.

The meeting adjourned at 8.50pm and reconvened at 9.00pm.

F52/22. Confidential Appendix to the Minutes

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Skinner, and **RESOLVED** that, the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee of 26 July 2022 be **APPROVED** and be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

F53/22. Confidential Actions Register/ Forward Plan

The confidential actions register and forward plan were noted and updated.

Lease with Oxfordshire County Council re Registration Office.

The Town Clerk explained that in negotiations the County Council had requested that a ten-year lease be agreed, backdated to the date of the end of the previous lease in 2018 and with rent review in 2013, rather than a five-year lease with effect from the date of signing, which was the previous agreement. This would result in a continuity of agreement but little difference in the date of the end of the lease agreement. Other details would remain as previously agreed.

It was proposed by Cllr Jim Halliday, seconded by Cllr Gabby Barody and **resolved**: that a 10-year lease be agreed with Oxfordshire County Council to lease part of the ground-floor of the Roysse Court offices for the registration service, the lease to commence from the end of the previous lease in 2018.

F54/22. Confidential – County Hall property matters

The committee received and considered a confidential report from the Museum Manager.

The Museum Manager outlined the main points from his report, noting the response from Historic England and the requirement for more work to be undertaken in relation to the pre-planning application. He elaborated on the views expressed by Historic England in their letter of 15 August 2022. The Museum Manager drew the Committee's attention to the options detailed in paragraphs 6.10 to 6.12 of his report.

Please see further notes in the confidential appendix to these minutes.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and further consideration be given to this matter at the next meeting, together with costings on the options available.

F55/22. Confidential – Property matters

The committee received and considered a confidential report from the Properties Officer.

The Properties Officer elaborated on her report.

RESOLVED: that the location of the kitchen proposed by the Abbey Cinema, being the lower ground-floor staff room, be approved and the detailed conditions required in permitting this be delegated to the Properties Officer.

F56/22. Confidential – General Report from the Finance Officer

The committee received and considered a confidential report from the Finance Officer together with recommendations.

The Finance Officer elaborated on her report.

The recommendations in the report were approved.

See also confidential appendix to the minutes.

The meeting closed at 10.05 pm.