



## Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

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# Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee, Tuesday 17 January 2023 Draft Minutes

### Present:

Cllr Samantha Bowring

Cllr Jim Halliday

Cllr Gabby Barody

Cllr Neil Fawcett

Cllr Andrew Skinner

Chair

Vice Chair

Chair, Environment and Amenities Committee

Chair, Community Committee

Chair, Town Infrastructure Committee

### In attendance:

Cherie Carruthers

Andy Crick

Victoria Moore

Alan Rouse

Responsible Finance Officer (RFO)

Democratic Services Officer

Properties and Events Officer

Town Clerk/Chief Executive

### In attendance online:

Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom

One member of the public attended the meeting.

The meeting started at 7.04pm. Cllr Halliday chaired the start of the meeting.

## **SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)**

### F57/22. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Andy Foulsham

### F58/22. **Declarations of interest**

Cllr Halliday declared an interest as the town council's representative on the Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust which receives funding from the town council.

## F59/22. Statements and Questions from the Public

A question was received from the Friends of Abingdon Civic Society with regard to plans for the Guildhall and County Hall Museum. A written response would be sent to the Friends of Abingdon Civic Society but some comments were made at the meeting.

Cllr Bowring joined the meeting at 7.06pm and took over chairing the meeting from Cllr Halliday

The town council is aware of the importance of the Guildhall to the town and residents were advised to contact their local councillor if they have any concerns about the complex. The Guildhall Working Party continues to operate to consider any plans for the Guildhall. The working party has not met since October 2022.

There is no intention to restrict use of the Guildhall and all regular bookings would continue as planned. Rooms in the Guildhall would continue to be used for meetings and events.

Work on a lift at the County Hall Museum is ongoing and until there is some agreement within the town council on what may be possible in this historic monument, there is no value in consulting with residents. The project is extremely complex and has been ongoing for 16 years. The town council would welcome the involvement of the Friends of Abingdon Civic Society when appropriate.

## F60/22. Minutes

The RFO, Cherie Carruthers, noted that her name had been spelt incorrectly in the minutes. This was amended and it was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RESOLVED** that, the minutes of the meeting of the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee of 13 October 2022, as amended be **APPROVED** and be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### Matters arising

- F44/22 Officers were asked to set a timescale for the next meeting and advise the members of the working group what is required.
- F48/22 Abbey Hall lease working group would include the Chairs of the Community Committee, Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee and the Mayor.
- F38/22 the committee was advised that Carswell School were extremely pleased with the new facilities they were able to install and have written to the town council to thank it for the support offered.

## F61/22. Finance report

The committee received and considered a finance report from the Responsible Financial Officer, including:

- payments made between 1 November 2021 to 31 December 2021 (appendix A)

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RESOLVED** that the list of payments be approved. The Chair thanked Cllr Lonergan and Cllr Skinner for their work on confirming the payments.

- management accounts to 31 December 2022 (appendix B)

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Barody and **RESOLVED** that the management accounts be approved. The RFO noted that the management accounts include a number of lines with zero budgets: this is because the accounts are being updated and simplified.

- summary management accounts at 31 December 2022 (appendix C)

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RESOLVED** that the summary management accounts be approved.

## F62/22. Estimates 2023-4

The committee received and considered a report from the Responsible Financial Officer in relation to estimates for 2023-4, including:

- The projected outturn of the 2022-23 budget (appendix A) was noted.

The RFO was asked about payments made under budget line 115/4555 for legal advice as the spending under this budget area was higher than forecast. It was noted that this cost line covered consultancy work carried out to review property held by the town council in Abingdon and the creation of a searchable database for the use of staff. It was suggested that these costs might be moved to 108/4103 as this budget line better reflects the work undertaken. The Chair asked officers to confirm projects which require future major spending commitments in advance.

The Town Clerk thanked the RFO for the clarity of the information provided on the budget.

- proposed fees and charges (appendix B)

The RFO withdrew the proposal at item 6.3 in the report as further work was needed on this and an update would be provided.

### Cemetery charges

The Environment and Amenities Committee had recommended additional charges for certain cemetery services which were not included in the current report. The RFO advised that the recommendation of the committee could be presented to the town council on 25 January 2023 in a supplementary report to include other recommendations over fees and charges.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RECOMMENDED** to the town council that the proposed cemetery fees and charges be approved, with a supplementary recommendation on cemetery charges to be presented.

### Market Place charges

Preferential charging for Market Place vendors based on their use of single-use plastics were agreed in 2019 but the Covid-19 lockdown meant that these charges were not introduced. Officers have been asked to find this information to share with councillors with a view to their implementation.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RECOMMENDED** to the town council that the proposed Market Place fees and charges be approved.

- proposed budget 2023-4 ([appendix C](#))
- committee summary proposed budgets 2023-4 ([appendix D](#))
- reserves and earmarked reserves ([appendix E](#))

### Fishing charges

The RFO advised that the report would be amended to reflect 2022-23 charges as the committee had agreed that they would not be increased in 2023-4.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Fawcett, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RECOMMENDED** to the town council that the proposed fishing charges are not increased in 2023-4.

### Pensions certifications

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RECOMMENDED** to the town council that the proposed fees for pensions certifications be approved, with pensions certificates for people living outside the parish of Abingdon increased to £15.75 in 2023-24.

### Members allowances

The committee discussed allowances for councillors and asked officers to prepare a report for the meeting in June 2023 on options for allowances and expenses.

The meeting was adjourned at 8.16pm and reconvened at 8.27pm.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Fawcett and **RECOMMENDED** to the town council that the proposed allowances be approved.

Travel and subsistence

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RECOMMENDED** to the town council that the proposed fees for travel and subsistence be approved.

Mayoral allowance

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Barody and **RECOMMENDED** to the town council that the proposed Mayor's allowance be approved. Officers were asked to review the allowance with the review of other allowances.

Budget estimates (item 6.7)

It was noted that the additional £10,000 identified for community grants was intended to be available for additional funds for regular recipients of large grants. This would be considered at a future meeting of the Community Committee.

The RFO noted that the earmarked reserve includes the underspent amount of £16,527 for the bandstand project, which identifies this as an ongoing project. When work begins again on this project, funds can be allocated from the earmarked reserve rather than the revenue budget, with additional funding available from the community infrastructure levy.

Overall budget proposal

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RECOMMENDED** to the town council that the precept for 2023-4 be set at £1,823,515, £146.26 per household. There were two abstentions.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Fawcett, **seconded** by Cllr Bowring and **RECOMMENDED** to the town council that the precept for 2023-4 be increased by 3.2% to fund the proposed budget. There were two abstentions.

Re appendix E, officers were asked if all prior commitments to outside bodies could be recorded as individual items of 'committed funds'.

F63/22. **Investment Strategy**

The committee received and considered a report of the Responsible Financial Officer, including an annual review of the strategy adopted in December 2020. Appendices include:

- summary of investment performance (appendix A)
- investment strategy (appendix B)

The investment strategy was noted.

F64/22. **Interim audit**

The committee received and considered the interim audit. The report was noted.

F65/22. **Property update**

The committee received and considered a report from the Properties and Events Officer. The Properties and Events Officer noted that the cemetery lodges are required to be raised to a higher energy efficiency standard to enable them to be rented out. Improvements above the required level will be considered.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Bowring, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RESOLVED** to accept the schedule of works and budget.

F66/22. **Environmental implications**

There were no additional environmental implications to note.

F67/22. **Publicity**

No items were raised.

F68/22. **Forward plan**

The committee noted the forward plan. The Chair noted that the forward plan would be updated for the next meeting in consultation with the Chairs of other committees.

F69/22. **Actions Register**

The committee noted the actions register.

F70/22. **Future Agenda items**

- Scheme of delegations and committee terms of reference
- Standing orders
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Working parties: a report with recommendations regarding the operation of working parties
- Property working party: to consider appointing a new property working party to engage with the Property Officer to enable a full understanding of property issues and support the Property Officer
- Monument to Queen Elizabeth II: to consider a monument to Queen Elizabeth II
- IT update – Town Clerk to update members on training options
- Draft Councillor/Officer Protocol
- Update on how the town council is addressing its carbon emissions targets

F71/22. **Dates of future meetings**

The dates of future meetings were noted:

- 15 March 2023 (Wednesday)
- 14 June 2023 (Wednesday)

F72/22. **Exclusion of the public, including the press**

The Chair moved, Cllr Skinner seconded and it was agreed 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.

**SECTION II (Confidential)**

F73/22. **Museum update**

The committee received and considered a report from the Museum Manager on the proposal to install a lift at the museum.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Barody and **RESOLVED** to continue to work with the current contractor, to gain further written guidance from Historic England and gauge their support for a viable option to install a lift.

F74/22. **Property matters**

The committee considered a recommendation from the Environment and Amenities Committee with regard to a request from a resident to purchase a small piece of land which is owned by the town council. It was **proposed** by Cllr Skinner, **seconded** by Cllr Barody and **RECOMMENDED** that it be reviewed by the Chair of the Town Infrastructure Committee to see if there was any other use for the land prior to the sale being recommended to Full Council.

F75/22. **Property update**

The committee received and considered a report from the Properties Officer on the Abbey Hall. The report was noted.

The meeting closed at 10.05pm