

**Present:** Councillor Dr B G Wood (Chairman)  
The Mayor, Councillor Mrs G Zakss  
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin  
Councillor Mrs J Bland (part)  
Councillor A J Elliott  
Councillor A J Follett (Vice Chairman)  
Councillor Miss L M Hillier  
Councillor Mrs J Wood

**In attendance:** Mr M W Kennedy – Town Clerk  
Mrs H King – Committee Administrator  
A member of the press  
A member of the public

1807. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Dr P Skolar and C Pye.

1808. **TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

*Members are hereby reminded that, under the provisions of Part 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 (The Code of Conduct), a member with a personal interest in a matter who attends a meeting of the authority at which the matter is considered must disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest at the commencement of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent. A member with a personal interest in a matter also has a prejudicial interest in that matter if the interest is one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the member's judgement of the public interest. A member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room or chamber where a meeting is being held whenever it becomes apparent that the matter is being considered at that meeting, unless he has obtained a dispensation from the standards committee of the responsible authority; and not seek improperly to influence a decision about the matter. For the purposes of this Part (of the Act), "meeting" means any meeting of the authority; or any of the authority's committees, sub-committees, joint committees or joint sub-committees.*

Councillor A J Follett – West Street Stores – Progress report, Min 1810 - personal and prejudicial – member of the Lions Club of Henley-on-Thames

Councillor E Hodgkin – West Street Stores – Progress report, Min 1810 - personal interest - wife of a member of Lions Club of Henley-on- Thames

1809. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2009 were received and approved.

1810. **PROGRESS REPORT**

Councillors received and considered the Progress Report and made the following comments:

West Street Stores

Councillor Follett advised the meeting that the Lions had, that morning, visited the Store and cleared out a large amount of their rubbish. They were still giving some thought as to where the remainder will be housed. However, all their material will be removed by the end of the notice period (17 March). The Town Clerk said that there had been a viewing (via the Estate Agent) earlier in the day and there had been one previous expression of interest. The Committee would be advised when a firm offer was received.

Singers Park (licence for Angel on the Bridge)

The licence had been signed by both parties and the first part payment was expected on 1 March. Action now complete.

Henley Town Football Club

A meeting has been arranged with the Club on 24 February at 9am in the Town Hall Committee Room.

Acceptance of credit/debit cards in the OSS

The relevant forms have been dispatched. Action complete.

Internal Audit – Review of Effectiveness

The Chairman explained that the paper would be reviewed at the next VFM meeting but this could not be arranged until Councillor Dr P Skolar returned from holiday.

*Councillors A J Elliott, Mrs J Bland and Mrs G Zakss entered the meeting at 7.31pm, 7.35 pm and 7.40 pm respectively*

1811. **FINANCE**

i) Budget Monitoring Report

Page 2 – the rent for Rugby FC showed a variance from budget of £0 but the budget and actual to date showed different figures.

Eyot Loan – the repayment due 08/09 showed a figure of £0 although Councillor Hodgkin believed that some capital repayment (c£4k) had been made at the same time as the interest payment but this had not been reflected in the figures.

*Action: HTC Accountant to investigate the discrepancies and advise Councillors accordingly.*

The Chairman pointed out that the additional notes to the report were extremely useful and had the benefit of giving a visual representation of how the current finances stood.

It was RESOLVED that the Budget Monitoring Report and associated notes for the 9 months to December 2008 be noted.

ii) Cashflow Position

Members had before them, the Cashflow Report and Balance Sheet for the 9 months to December 2008, copy having being issued.

It was RESOLVED that the Cashflow Report for the 9 months to December 2008 be noted.

iii) Investment Performance Update

The Chairman was at pains to point out that, contrary to inaccurate reporting in the local newspaper, the Council had not 'lost' £1m. The £1m reduction represented a fall in investment value and would not be realised unless investments were sold and at this time there were no plans to do so.

It was RESOLVED that the Investment Performance Report for the 9 months to December 2008 be noted.

iv) List of Payments

The list of payments was reviewed and the following issues were raised:

Page 1 - The description against the £10 cheque to Studio 35 should read "Repairs to the Mayor's consort's chain"

*Action: Accounts Asst to update the payments system.*

Councillor Mrs Bland expressed concern that the electricity and water bills at the Pavilion seemed very high if they only related to a single quarter.

*Action: the Town Clerk was tasked (with the assistance of the Accounts Asst) to carry out a review of all utilities and present a report to a future F&A meeting.*

Councillor Mrs Bland also raised the continuing high expenditure in relation to Chubb and the services they offer. It was suggested that alternative suppliers were investigated and put forward Reading Extinguisher Services (Caversham) and Active Security Information (Henley) as contacts she could recommend. The Chubb contracts and their cost had been a long running issue.

*Action: The Town Clerk and Accounts Asst to produce a paper detailing the current contracts for services such as fire extinguishers, intruder alarms etc, their lengths and associated costs for presentation at a future F&A meeting.*

It was RESOLVED that the Schedule of Payments for the January period be received, approved and adopted.

v) Williams de Broë Meeting

The Chairman reported that the meeting with Williams de Broë was very successful especially in respect of the fee holiday in the April – June quarter of 2009.

It was RESOLVED that the report be received and approved.

vi) Fees and Charges

Councillor Mrs Zakss raised the point that as Councillor Mrs Bland was a local shopkeeper there was a potential conflict of interest in regard to this item. Councillor Mrs Bland agreed to leave the room whilst the discussion took place.

Councillor Miss Hillier queried the basis on which the increases were calculated as there appeared to be no set percentage rises. A general discussion took place on each item listed and whether the rises proposed were justified.

The Committee RECOMMENDS

that the revised Fees and Charges outlined in the agenda paper be adopted save for the Upper Market Place Parking where the 2009-10 cost should be restricted to £660/year.

Councillor Mrs Bland then rejoined the meeting.

1812. GRANTS

It was recognised that there was insufficient budget remaining to satisfy all the requests in full.

The Committee RECOMMENDS that the following grants be awarded:

- MS Therapy Centre Berkshire                      £250
- Rotary Club of Henley Bridge                      Saturday Free Use of Town  
Hall ( representing £88 for 4hours)
- South Oxon Mencap Society                      £500
- Henley Festival Trust                                  £1,000
- Henley Round Table                                  £1,000

Councillor Follett made the point that although the Round Table have been awarded a grant towards the May Fair, this did not confer an automatic right to use Mill Meadows.

*Action: F&A Committee Clerk to write to the Round Table advising them that a formal, separate application to use Mill Meadows was still required.*

It was also agreed that the cost of ‘free use’ should be recorded against the grants budget.

1813. AUDIT COMMISSION’S AUDIT PRACTICE ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT

The Town Clerk explained that the paper had been presented as an information only document and no action was required from Councillors at this stage.

It was RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

1814. **INSURANCE PREMIUMS**

The report presented detailed the refined proposals covering the Council's insurance requested from the previous F&A meeting. Councillor Mrs Hodgkin thought that the £200k excess on fire was high considering that many of the Council's buildings were old and presented a high risk. However, the Town Clerk explained that while the Council had large reserves it could afford to carry that risk and benefit from the associated savings on the insurance premium.

Councillor Mrs Bland expressed her thanks to the HTC Accountant for the excellent work he had done in achieving the reductions in the premium. This was supported by the meeting.

The Committee RECOMMENDS

that the Council authorises the Accountant to accept the proposal outlined above as a basis for settling its insurance cover for 2009/10 with Zurich Insurance.

1815. **LEGAL FEES**

The meeting noted the spreadsheet produced by the Town Clerk which showed comparative legal fees for other Councils. The document revealed that the costs HTC pay are in line with those paid by others. Councillor Mrs Bland believed that the Council should always be mindful of the cost of legal advice and not to consult solicitors too easily or quickly.

It was RESOLVED that the item be received and noted.

1816. **EXHIBITION CENTRE**

The Committee regretted that insufficient external funding had been forthcoming to progress the full works intended for the Exhibition Centre. However, it was accepted that the building did require some immediate maintenance and as it was run at a profit then the investment would be well made. It was agreed that the search for additional external funding should continue.

The Committee RECOMMENDS

that Council considers releasing the capital expenditure contingency of up to £20,000 for essential refurbishments to the Exhibition Centre / Old Fire Station Gallery, and the Town Clerk is given delegated powers to work with the Chairman of the Finance & Administration Committee, the appointed tenderer (M C

Robbins) and the project managers Oxley Conservation Ltd to facilitate this.

1817. **MAYORAL CHAIN**

There was a general discussion concerning the Mayor's chain and its replacement. It was felt that any new chain should be of the same quality as the original and that any cheaper alternative would not be acceptable. As the new chain would last in excess of 40 years, an investment in a better quality, more expensive chain would be worthwhile. The Mayor's chain was an important symbol of the town and an inferior replacement would be seen as false economy.

The Committee RECOMMENDS

that to preserve the look of the existing chain, provision is made in future budgets to cover the cost of manufacturing a replica chain in terms of appearance, quality and weight. This would entail ring-fencing £2,000 from the capital budget for the next 3 years (on a cumulative basis) to meet the cost.

*Councillor Mrs J Bland left the meeting at 8.15pm.*

1818. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

It was moved by the Chairman and RESOLVED

that the public and the press be excluded from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as matters which were about to be discussed are considered to be confidential.

1819. **MINUTES OF THE CONFIDENTIAL SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 JANUARY 2009.**

i) **LEGAL UPDATE**

The content of the legal update was received and noted. In particular:

Moorings

It was noted that despite there apparently being a waiting list, not all the jetties had been let. It was explained that not all boat owners' sign up to mooring commitments before boats are back on the water at the start of the season. It was still expected that the jetties will be fully let by April.

Hobgoblin

Although it had not been possible to reclaim the outstanding fees in this case, it had proved to be a valuable learning experience as to the workings of the small claims court. Councillor Follett suggested that the Parks Service staff should keep an eye out for Mr McArthur and his boat just in case he should attempt to pass through the town.

The Committee RECOMMENDS

that the sum of £665 (£600 mooring fees and £65 court fee) is written off.

36 Market Place

Discussion took place on the appropriate level of increase and it was agreed that the figure proposed should be accepted, and put in place for a two year period, with the tenant and Fair Rent Panel advised accordingly.

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

The Town Clerk explained that the lease was progressing slowly. The Council's solicitors have included a number of clauses expected in a normal commercial lease and this had been done to fully protect the Council's interests. The CAB trustees felt that a lease on such commercial lines was not necessary. Councillor Mrs Hodgkin stated that the CAB needed to get to grips with the changes and move the process forward.

The Committee RECOMMENDS

that the Town Clerk should be given delegated powers to conclude the lease negotiations in a practical and timely manner, whilst protecting the Council's position.

Registration of HTC Land

The Town Clerk had received the Blandy & Blandy report covering the Phase 1 work that morning. He provided a précis of the content, explaining that not all HTC land was registered and to complete the first registration exercise then all original documentation had to be located. This would also include the originals of all associated leases. At present there was not the resource to undertake this preliminary work and extra resource would need to be identified and costed. It was suggested that a number of ex-Councillors, due to their extensive experience and knowledge, may be able to assist in the location of old documents.

*Action: Town Clerk to produce a detailed proposal as to how the issue of the outstanding registrations should be addressed. This should include the properties affected, resource required, costs and timescale.*

AFC Henley

The Town Clerk reported that AFC Henley had indicated that they did not want a break clause in the new lease as it would serve no purpose. This should not cause a problem for the Council but advice will be taken when the new lease is drawn up. It was also requested, by the Club, that the maintenance regime for the pitch should not be so "draconian". Details of the current wording will be re-examined.

**ii) VFM WORKING GROUP**

Councillor Dr B Wood reported that there had been some developments regarding the situation with the CCTV cameras. Andy Rogers (Town

Clerk, Wallingford) had advised him that Thame make an offer for the CCTV services as opposed to paying the amount originally asked. It was felt that if the four councils affected combined forces and made an offer of £800/camera, this could be an achievable saving. Further developments were expected in the next couple of weeks.

It was RESOLVED that the item be received and noted.

**iii) PARKS SERVICE**

The Town Clerk talked through the ideas behind the report which, he explained, were a first 'broad brush' attempt to introduce ideas on how the Parks Service could be improved to the benefit of the Town's open spaces. The meeting gave the report a positive reaction and felt that the ideas should form the basis of a more detailed paper which took the initiative to the next step. The paper should include the types (tools/machinery) and level of capital investment, staffing (including any career progression structure), scope and timing.

It was agreed that the paper should also show a comparison with the status quo. Previous project papers existed from approximately 6 years ago (in the days of Colin Barlow and John Jeffcott) where the Parks Service's remit was costed and may provide a useful source of information.

*Action: the Town Clerk to produce a more detailed paper for consideration at a future F&A meeting*

**iv) RENT REVIEW**

The level of the rent increase for the River & Rowing Museum was discussed.

The Committee RECOMMENDS

that the RRM is advised that their rent will be increased by 4.9% to £5,245.

that the Rent Review Monitoring System and accounts system is updated accordingly.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm.

Chairman

19.2.09