

Present: The Deputy Mayor, Councillor C Pye
Councillor Mrs J Bland
Councillor Mrs G Dodds
Councillor A Follett (Chairman)
Councillor C W Gibson
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith
Councillor I Reissmann (Vice Chairman)
Councillor Dr P Skolar
Councillor Dr B Wood

In attendance: Mr M W Kennedy – Town Clerk
Mrs H King – Committee Administrator
Mrs L Jones – HTC Accountant
1 member of the press
7 members of the public

The Chairman referred to the recent death of Doug Ellis and informed the meeting that the funeral would be held on Friday 17th December. Doug was a member of the Town Council in the 1990s and had been Chair of the Finance Committee. Latterly he was Treasurer of the Day Centre and an active member of the Rotary Club. The meeting (and members of the public) stood for a minutes silence as a mark of respect.

83. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from The Mayor, Councillor Mrs J Wood

84. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Dr P Skolar – Min 87 – Progress Report (Northfield End) – personal – (OCC Councillor). Min 92 – budget/moorings – personal (boat owner).
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith – Min 87 – Progress Report (Northfield End) – personal – (OCC Councillor). Councillor Dr B Wood – Min 91 (Nomad grant) – personal & prejudicial (Management Committee member)

85. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION**

Mr Atkin (Elizabeth Road)

Mr Atkin made reference to the LTP3 and in particular – the cost benefit analysis, DEFRA funding and the list of priorities. He was aware that his comments were being made in advance of the Chairman's verbal update on the item. He submitted a written note of his points to the Chairman so that they may be considered when HTC's response was formulated.

Mr Hamilton (Greys Road)

Mr Hamilton made a request under the Freedom of Information Act and asked how much the Council had spent on legal/professional fees in the last 5 years. The Town Clerk asked that the request be made in writing and a response would be made within the specified 28 day time limit.

Pippa Hare (Northfield End)

The comment was made that the 'no parking and clamping' signs had not yet been removed from the area 92-102 Northfield End despite OCC being advised to do so. The Town Clerk indicated that a meeting with OCC to discuss all the issues associated with the area had been requested but that the County Council had decided there would be little benefit in meeting at this time. A view was expressed that with the current funding situation, sign removal was not high on OCC's priority list.

Christopher Russell (Bell Street)

Mr Russell pointed out that the developer had been using the area at Northfield End (which had been confirmed as highway) as a dumping ground for construction material. He had contacted OCC who had visited the site but on the day of the visit it was clear. It had subsequently been used again. Vehicles were having to mount the pavement to avoid the obstruction which, in some cases has caused the slabs to crack which causes a tripping hazard. He believed OCC needed reminding that HTC still had the power of veto over the proposed outcome at Northfield End.

Councillor Mrs J Bland entered the meeting at 7.44pm.

Councillor Dr Barry Wood (Blandy Road)

Councillor Dr B Wood made a statement from the public gallery as he was unable to participate in the discussion on the NOMAD agenda item due to a personal and prejudicial interest. He asked the Committee to consider raising the NOMAD grant from the proposed £5k to nearer £8-10k. He applauded all the work carried out by the organisation and their assistance with young adults with problems, especially at Gillotts School. Their efforts had a noticeable effect in increased school attendance levels. With austere times ahead he felt that restoring the grant to previous levels was very important.

86. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee held on 2 November 2010 were received, approved, adopted and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

87. **PROGRESS REPORT**

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

Estate Inspections

It was noted that Cllr Hillier's inspection was still outstanding and the Town Clerk was requested to remind her to carry out the inspection as soon as possible.

Northfield End

A discussion took place on the fact that HTC had not been invited to take part in the consultation process but still had a right to veto OCC's proposals. Although OCC had reported that there was little more information to give at this stage

it was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that

HTC write to OCC to request a meeting so that they can provide an update on;

- the consultation process
- the application for a stopping up order

- OCC's enforcement of the 1980 Highways Act and other legislation which obliges the Highways Authority to maintain the highway for public use and prevent obstruction; and

that OCC be reminded of the continuing Town Council's right under the 1980 Highways Act to veto the stopping up order at any point.

88. **FINANCE**

i) Budget Monitoring Report

It was agreed that the twinning associations needed to be reminded that budgeted funds were available. However, applications need to be made to claim the money which needs to be used for a good purpose. Councillors who were representatives on the twinning committees should relay this information.

Action: T&C Committee Administrator to note.

It was **RESOLVED** that the reports be received and noted.

ii) Investment Performance Update

The latest performance was reviewed without comment.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be received and noted.

iii) Monthly List of Payments

Members had before them the List of Payments, copy having being issued.

It was **RESOLVED** that the reports be received and noted.

89. **FIRST CHAPEL**

A long debate took place on the plans for the First Chapel and the proposal to use the building for a George Orwell Visitors Centre. Members were not in favour of providing an interest-free loan up to a value of £40k. It was not deemed to be acceptable to realise assets for this use and the fact that the loan would be unsecured would leave the Council exposed. The Town Clerk explained that Mr Burness-Smith had said that the project was not dependant on the loan although the Council's financial support would obviously be of benefit. Concern was also raised about the proposed parking area, which if fully or over-utilised would cause access difficulties back onto the main Fairmile road. Also, it was not entirely clear from the documentation provided on the project that the venture could generate sufficient financial income.

A motion was put forward that no further action be taken on the project and there should be no further support. The motion was lost on the Chairman's casting vote. A further motion was put forward which gave the project support but only if backed by a clear sustainable business plan. This motion was also lost.

Although members had concerns about the viability of the project, in the main, they still believed it should be encouraged.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that the matter be referred back to the Recreation and Amenities Committee with a view to continuing discussions with Mr Burness-Smith.

90. **VALUE FOR MONEY & RESOURCES WORKING GROUP**

There were no comments made on the content of the notes.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that the notes of the meeting held on 6 December be noted.

91. **NOMAD GRANT**

Councillor Dr B Wood having declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this matter left the Council Chamber and took no part in the debate for this item.

It was pointed out that the reference to 'SODC' in the report should have read 'OCC'.

Councillors considered a request for further funding from NOMAD and agreed their work was invaluable and they did a remarkable job for the disadvantaged. However, there were other organisations in the town who would also be struggling for money e.g. the youth centre and no doubt would be looking for additional financial support. The Chairman pointed out that he was not in favour of raising the grant level at this stage but reminded councillors that an increased contingency fund from £10K to £20K had been budgeted for in 2011/12 which could be used if specific projects were in need of support.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that NOMAD is advised that the level of grant for 2011-12 remains at the budgeted figure of £5k and that they be reminded that the Council does operate a 'grants for local organisations' scheme under which they are entitled to make applications for funding of specific projects.

Councillor Dr B Wood rejoined the meeting.

92. **BUDGET 2011-12**

The budget had been reviewed by the VFM Group prior to the meeting. There was intense discussion on the subject with concern being raised on the extent of the capital expenditure and the impact this would have on the Council's investments during a time when the stock market had yet to fully recover.

A member suggested that the Council's funding of the PCSO should be withdrawn and that Thames Valley Police (TVP) carry the full cost instead. This issue had been addressed before (in the T&C Committee) which had led to discussions with TVP with the result there should now be better communication in the future and also better monitoring by the Council. The increased sale of assets, with a view to reducing the drawdown requirement, was also mentioned. It was noticed that the budget made no reference to the cost of the Astroturf replacement. The Town Clerk advised that the cost was likely to be in the region of £250k (in 2012-13) but a paper would be presented to the Recreation and Amenities Committee in the future.

The Town Clerk and the Accountant also advised that they had been notified of some last minute savings; £1,800 in external audit fees (as no VFM audit was required in 2011/12) and £10k employers pension fund contributions towards to the funding deficit.

It was proposed that the budget be accepted (with the inclusion of the notified savings). A recorded vote was requested:

For

Against

Councillor C W Gibson
Councillor Mrs G Dodds
Councillor A Follett
Councillor I Reissmann
Councillor C Pye

Councillor Mrs J Bland
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith
Councillor Dr P Skolar
Councillor Dr B Wood

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that

the Committee recommends to Full Council acceptance and adoption of the Revenue Estimates for 2011/12 (including the Capital Budget) subject to the amendment showing the reduction in the employers superannuation contribution and the reduction in the audit fee; and

a precept of £468,700 be levied on South Oxfordshire District Council, representing no change in overall amount from the current year, but a reduction in the Band D equivalent from £82.42 to £82.16.

93. **COUNCIL TAX LEAFLET**

The meeting noted the timetable for the Council tax leaflet and the fact it had to be cleared by FS&M on 25 January with delegated powers.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that Full Council authorises FS&M Committee on 25 January 2011 to approve the Council Tax leaflet for 2011-12 under delegated powers.

94. **ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER & FINAL VERSION OF ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REPORT**

The draft version of the Report had already been viewed by FS&M. Councillors noted that the accounts were unqualified and considered that reference to this should be made in the press as well as on the Council's website and in the Council Tax leaflet.

It was acknowledged that congratulations be recorded to the Accountant and to those staff and Councillors who had assisted in the production of the accounts.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that the letter from the Audit Commission and Governance Report be received and noted; and

that the Council's thanks and appreciation be recorded in the Minutes to the Accountant and to those staff and Councillors who had assisted in the production of the accounts.

95. **PAYROLL CONTRACT**

The Town Clerk was pleased to report that the HTC Accountant had the necessary skills and expertise to bring the payroll function in-house. This will produce a saving to the Council of c£900.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that

the arrangements for administering the payroll function in-house be approved.

96. **DISCLOSURE OF LESS THAN COMMERCIAL RENTS**

It was suggested that the accounts should also show the full market rent against each of the properties. In this way, the level of effective grant would be apparent. The Town Clerk stated that these figures were not available without commissioning the necessary valuations which would be a cost to the Council. It was suggested that (as long as made clear) previous years or comparable data could be used instead. The Chairman undertook to discuss the possibilities with the Town Clerk.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that Committee continues the current practice of showing actual rent received as income in the accounts.

97. **HTC STRATEGY TO MAY 2011**

It was appreciated that the document was out of date (although progress reports had been given against each item) but it would not be cost effective at this stage, so close the end of the term of office of the current administration, to revise the document. It was also suggested that in preparing updating reports other stakeholders e.g. Transition groups should be consulted as necessary.

It was agreed that as soon as the new Council was elected, a Corporate Plan should be drawn up which would fully encompass the Council's strategy.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that the report be noted.

98. **LTP3**

The Chairman reported that a meeting had taken place on 10 December between Roger O'Neill and Councillors Follett, Reissmann and Dr Wood. Mr O'Neill explained that, at this stage, LTP3 was only looking at the overall strategy and not the detail. Councillors raised points on a number of areas:

- greater thought to be given to cross boundary issues and the impact this will have on Henley
- the effect of the core strategy plan
- how will the success of LTP3 be measured
- electric transport/cars and OCC response to the increase in the number of charging points across the UK
- better communication on transport issues

- being a good neighbour – involving surrounding parishes to buy into changes within our community
- strategy across different agencies
- reliable and quick information inc. live signs for buses
- more vertical (as well as horizontal) integration
- informing people of cost per mile

It was felt that Chapter 23 of the draft consultation document did not fully reflect the strategy in Henley and it would be more effective if the policy and strategy elements were reported separately. It was also noted that the document was ‘Oxford centric’ which needed to be avoided in future. Although Henley had been classified as a Large Town it was felt that not all Large Towns had the same problems or priorities.

The Chairman volunteered to draft a response to OCC on behalf of the Council (with the assistance of Councillors Dr Wood, Nimmo-Smith and Reissmann).

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that the draft response be considered at Full Council on 4 January 2011 for submission to OCC by the deadline of 9 January.

99. **OALC ELECTRONIC DISTRIBUTION**

The Town Clerk advised that Standing Orders would need to be amended to allow this form of distribution and even then Councillors could not be forced to accept papers sent electronically. It was agreed that the new Council should agree any change to the current system but in the meantime the IT Group should examine what additional material could be included on the Council’s website.

Action: IT Group

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that the matter is reviewed again (later in 2011) with regard to the capability of the office IT equipment, office working practices and the wishes of the new Council.

100. **PRESS & MEDIA PROTOCOL**

The Town Clerk introduced the paper which had resulted from the exercise to update Standing Orders. Some concern was expressed that the document was too big and addressed too many issues but the majority believed the document was comprehensive, fit for purpose and the Town Clerk was commended for his efforts.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that the draft protocol be received, approved and adopted

101. **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

There was no material discussion on this item

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that the published date for next year's Annual Town Meeting shall be Tuesday 22 March 2011.

102. **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 were considered to be confidential.

MINUTES OF THE CONFIDENTIAL SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2010.

103. **CONFIDENTIAL**

i) LEGAL UPDATE

The Committee received and noted the report on the outstanding legal issues. In particular:

Leaver Road

The meeting accepted that this was a complex issue and gave the Town Clerk delegated authority to hold a meeting of the Council's Legal Group to progress the matter.

ii) VENTILATION TO BASEMENT ADMINISTRATION AREA

The Town Clerk gave the background to the paper. The basement office had no natural ventilation and was permanently hot and stuffy causing respiratory problems for a number of the staff over the years. Three companies had been invited to review the office and submit quotes. The quotes ranged in price and specification quite considerably.

Members appreciated the less than ideal conditions in the office and were concerned that the right equipment was purchased and installed. As well as ventilation, air cooling should also be part of the specification. It was recognised that all new equipment should not increase the noise level and all ducting needed to be boxed in. Questions were also raised on the subject of guarantees and servicing/maintenance levels. As the installation was only going to be undertaken once then it was imperative that the correct equipment was chosen.

It was agreed that expert guidance should be called upon to assist in defining the specification/equipment needed as well as addressing the issues raised above.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND**

that the Town Clerk engages Monson Engineering (up to a cost fee of £500) to provide independent guidance on the type of installation required (bearing in mind that the Town hall is a listed building)

The meeting closed at 22.00 pm.

Chairman
15.12.10