

Present: The Mayor, Councillor S Gawrysiak
Councillor W Hamilton
Councillor Miss L Hillier
Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin (Vice chair)
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith
Councillor Mrs P Phillips
Councillor I Reissmann (Chair)
Councillor Mrs J Wood

In attendance: Mrs L Jones – HTC Accountant
Mrs H King – Committee Administrator
1 member of the press

65. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from The Deputy Mayor, Councillor M Akehurst. There was also an apology for a possible late arrival from Councillor Miss L Hillier.

66. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

67. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION**

There were no members of the public at the meeting.

68. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy and Management (FS&M) Committee held on 22 October 2013 were received, approved and adopted and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

69. **PROGRESS REPORT**

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

Bell St & Northfield End – Parking & Highways Issues

Councillor D Nimmo-Smith (in his capacity as an OCC Councillor) gave an update on the situation. He had sent an e-mail to members of the Traffic Advisory Group a couple of months previously but this had not been seen by all Councillors. It was requested that the e-mail be circulated to all for information. He confirmed that the full OCC parking survey report was not yet available but he was chasing the officer responsible at OCC for sight of the parking plans.

The Councillor was fully aware that HTC wanted to be involved in any consultation process especially concerning the 'heritage' element.

Estate inspections

It was noted with disappointment that despite there being an agreement to the inspections being carried out in September, only 6 of the 14 had been completed. Councillors had been reminded where inspections were still outstanding.

Community Governance Review

The meeting reviewed the final terms of reference from SODC. The timetable showed that the consultation closes on 4 April 2014 which would give HTC enough time to provide an approved response (as Full Council is on 1 April) to any proposals put forward. The Chairman confirmed that HTC had already written to SODC pointing out that the Neighbourhood Plan and its timing/implementation had not been fully reflected in this review.

Councillor Miss L Hillier joined the meeting at 7.45.

70. FINANCE

i) Management Accounts

In answer to a question raised, the Accountant explained that the £17k underspend on Parks Service salaries was due to two staff members leaving and the subsequent employment of two new assistants who were on a lower pay scale. In time, and as their experience grew, they would progress to be park wardens with commensurate pay.

It was also confirmed that any member of staff who opted to join the pension scheme retrospectively would only have the contributions backdated to the start of the tax year in which they joined.

The meeting was pleased to note that there will not be a need for a drawdown from investments in this financial year.

It was noted that there was an expected operating surplus for 2013-14. However, the one-off costs would mean that there would be a net overall deficit. It was accepted that the one-off costs listed would not be repeated next year so it was important that the 2014-15 budget provision did not produce an unnecessary surplus.

The capex listing showed an entry for Safety Measures with a budget of £30k. It was confirmed that this amount could be carried forward into the next financial year if not fully spent. Although, it was expected that the Greys Road crossing would be in place in this financial year thus reducing any carry forward figure.

It was RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

ii) Investment Performance

The meeting felt the Investment Managers should be congratulated on their performance in managing the Council's investments and it was suggested that their names be added to the Mayor's Christmas card list so that personal thanks could be conveyed.

It was RESOLVED that the update be received and noted.

iii) List of payments

It was questioned whether the £75 subscription to 'Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC)' was necessary and the Town Clerk was asked to consider whether it should continue.

Accountant's Note: HTC joined the ORCC in September 2013, an organisation that assists communities in Oxfordshire with all types of community and neighbourhood planning. ORCC has assisted the Town Clerk with suggestions regarding grants towards the costs of the Joint Henley & Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan.

It was RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

71. PLANNED MAINTENANCE

The Accountant explained the reasoning behind the need for the maintenance programme and the extent of the provision to be made. She pointed out that the figure for 'unknowns' in 2014-15 was £11k (and not £19k as stated in the report). The surveyor's expertise did not cover the electrical and plumbing elements of the survey. Separate surveys are currently being undertaken by a specialist electrician and plumber with estimated provisions being made in the maintenance schedule works arising from these surveys.

It was intended that no more of £75k would be spent in the first year and the list produced would be examined to see if any non-essential items could be deferred.

Councillor D Nimmo-Smith asked if he could review the list with the Town Clerk to see if any of the items could be classed as capital expenditure. His professional expertise may also help identify recurring problems at properties where full remedial action was needed rather than constant repairs.

Action: Town Clerk to arrange a meeting with Councillor D Nimmo-Smith.

Overall, the meeting felt that having a five year maintenance programme was essential both in terms of good stewardship of Council properties as well as prudent financial budgeting. Any savings on the projected costs achieved by officers would be shown in the variance column of the management accounts.

It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that Councillors approve the inclusion of a figure of £75k per annum towards planned maintenance for each of the years 2014-15 to 2018-19.

72. 2014-15 BUDGET

Following discussions in each of the Standing Committees, the Accountant had drawn up the budget and her paper detailed four options as to how the funding gap of £503k be covered. All assume that the budget figures remain as they stand.

A Member proposed that "HTC increase the average Band D council tax by inflation, rising from £85.14pa, or £1.65 per week this year, to £87.00pa, or £1.68 per week. An increase of 3p per week. This would produce a precept of £481,693.

The deficit of £21k would be funded from the general fund, i.e. surpluses accumulated over recent years.

There was extensive discussion following a suggestion that savings could be made in the areas of destination marketing, other marketing costs, the Mayor's allowance. Increases in parking charges and market licences could also reduce the deficit. There was also the suggestion that the Council's reserves should not be used to balance the revenue budget but only used for capital projects.

Conversely, it was suggested that the Council should be investing, both to improve the town for residents and increase its attraction as a tourist destination. The Council currently supported a number of local organisations and there was every possibility that with wider funding cutbacks there would be a greater need for local support in the future (the Rainbow centre being an example). It was also pointed out that Henley had the lowest council tax rates of towns in the area. The closest rate to that of Henley was Wallingford who charges £98.53 per Band D property.

It was agreed that the Council's capital sum realised from the sale of the Tesco site needed to be preserved so that it was able to produce an income from dividend returns. This would enable the Council to carry out all its commitments whilst keeping Council Tax low. The grant from SODC (as a result from the tax base changes) which will be received in 2014-15 was also welcomed.

A recorded vote was requested on the proposal.

FOR

Councillor S Gawrysiak
Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin
Councillor Mrs P Phillips
Councillor I Reissmann
Councillor Mrs J Wood

AGAINST

Councillor W Hamilton
Councillor L Hillier
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith

The proposal was carried by five votes to three. Consequently,

It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that HTC increases the average Band D council tax by inflation, rising from £85.14pa, or £1.637 per week in 2013-14, to £87.00pa, or £1.673 per week in 2014-15, an increase of 3.6p per week. This would produce a precept of £481,693. The deficit which would amount to approximately £21k is to be funded from general reserves accumulated over previous years

73. **ENERGY REDUCTION**

The meeting noted the savings that had been made from the installation of the photovoltaic (PV) cells. The actual figures as to the reduction in CO₂ output were not complete although savings have been made approximately as originally planned where this had been measured.. Overall, it was felt that the installation of PV panels had been a good investment, and had been proved to save consumption at the 60+ Club by over 30%. The payback period for the panels was still expected to be ten years as per original assumption. If for any reason PV panels had to be removed from any of the Council's buildings, then efforts should be made to have them installed on another Council property. The meeting was advised that sustainability was also one of the factors that was under consideration in the Neighbourhood Plan.

It was **RESOLVED** that Councillors note the figures on the schedule and note that the Accountant will continue to monitor the figures for Feed in Tariffs and energy consumption at all three buildings (Outdoor Sports Centre, 357 Reading Road and the 60+ Day Centre).

74. **PROJECT PLANNING**

The Town Clerk and managers were congratulated for producing the plan covering key areas of work. The plan produced a lot of discussion including:

- 30% increase in room hire. It was explained that this was not an increase in the rental cost but an expectation to increase the footfall/bookings.
- Introduce scheme of delegation to committees. This was a suggestion from the Town Clerk to improve and possibly speed up the decision making process by introducing more delegated powers. However, the committee was concerned that this would remove the transparency and accountability of the Council and was felt the overall democratic process would be affected. It was decided that this item be removed from the list.
- Improve relationship with River & Rowing Museum (RRM). It was agreed that this item should also be removed from the list as it was not felt appropriate. In addition, it was felt that the Town Centre Manager should not take the lead on this issue but it should fall to the Mayor, Councillors and RRM trustees to meet in the New Year with the new RRM Chief Executive.
- Streamline paperwork process. It was noted that most Councillors still preferred to receive agendas and minutes in paper form and were reassured to hear that an electronic system would remain optional for the time being.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that Councillors note the report and the items covering delegation to committees and the River and Rowing Museum be removed.

75. **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 3 DECEMBER 2013.

76. **CONFIDENTIAL**

i) **LEGAL UPDATE**

Kiosk

Concern was expressed that the lease had still not been finalised and this could have a negative impact on the legal costs. The Council's solicitor has been in contact with the tenant's solicitor very recently pointing out that time was moving on and expressing the wish that the matter could be concluded expeditiously.

ii) 357 READING ROAD

The Committee Administrator had produced a paper outlining various options for the building and the site as a whole. Subsequently, the site had been identified as one of those for consideration under the Neighbourhood Plan. There were still many unknowns including whether planning permission would be granted for leisure facilities on Jubilee Park and if there was sufficient room for the Parks Service if both had to be moved if the site was sold. It was suggested that SODC be approached to gauge their feeling on the development site and associated impact. Initial discussion with potential developers may also be necessary to gain all the relevant information. However, it was recognised that the Town Clerk should be supported by two Councillors in any discussions and it was agreed that they be the Chair of Planning and the Mayor.

Clerk's post meeting note: The appointment of the Chair of Planning to support the Mayor and the Clerk in any future discussions could result in a conflict of interest in the Neighbourhood Planning process. The Council is therefore invited to appoint an alternative Councillor.

It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that

HTC agree to investigate the opportunities to sell the 357 Reading Road land, within the timeframe needed by the Neighbourhood Plan being prepared, the sale to be considered subject to suitable terms and conditions.

The Town Clerk is authorised to consider a more detailed proposal for a new leisure centre on Jubilee Park using some of the capital raised and reporting back to a future meeting.

iii) MOORINGS – RENT REVIEW

A discussion took place on the appropriate level of rent to be charged from the review date. A valuation had been carried out which showed that the rent could theoretically be £15k plus VAT, but the valuation did not take account of the annual costs of running the moorings including Environment Agency fees, rates and repairs. The operating profit resulting if rent of £12,100 + VAT was charged would be no more than £8k which was the level advised by the valuation. Consequently,

It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the rent is increased to £12,100 (+VAT) with agreement to net off the £600 monitoring fees paid to 'police' the Little White Hart and River Terrace moorings.

iv) RIVER & ROWING MUSEUM (RRM)

The meeting noted the letter from the Department for Communities and Local Government dated 29 October addressed to the River and Rowing Museum's solicitors. No further action was needed.

The meeting closed at 9.40pm.

Chairman
4.12.13