

**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 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  
2 members of the public

104. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from The Mayor, Councillor Mrs J Wood and Councillor Dr P Skolar. An apology for lateness was received from Councillor Mrs J Bland.

105. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor D Nimmo-Smith – Min 108 – Progress Report (Northfield End) – personal – (OCC Councillor), Min 118 – Electoral Review – personal – (OCC Councillor). Councillor Dr B Wood – Min 116 – Free use of council premises – personal – (Mayor’s escort). Councillor Mrs G Dodds – Min 112 – 40 Acre Field – personal – (member of Henley in Transition Group). Councillor I Reissmann – Min 112 – 40 Acre Field – personal – (member of Henley in Transition Group).

106. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION**

*Mr W Hamilton (153 Greys Road)*

Mr Hamilton thanked the Town Clerk for providing the expenditure figures for legal and professional fees following his request under the Freedom of Information Act. He had analysed the figures and commented on the seemingly high costs associated with the Makins development and the proposed refurbishment of the Leichlingen Pavilion Toilets and asked the Council to think twice before employing architects in the future.

107. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee held on 14 December 2010 were received, approved and adopted and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

108. **PROGRESS REPORT**

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

**Estate Inspections**

It was noted that a Member had kindly volunteered to carry out the one remaining estate inspection which would complete the second round. It was acknowledged that, in general, the inspections had not been carried out to timetable. The Town Clerk pointed out that now the remaining Council land had been registered with the Land Registry the likelihood of adverse possession claims was much reduced. Problems highlighted on inspection reports were being monitored and actioned by the officers as a matter of course. It was

**RESOLVED** that the Chairman, Town Clerk and Committee Administrator meet to discuss the inspection regime and method of reporting to Committee.

*Action: Chairman, Town Clerk and Committee Administrator*

**Northfield End**

It was suggested that the 'burden of proof' item on the report was no longer appropriate and could be removed because the matter had been covered in the Town Clerk's letter to OCC. The Town Clerk confirmed that no response had yet been received to his letter of 12 January and agreed to remind OCC that a response was still awaited. It was

**RESOLVED** that the 'burden of proof' item on the report be removed from the progress report; and that the Committee notes that the Town Council still had the right to apply its veto and this should be debated for possible resolution at Full Council on 15 February.

*Action: Town Clerk*

Arising from the foregoing, the Committee was informed that the pile of builder's materials was still on the highway causing an obstruction.

**Review of Polling Districts and Places**

It was thought that the response to the Electoral Services Officer, copy having been issued, should have contained an explanation of why it would be beneficial for the counting to take place in Henley; the reason being that local people can witness the count and, at present, there was insufficient room at the District Office for the public (and only a limited number of public passes were available). It was important for the sake of democracy and accountability that the process was open and transparent to the public. It was

**RESOLVED** that further representations be made to the Electoral Services Officer on this point.

*Action: Committee Administrator.*

**Henley Information Centre**

The Committee had recommended that a Working Party reviews the recommendations set out in the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November, 2010. The Clerk explained that the officers were preparing a report outlining progress to date. This would include hiring uptake, promotions, tourist information, weddings etc. It was

**RESOLVED** that a further report be presented to the next meeting of FSM and that a decision would be made as to whether the HIC Working Group should be convened to take forward any recommendations.

109. **FINANCE**

i) **Budget Monitoring Report**

The graph showing the income from Mill Meadows Car Park was discussed. The income in 2010-11 outstripped the previous year except from August onwards. There was no clear explanation for this other than the speculation that it could be weather related. It was thought that there may be a price-sensitive element to the downturn although there was no proof of that since the tariff had not been increased until 1 January 2011. Overall, income was still expected to be £10k over budget despite this downturn. It was

**RESOLVED** that the reports be received and noted and that a more detailed analysis be undertaken of the Car Park Income at the end of the financial year to review the figures and possibly carry out a comparison with other car parks.

*Action: HTC Accountant*

The Town Clerk took the opportunity to update the meeting with the news that he had just received a copy of the Accounts and Audit Regulation 2011 document, draft for public consultation. The threshold for reporting accounts under FRSSE had been lifted to £6.5m and, therefore, the Council's accounts for 2011 would only need to be produced in a simplified format. This would result in a commensurate saving in external audit fees. In noting that the consultation period ends on 4 March. It was

**RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk and HTC Accountant, in consultation with the Chairman, respond to the Accounts and Audit Regulation 2011 Draft for consultation.

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 report be received and noted.

110. **COUNCIL TAX LEAFLET**

The meeting was reminded that FS&M had already been given delegated powers to accept the leaflet due to the deadline for submission being before the next Full Council. One amendment was proposed:

Page 1. Penultimate sentence should read "Staff have not received a **cost of living** pay increase for 2 years, ..."

A view was expressed that the Council ought to be congratulated for increasing its expenditure on the town whilst reducing the level of council tax.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Council Tax leaflet be accepted with the above amendment.

111. **THE GENERAL FUND**

As this was a complex area, the HTC Accountant talked through the report and explained how the General Fund comprised both capital and revenue monies and included both surpluses and deficits from investments. It was agreed that the Fund currently contained amounts that should be allocated to capital and the transfer of £1,655k should more properly be placed in the capital reserve. This would also have the benefit of reducing any criticism from the auditors. However, the further movement of £495k from revenue reserves to capital reserves was not seen as essential at this time due to the volatility of the stock market but should be given consideration later in the year.

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

the £1,655k be transferred from the General Fund Balance to Capital Reserves.

112. **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

The meeting reviewed the list of current and proposed subscriptions for the financial year 2011-12. The Town Clerk considered that Members should be aware of which organisations were covered and confirmed, in answer to a Member's question that the annual subscription to OALC was on a sliding scale based on the number of electors. He also pointed out that SAGE was now included on the list. This was necessary with the payroll function moving in-house. It was

**RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that the subscriptions for 2011-12 be accepted.

113. **FINANCIAL PROCEDURES**

The HTC Accountant explained that the production of the procedures manual was a large undertaking and would be completed in sections. The report showed progress to date and it was anticipated that the task would be completed by the date in the Strategy Document. It was recognized that the Council needed these procedures in place for its own protection. It was

**RESOLVED** that the progress report be noted.

114. **40 ACRE FIELD**

The Committee considered a recommendation from the Recreation and Amenities Committee on the funding of £6,000 for fencing at 40 Acre Field. The Town Clerk explained that following a site meeting, there had been further developments with the positioning of the proposed fencing. It was suggested that a circular walk could be created around 40 Acre Field by extending the fencing along the boundary with Nicholas Hill Farm but leaving a gap of at least 1.5 meters between the existing fencing to form a footpath which would extend all the way to Pack and Prime Lane. This would enable OCC to include the path on the Definitive Rights of Way Map. The increased length of fencing would bring the total cost to c£9k.

The Committee considered that the creation of a circular walk around 40 Acre Field would be extremely beneficial and supported the suggestion. This would have the added advantage of protecting the Council's landholding. However, it was recognised that other activities, such as horse riding, should be

discouraged along the newly formed pathway. As this item was originally instigated by R&A, it was agreed that R&A should progress the matter and consider the actual fine detail of implementing the proposal. An agenda item would appear on that Committee for its meeting on 1 February. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that

- the Town Clerk is given delegated authority to appoint the preferred supplier, with the revised cost of the work not exceeding £9k.
- the item is referred back to R&A for the details to be agreed.
- the funding for the fencing is met from the 2010-11 General Fund Balance.

The Town Clerk also reported that the new tenancy agreement was almost finalized and would be ready for signing shortly. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Town Clerk be authorised to sign the final document on behalf of the Council.

115. **IT UPDATE**

The meeting reviewed the report advising on the progress with the IT update. No comments were made. It was

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

116. **PARKS DEPARTMENT – IT REQUIREMENT**

The Committee considered the purchase and installation of a new computer for the Parks Department at the Reading Road Depot. The point was made that the price quoted for the new PC appeared slightly above the market rate. The HTC Accountant had made comparable checks on the internet and agreed that, although the price appeared higher, it needed to be borne in mind that the Council's IT Support Service provider (who was familiar with the Council's current systems) would configure the new PC and ensure it was correctly added to the Council's network. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the cost (£1,176) for the Parks Department new computer be approved.

117. **DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY TO COMMITTEES**

The Town Clerk explained the background to the paper. In essence, no recommendations made by committees could be actioned by officers until ratified by Full Council. This in-built delay did not assist with the smooth running of the office as weeks could pass before any action was initiated. This situation could be alleviated by greater powers being delegated to individual committees. He suggested that if the area was within the committee's terms of reference and there was budgetary provision then delegation could take place. Other councils operated similar schemes of delegation and in some cases all councillors attended all meetings so that decisions could be ratified on the day.

Although there was general agreement that the current system was cumbersome, discussions at Full Council had proved to be a worthwhile system

of checks and balances. Decisions, under any proposed new system, could be overturned by a 5 member motion at Full Council but this could be unwieldy if overused. However, it was accepted that delegated authority should be allowed where fact finding/information gathering only was required.

The Committee acknowledged that this issue deserved further consideration and that the Town Clerk should present another paper to the next FS&M meeting. The object of the change would be to streamline the committee process without marginalising councillors. Any changes to the process of delegation should be covered in the Council's financial procedures. It was

**RESOLVED** that

the Town Clerk produces a further report outlining a draft protocol to be presented to FS&M giving a range of proposals and associated detail covering issues such as:

- Information gathering
- Delegation of spending powers within an agreed financial limit
- Need to make urgent decisions
- Level of commitments
- Recording reasons for using delegated powers
- 5 member motions

118. **FREE USE OF COUNCIL PREMISES BY THE MAYOR**

*Councillor Dr B Wood having previously declared a prejudicial interest in this matter left the meeting and took no part in the consideration thereof.*

There was limited discussion on this subject but it was generally accepted that restrictions should not be put on the number of occasions the Mayor has free use of Council premises where the activity was for the benefit of the town. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that it is Council policy to permit the Mayor to make use of the Council's premises in her/his mayoral year, free of charge for fund raising activities specifically for the Mayor's chosen charities and for the benefit of the town.

*Councillor Dr B Wood rejoined the meeting.*

119. **THE TREE OF LIGHT**

*Councillor Mrs J Bland entered the meeting at 9.10pm.*

Councillors Mrs G Dodds and A Follett had attended a presentation by Suzanne Yeates on the Tree of Light including what was involved and how the area would be affected. Unfortunately, the literature attached to the agenda papers did not do the scheme full justice and was unable to provide answers to any detailed questions that related specifically to Henley. Although it was a huge accolade for Henley to be chosen as one of the 'hubs' and the committee was supportive of the aims of the scheme, no promise of funding could be made until more details of Henley's involvement was known.

It was brought to the committee's attention that providing a grant for this venture may upset those other organisations where grants had been declined due to the current economic situation. It was

**RESOLVED** that although there was agreement in principal to the initiative and possible grant, the Town Clerk would need to discuss the situation with the Mayor and also invite Suzanne Yeates to make a presentation on the subject ahead of Full Council on 15 February. In this way all Members would be in possession of all the facts.

120. **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF OXFORDSHIRE**

A debate took place on the reasons for the Boundary Commission instigating a review of Oxfordshire and the possible effects it would have. It was felt that the reduction in the number of OCC councillors from 74 to 64 would inevitably mean larger geographical areas for each councillor to cover with proportionately more work. It could also have the effect of suppressing the independent vote. It was agreed that any re-organisation should ensure that OCC boundaries were co-terminus with those of SODC. It was pointed out that the website ([www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk)) contained more information than was in the report and members were encouraged to visit the site.

Although no response was made by the Council to the first consultation it was generally accepted that the above views should be supported. It was

**RESOLVED** that

- the letter and poster from OCC be noted
- the Town Clerk should investigate whether there were any more (published) details on the subject and if so advise members via the Newsletter
- Members pass any comments they wish to make to the FS&M Chairman so that a consolidated proposed response could be included on the next FS&M agenda for agreement.

121. **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 25  
JANUARY 2011.**

122. **CONFIDENTIAL**

**i) LEGAL UPDATE**

The Committee received and noted the report on the outstanding legal issues. Arising from the foregoing, the Town Clerk advised that the lease between the Council and Headway for the occupation of Brunner Hall had been completed and was awaiting the appropriate Council signatures. It was **RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that authority be granted for the lease to be signed at Full Council on 15 February 2011.

**ii) LEAVER ROAD**

It was agreed that the meeting of the Legal Group should take place at 10.00 on Wednesday 2 February in the Committee Room. Councillor Mrs J Bland volunteered to substitute for Councillor Dr P Skolar and the Committee Administrator undertook to provide her with the relevant copy papers.

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm.

Chairman  
26.1.11