

**Present:** The Mayor, Councillor Mrs P Phillips  
Councillor M Akehurst  
Councillor S Gawrysiak (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor K Gehrman (substituting for Cllr Mrs E Hodgkin)  
Councillor W Hamilton  
Councillor Miss L Hillier  
Councillor Ms L Meachin  
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith  
Councillor I Reissmann (Chair)

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

51. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin.

52. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor D Nimmo-Smith:

Min 55 – Progress Report (Northfield End) – personal (OCC Councillor)  
Councillor I Reissmann

Min 66 – Code of Conduct Complaint – personal and prejudicial  
(Councillor named by the complainant)

The Chairman then left the room and Councillor Gawrysiak took the chair. A debate then ensued on agenda item 16(ii) Code of Conduct Complaint as to whether it should be moved into the public session. The Town Clerk explained that Standing Order 33(d) dictated that it should be included in the confidential section and therefore the Standing Order would need to be suspended if the item was moved. It was suggested that the information would be available from SODC under the Freedom of Information Act so, in essence, it was already in the public domain. A proposal to suspend Standing Order 33(d) was made but lost on a vote. The item would be heard in the confidential session as originally planned.

The Chairman rejoined the meeting and took the chair.

53. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION**

*Mr K Arlett (Elizabeth Road)*

Mr Arlett referred to Item 6iii) – list of payments. He advised the meeting that he had already e-mailed a list of queries to the Town Clerk and thanked the HTC Accountant who had addressed some of them prior to the meeting. He pointed out that the papers were difficult to read as the print was very small. However, he had paid particular attention to the plumbing bills which, in his opinion, appeared very high. He urged the Council to take a longer term look at their suppliers to ensure that bills for services were not over inflated.

The Chairman agreed that the listing was not the easiest to read and thought would be given to its improvement. There was an opportunity for the Value for Money & Resources Working Group to become involved and examine the way preferred suppliers are identified and that best value is gained from expenditure.

Mr Arlett also referred to Item 7 – Staffing. He wondered if any of the Committees could be amalgamated to save money and increase efficiency.

*Councillor I Reissmann (Gainsborough Road).*

Speaking as a member of the public, Councillor Reissmann stated that he would have had no objection to Item 16ii) Code of Conduct Complaint being taken in open session and for the sake of transparency would have preferred that course of action.

54. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee held on 27 September 2011 were received, approved and adopted and signed by the Chairman as a true record save for the addition of an extended sentence under Min 36. The corrected version to read as follows:

“Corporate Plan

Although no date had yet been set for Councillors to meet and construct the foundation of the Plan, it was agreed that the document should contain a medium term financial budget for the rest of this Council’s term.”

55. **PROGRESS REPORT**

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

Northfield End

The Town Clerk reported that a substantive reply to his letter of 19 October had not yet been received but he was aware that the matter had been referred to Kevin Haines. It was agreed that a copy of the Town Clerk’s letter should be circulated to all Councillors in the weekly mailing. It was also reported that the maintenance of the ‘green area’ would be undertaken by the Parks Service as part of their winter maintenance programme.

IT Review

The Town Clerk explained this subject revolved around the current paper filing system in the office and the opportunity to computerise the office record keeping. Only limited progress had been made to date as it was a resource intensive exercise, albeit an important one. It was accepted that any re-organisation may result in efficiency savings and this should be borne in mind when staffing implications are considered.

### Website Working Group

The reference in the report to awaiting instructions from In Touch was clarified by the Accountant. HTC is awaiting forms for completion from In Touch who will be explaining which aspects require significant input from HTC. The forms are expected by the end of the week. Councillors felt that with the Olympics and Jubilee being held in 2012 it was imperative that the new website was in place early in 2012 as it was important to attract visitors to the Town. A further update on timing will be provided at the next FS&M meeting.

### Corporate Plan

There was an extensive discussion on this subject. It was pointed out by one Member that there had been a stated intention to produce a Corporate Plan since the early days of the current Council term. However, there appeared to be a change of mind and a Plan was no longer going to be produced. There was the belief that a Plan would provide a framework explaining the nature, strategy and direction of the organisation. The benefit of such a plan was debated and the majority feeling was that its production would be too resource intensive and could potentially be too rigid. Although a proposal was made to have a Plan in place by 1 January 2012, it was lost on a vote.

### Town Hall ventilation

The Town Clerk confirmed that work on the ventilation system would start this month and a report will be made to the Town & Community Committee. This item could now be removed from the FS&M Progress report.

## 56. **FINANCE**

### i) Budget Monitoring

It was noted that there was a projected surplus against budget of c£42k in the R&A net income. However, this could not be earmarked for other projects at this stage.

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

### ii) Investment Performance

The Investments Managers (IMs) were due to present at the FS&M meeting in December and have been allocated a 10 minute time slot each. One member pointed out that the IMs used to present to the Value for Money and Resources(VfM&R) Group and were each given 30-40 minutes to explain their respective positions with the notes of the meeting being considered by the subsequent FS&M meeting. There was also a query as to whether the IMs could deliver the £160k income as budgeted. The HTC Accountant had asked the IMs that very question three weeks previously and confirmation had been received that they still believed this to be the case. The HTC Accountant undertook to copy the IMs letters to Councillor W Hamilton.

*Action: HTC Accountant*

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

### iii) List of payments

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

A member queried the refund of £200 that had been made to Thomas Shenton. The Town Clerk explained that a licence had been issued to the operator to use

Red Lion Lawn during the Rewind Festival but subsequently all operators' licences for the period were revoked as Red Lion Lawn had to be closed on safety grounds. Any concerns relating to the legality of operator's boats should be discussed at the R&A Committee.

There was also a query as to whether the Council was obtaining best value from their suppliers and not paying over-inflated invoices. The Town Clerk cautioned against making sweeping statements concerning the legitimacy of all invoices but was happy to check on any individual cases where relevant information could be supplied. There was a broad consensus that the VfM&R Group could have a role in determining the broad principles of how preferred suppliers were chosen, ensuring best value and effective procedures for Councillors reconciling payments to invoices.

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

57. **STAFFING LEVELS**

It was noted that the IT Review may impact on staff resource and it was agreed that it would be helpful if the Town Clerk produced a position report on progress to date and the amount of work yet to be undertaken.

It was recognised that 2012 would bring a significant increase in the workload for the Council's staff and to successfully cope with the increase, it must be sufficiently resourced. Although it was agreed that the staffing budget should be increased, equally there must be an examination of working practices to identify efficiency savings. There may be a case for Chairs to work more closely with their Committee Administrators in pursuit of this.

**It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that**

**the Council adds up to £10,000 into the 2012-13 staffing budget only to cover the cost of overtime payments, temporary cover and training costs (for example in Microsoft Access) and that further reports be presented to the Value for Money Working Group as service reviews are undertaken.**

**that the Town Clerk carries out a review (throughout 2012-13) to identify efficiency savings and produce a report for consideration by the FS&M Committee.**

58. **LEVEL OF PRECEPT**

An intense debate took place on whether the precept should be raised and if so, by how much especially in light of the fact that OCC and SODC were not raising theirs. It was accepted that both OCC and SODC did receive money directly from Government which allowed them to implement a zero precept increase but the Town Council did not. It was felt that any increase would be regrettable but essential if the Town Council was going to continue to support local services/issues. The proposed increase of 4% was below the current rate of inflation.

It was proposed that a 4% increase be applied to the precept from 1 April 2012.

A recorded vote was requested:

FOR

Councillor P Phillips  
Councillor Miss K Gehrmann  
Councillor S Gawrysiak  
Councillor Mrs L Meachin  
Councillor I Reissmann  
Councillor M Akehurst

AGAINST

Councillor W Hamilton  
Councillor Miss L Hillier  
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith

**It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that**

**the precept is increased by 4% from 1 April 2012 which would generate an additional £18.7k of income to the Council. (A 4% increase would increase the amount paid by an average Band D property owner by £3.29 per year, to £85.45.)**

59. **FS&M BUDGET 2012-13**

In answer to a query, it was confirmed that the overall budget contained a provision for the replacement of the astropitch and future budgets would continue to do so over the life of the pitch.

It was explained by the Town Clerk that the allocation to grants had been increased slightly (+£1k) and the professional fees budget reduced (-£6k).

**It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that**

**the figures detailed in the budget report be put forward to Full Council for approval.**

Councillors Miss L Hillier and W Hamilton abstained from the vote.

60. **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

To clarify a point raised, the Town Clerk explained that the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) was the overarching body for town and parish councils. It gives guidance and advice when required and has always provided a first class service. In addition, membership of OALC was a prerequisite to being a member of NALC, the national association.

**It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that**

**the list of subscriptions for 2012-13 is approved.**

61. **VARIATION TO STANDING ORDERS**

The Chairman introduced this item as he was the person who had suggested the change to the Standing Order. He had proposed the amendment to ensure that Councillors who were not members of a committee could be treated on an equal footing as members of the public and be called to the table to speak if requested.

**It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that**

**Standing Order 21b be reworded as follows:**

**Members who have not been elected to serve on the Council's appointed Standing Committees, Sub Committees, Advisory Committees or Working Groups are entitled to attend all such meetings as observers and may speak with the permission of the meeting. Councillors may also exercise their rights contained in Standing Order 7 above in common with members of the public during the Public Participation Session.**

**62. SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE CORPORATE PLAN**

The meeting reviewed the draft Plan circulated by South Oxfordshire. Although members were grateful for sight of the document, it was generally felt that it did not add any benefit to service delivery. The main criticisms were:

- Not all the performance indicator values were shown,
- Many of the criteria were subjective,
- Some of the measures appeared fairly dilute
- It was not clear how information would be collected and by whom, and
- Quantative/speed measurements were not necessarily an indication of quality.

There were also questions raised concerning the cost of producing the Plan and the associated costs of collecting the resulting success data.

**It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that**

**Councillors note the content of the draft Plan and request that the Town Clerk responds on behalf of the Council to SODC passing on the appropriate comments before the stated deadline.**

**63. LOCAL COUNCILS AND THE GREEN DEAL**

The meeting noted the content of the papers produced by Jake Smith and the eaga Charitable Trust. No further discussion on the subject took place.

**It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that**

**the Council records its thanks and appreciation to Jake Smith for the work he has undertaken in summarising the opportunities and implications of the Green Deal for Henley residents; and**

**awaits the publication of the toolkit and supports the Council's involvement in promoting the Green Deal.**

**64. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS FOR 2012 AND 2013**

A suggestion was put forward that the Annual Meeting (Mayor Making) should be held in the evening to enable more of the Town's working residents to attend. It was felt that this discussion should be held at Full Council and the decision should not be made by the FS&M Committee.

*Action: Full Council Administrator to add this item to the next agenda.*

A typo was noted with one of the dates in 2013.

**It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that**

**the calendar of meetings for 2012 and 2013 is accepted with the amendment that the Full Council meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2013 be amended to read 7<sup>th</sup> May.**

65. **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 8 NOVEMBER 2011.**

66. **CONFIDENTIAL**

**i) LEGAL UPDATE**

The meeting reviewed the report and made the following comments:

Leaver Road

Two of the Councillors had been unable to open the e-mailed draft letter and the Committee Administrator was asked to re-send in an earlier Word version so that the draft could be cleared. As soon as final clearance is received it will be forwarded to the Council's solicitors.

Pavilion

A member requested that the oversized advert at the nursery be moved to the side of the building so it is not so conspicuous.

Barn

A member enquired why the Council was going to the expense of installing a carpet (plus underlay) in the Margaret Day room when the main benefit seemed to be for the commercial tenant in the office below. The Town Clerk explained that noise from the upstairs room was significant and had been a long running issue. He believed the carpet would bring many benefits i.e. fewer complaints from the tenant, greater insulation, heat conservation, would protect the original hardwood floor from damage and eliminate possible health and safety issues arising from the protruding nail heads. The installation of two (outside) door closures would also greatly assist in reducing heat loss from the building.

**It was RESOLVED that the legal update report be noted.**

**ii) CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT**

Due to the Chairman's personal and prejudicial interest in this item, Councillor Reissmann left the room and the chair was taken by Councillor S Gawrysiak.

The Town Clerk was asked whether it was appropriate to ask SODC for a group dispensation to be applied as all the Councillors were acquainted with Councillor Reissmann and therefore could be seen to have a personal and prejudicial interest as a result. However, it was generally felt that there was little merit in discussing the subject and effectively it had now been closed. If the meeting merely wished just to note the papers then a dispensation would not be necessary. It was agreed that there was little to be gained in prolonging the issue as it had been the subject of discussion on a number of other occasions.

**It was RESOLVED that the report be noted**

Councillor I Reissmann rejoined the meeting, took the chair and closed the meeting.

The meeting closed at 22.05pm.

Chairman  
9.11.11