

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

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

62. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

63. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

It was realised that, as the majority of councillors claimed mileage expenses, then an interest had to be declared. This would mean that Councillors would have to leave the room for the debate on Councillors' Mileage Rates, and therefore the meeting would not be quorate. A dispensation could be applied but as it was not an agenda item, it could not be discussed. The Town Clerk advised that the dispensation would be reported to Council for approval and the report would be considered at the next meeting on 5 February 2013.

Councillor Miss L Hillier – Min 70 – Shop Front Improvement Scheme – Shop Owner

64. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION**

None.

65. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee held on 6 November 2012 were received, approved and adopted and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

66. **PRESENTATION FROM NOMAD**

Sue Prior (NOMAD Project Lead) was invited to the table to give a short presentation of the work of NOMAD in Henley. She thanked the Council for the opportunity to speak and for the support the organisation had received since the centre was opened in 1996. She explained that the Council had provided initial funding to set up their work and had been supporting them ever since. NOMAD works with families who are disadvantaged, on low income and/or experiencing social issues. It is a local organisation serving the local community with a long term commitment to the area and has had an excellent track record. Funds are currently used for parenting programmes, tackling attendance issues at school, problems with drug and alcohol abuse and organising annual events such as trips to the seaside.

She explained that the contract to provide the children's centre services has been lost and that service would now be provided by Action for Children. However, the work of NOMAD would still continue with children over 5, youths and families. Approximately 14 of the current staff will TUPE over to the new provider which will ensure a degree of continuity. However, the loss of funding that was allied to the original contract (approx 50% of NOMAD's total income) will have an impact on the remaining services as there was a degree of cross-subsidisation. It was Sue's view that funding from the Council was still essential and requested that the Council look favourably on the budget proposal to raise the grant from £5k to £10k for 2013-14.

The Chairman asked if there were other ways (apart from financial) where the Council could be of assistance such as free use of buildings, permission to use land etc. Sue stated that it was extremely useful to have a Town Council representative on their committee and she would give some thought to what else could be requested.

The Chairman thanked Sue for her attendance at the meeting and the sensitive presentation she gave on the work of NOMAD

67. **PROGRESS REPORT**

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

Energy Reduction

The Town Clerk advised that he had responded in full to the letter in the Henley Standard that was critical of the process of installing the PV panels. The Chairman pointed out that although others may be critical of the decision to install the panels, the formal procurement process was legitimate and followed financial regulations.

Social Media Policy

This item had now been completed and should be removed from future progress reports.

68. **FINANCE**

i) **Budget Monitoring**

The Capex table listed three amounts for the supply and installation of the PV panels on the Over 60s Club, Sports Centre and Fitness Centre. However, the overall amount did not reconcile with that on the payments listings.

*Action: HTC Accountant to investigate and report outcome.
(The Accountant can confirm that the total of £55,437 per the Capex table excluded VAT at the special rate of 5%. Once 5% is added the figure equals the amount of £58,209 shown in the list of payments)*

It was agreed that the reference in the Balance Sheet to Britain in Bloom under the Net Assets should be renamed 'Henley in Bloom' and the reference to a £10k grant previously received and now part of the accumulated fund balance should be deleted.

It was RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

ii) **Investment Performance**

No discussion took place on the update and therefore it was

RESOLVED that the update be received and noted.

iii) **List of payments**

No discussion took place on the update and therefore it was

RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

69. **PLANNED MAINTENANCE**

It was suggested that when reporting this item the phrase 'land and buildings' be used and not just buildings as there was a maintenance requirement for land as well. The Accountant advised that the underspend from the current year's budget had allowed the repairs to Red Lion Lawn to be paid out of the General Fund rather than reserves.

It was RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that

Councillors note the planned maintenance budget; and

approve that expenditure for Mill Meadows toilets should come from general reserves but not be included in the operational budget due to its one-off nature.

70. **SHOP FRONT IMPROVEMENT SCHEME**

Councillor Miss L Hillier left the meeting for this item.

The Front Shop Improvement Scheme was discussed at length. The paper prepared by the Town Centre Manager was well received but there was concern that council tax payers' money would be used to subsidise improvements to commercial properties which should be the responsibility of the owner/tenant. The detail of the scheme had not yet been considered by the Town & Community Committee but the provision was included in the budget to enable the project to go ahead if that committee recommended it should do so.

It was felt that the suggested £10k provision was too high and should be reduced to £5k although it was debated how much impact the funds could actually make considering the number of premises in the town that would benefit from improvements. Due to budgetary constraints only £5k has been included in the budget considered at 74 below, not the £10k as recommended in the report.

It was RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that

Councillors approve the funding cap of £5,000 as included in the 2013-14 budget towards a Shop Front Improvement Scheme (on the assumption that match funding is forthcoming from SODC); and

Subject to Council's approval, the matter is referred to the Town & Community Committee to consider the scheme in more detail.

Councillor Miss L Hillier rejoined the meeting.

71. **PROFESSIONAL FEES**

The meeting felt that the breakdown of legal and professional costs was very enlightening and gave a good insight into the variety of work that was undertaken by the Council and the number of specialists needed to be employed. It was agreed that a similar list should be presented each year at the same time as the budget is considered. The Chairman reiterated that where specialist advice was required, the Council should engage the necessary expertise.

It was RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that

Committee notes the breakdown of costs, requests that an annual report be prepared as part of the budget setting process and approves the 2013-14 budget figure of £19k.

72. **SUBSCRIPTIONS TO PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS 2013-14**

The meeting noted the list of subscriptions. No comments were made.

It was RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that

Councillors approve the list of subscriptions for 2013-14

73. **COUNCILLORS' MILEAGE RATES**

This item was not discussed due to the Declarations of Interest as detailed in minute 63.

74. **2013-14 BUDGET**

The Chairman introduced the paper and explained that a number of assumptions had been made to enable the budget to be constructed, namely the salary increase of 1% for staff (as indicated in the Autumn Statement) and the amount of grant (£15k) forthcoming from SODC to compensate for the reduction in the tax base. The budget also assumed a 2% increase in the Band D Council tax figure to go some way towards filling the funding gap of £28k caused by the localised council tax reduction scheme. It was explained that the budget needed to be approved by Full Council on January 15 unless a Special Full Council meeting was called to approve the budget after this date (but before the cut-off date imposed by SODC). SODC have requested town and parish councils to submit their precept requests by 31st January 2013 although the statutory requirement is 28th February.

There was discussion regarding £5k of costs for the National Henley in Bloom competition. The expense had been removed from the budget on the basis that it could be funded from the earmarked reserve for Britain in Bloom (in the balance sheet brought forward). There was however strong support that the cost should come from revenue instead. The budget is to be amended to return the £5k to costs under Recreation & Amenities. The resulting operational budget deficit will be around £5k.

The Capital Expenditure budget for 2013-14, and the years beyond, was discussed. The Chairman explained that the monies allocated against the various items did not automatically mean that the projects would all go ahead or that all the allocated funds would be spent but it was important that provision was made for the items in case they were progressed. It was pointed out that the Christmas lights items was incorrectly shown under T&C and should be moved to R&A.

It was agreed that the 'Traffic calming' item should be renamed 'safety measures'. There was a motion to delete this expenditure from the budget completely but the motion was lost on the Chairman's casting vote. There was a second motion to bring the expenditure forward from 2014-15 to 2013-14. This motion was carried on the Chairman's casting vote.

The provision for £10k to be spent on the solar panels on the roof of the Town Hall was discussed and a motion to delete the item was lost. The expenditure will remain in the 2013-14 budget.

A query arose on the amount of £10k allocated for the fencing and Japanese knotweed at Makins. There was a potential saving if the Parks Service staff can carry out some of the work but adequate funds needed to be available should this not be the case.

It was agreed that the item entitled 'Recreation (Makins Recreation Ground)' should be renamed 'Recreation improvements' to widen the scope. The budget indicated expenditure of £20k in each of 2013/14 and 2014/15. There were two motions as follows: a motion to delete the £20k from the 2013/14 budget, this motion was lost; and a motion to bring the £20k forward from 2014/15 to 2013/14 to make a total of £40k in 2013/14 and this was also lost. The status quo of £20k in each of 2013/14 and 2014/15 therefore remains.

There were a number of comments regarding whether the precept should be raised and accepting the budget as presented would result in a 2% increase in the average Band D rate. It was noted that this remains below the current rate of inflation despite the loss of £28k caused by the localised council tax reduction scheme introduced by parliamentary legislation. As such it was requested that the proposal to accept the budget was made with a recorded vote.

FOR

The Mayor, Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor S Gawrysiak
Councillor M Akehurst
Councillor Mrs P Phillips
Councillor I Reissmann
Councillor Mrs J Wood

AGAINST

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

It was RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that

Councillors recommend the budget for approval at Full Council, subject to finalization of the SODC grant and the 1% staff salary increase with the proviso that:

- the £5k for the National Henley in Bloom competition be returned to Recreation & Amenities expenditure.
- £30k in the capital budget for Traffic Calming in 2014-15 be renamed as Safety Measures and moved into the 2013-14 budget.

75. ELECTORAL REVIEW OF SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE

The information supplied by the Local Government Boundary Commission was noted. It was agreed that no further representations needed to be made as the draft recommendations had included the Council's previous comments.

It was RESOLVED that the summary of draft recommendations be noted.

76. 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 18 DECEMBER 2012.

Having regard to *Standing Order 1aa* and the time meetings of the Council and its Committees shall conclude by 10.00pm, it was

RESOLVED that the remaining business on the agenda, save for the Citizens Advice Bureau Lease, shall stand deferred to the following meeting of the Committee.

In noting that this was the second consecutive meeting of the Committee where business had failed to be concluded, it was

RESOLVED that consideration be given to commencing the next meeting of the Committee at 7.00pm subject to the nature of the business to be transacted.

77. **CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU**

The report gave details of the proposed merger of the boards of the Citizen Advice Bureaux in Abingdon, Didcot, Henley and Thame from 1 April 2013 and the establishment of an Executive Committee of the new Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizen Advice Bureau.

Representatives on the Shadow Board had reassured the Council of its previous concerns as set out in the report. It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that a new lease is put in place between the Council and the Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice Bureau for the occupation of 32 Market Place on the same terms and existing rent as the Henley and District CAB current enjoy from 1 April 2013 until 31 December 2024.

The meeting closed at 10.10 pm.

Chairman
19.12.12