

HENLEY-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE  
STRATEGY & MANAGEMENT  
COMMITTEE HELD ON 10  
SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 7.00  
PM, COUNCIL CHAMBER,  
TOWN HALL, HENLEY-ON-  
THAMES.

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**Present:**

The Mayor, Councillor S Gawrysiak  
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor M Akehurst  
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 Miss K Hinton (substituting for Cllr Mrs J Wood)

**In attendance:**

Mr M W Kennedy – Town Clerk  
Mrs L Jones – HTC Accountant  
Mrs H King – Committee Administrator  
1 member of the press

33. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs J Wood. There were also apologies from Councillor Miss L Hillier for a possible late arrival.

34. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

35. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION**

There were no members of the public in attendance.

36. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy and Management (FS&M) Committee held on 16 July 2013 were received, approved and adopted and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

*Councillor Mrs P Phillips joined the meeting at 7.05pm*

37. **PROGRESS REPORT**

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

Bell St & Northfield End – Parking & Highway issues/Land outside Sydney House

Councillor D Nimmo-Smith gave a verbal update on progress. He confirmed that OCC carried out its parking survey by the end of June with the intention that the results would be available at the end of August. He advised the meeting that he would be meeting his OCC colleagues later this month to discuss the outcome. The discussions would also cover the Sydney House area and the Georgian pavement. Members were keen to see the Georgian pavement reinstated as this was an important part of the heritage of the Town. Councillor Nimmo-Smith was also asked to impress on OCC that the Town Council would like to continue to be involved in any future meetings and have an input into the management of the respective areas.

Henley Town Council Grant Application Form

It was noted that the form had been updated and copies were available on the website. This item could now be removed from the Progress Report.

NALC Consultation Paper

The response had been submitted prior to the deadline and it was agreed that the item could be removed from Progress.

38. **FINANCE**

i) Management Accounts

The meeting reviewed the figures but no questions were raised. It was

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

ii) Investment Performance

It was noted that the investments handled by Rathbones had performed less well than those handled by Investec. It was confirmed that both Investment Managers will be giving presentations to the October FS&M meeting and councillors will have the opportunity to put forward any questions they may have. To assist, the Accountant will be preparing relevant investment figures covering the past 3 years and will circulate these to Councillors in early October. It was

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

iii) List of payments

The list of payments was reviewed. A Member questioned whether a comprehensive breakdown of the Henley in Bloom/Britain in Bloom budget was available. It was confirmed this was the case. It was

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

*Councillor Miss L Hillier joined the meeting at 7.25pm*

39. **GRANTS**

Each of the applications were discussed and considered. The Chairman reminded the meeting of the overall budget and the fact that there would be a second tranche of applications to be reviewed in March 2014. It was

**RESOLVED that the following grants be awarded:**

<b>Town &amp; Visitors Regatta</b>	<b>£1,500</b>
<b>Aliquando Choir</b>	<b>£ 627</b>
<b>Victim Support</b>	<b>£ 500</b>
<b>Sports &amp; Fitness Academy</b>	<b>£ 500</b>
<b>Berks MS Therapy Centre</b>	<b>£1,000</b>
<b>Gainsborough Residents Group</b>	<b>£ 270 (free use)</b>
<b>Henley &amp; District Theatre Organ Trust</b>	<b>£ 450</b>
<b>Rotary Club Henley-on-Thames</b>	<b>£ 212.50 (free use)</b>

Sports & Fitness Academy

The grant made was less than the amount applied for and Members suggested that the organisation should be advised that additional funding may be sought from Sport England and the Community Investment Fund and this should be made clear when the Academy was advised of the outcome of this application.

Gainsborough Residents Group

The meeting was very supportive of this new group and was happy to grant the application for free use. It was also felt that the committee may look favourably on future applications as the Group grew and became more established. The Group should be encouraged to apply again for the March round of grants if appropriate. Councillor Miss K Hinton offered to speak to the Group in person to relay the Committee's thoughts on their endeavours.

40. **2013-14 PAY SCALES**

The meeting noted the revised pay scales from 1 April 2013 published by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services. Reference was made to the fact that this 1% increase, the first pay award in four years, is significantly below the published private sector pay increase of 12% over the past five years. It was

**RESOLVED that the revised pay scales for 2013-14 be noted.**

41. **FINANCE PLANNING & SCRUTINY GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE**

A view was expressed that the number of Councillors serving on this Group was too many and should be reduced from 6 to 5, the original number serving on the (now replaced) Value For Money Group. This would restore a better 'political' balance. A motion that the number be reduced to 5 was lost, whereupon it was agreed that the number should remain at 6 Councillors and 3 officers.

Standing Orders stipulated that with 6 Councillors, the quorum size only needed to be three, i.e. 50% of the number serving on the committee/sub-committee/working group. A motion that the quorum be reduced from 4 to 3 was also lost, whereupon it was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the quorum size remain at 4 Councillors (as specified in the current Terms of Reference)**

42. **VAT VISIT**

It was noted that the compliance visit by HMRC had been short and had not revealed any shortcomings in the Council's systems and controls. The meeting congratulated the Accountant for ensuring that the visit had been successful. It was

**RESOLVED that Councillors note that the VAT visit occurred and that the inspector had confirmed that the compliance check has been closed.**

43. **SUPPLIER CONTRACTS REVIEWS**

The report on savings was noted. The Accountant also reported that a meeting with MFG (the Council's IT supplier) had taken place that morning to discuss present and future requirements and the financial impact. Feedback from that meeting will form part of a report to be presented to the FPS meeting on 25 September. The notes of that meeting will be submitted to FS&M in October for consideration. The meeting was pleased to see that the officers had continued to identify savings both in contract renewals and other areas of their work. It was

**RESOLVED that the pro-active approach that continues to be undertaken by the Accounts Department and the positive results being obtained be noted.**

44. **CHILTERN CENTRE – LOAN AGREEMENT**

The meeting conveyed congratulations to the Chiltern Centre for the excellent work it undertakes as well as its ability to fund raise. Members were pleased to note that the Centre had managed to raise sufficient funds to repay the £100k HTC loan. It was agreed that the Council had sufficient foresight at the time the loan was granted to support the Centre financially. It was agreed that the Council should forego the £1,430 interest and regard it as a donation to the Centre. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council forego the interest due from the borrower having regard to the fact that the early repayment of the £100,000 loan will enable the capital sum to be reinvested at a superior rate of return.**

45. **2014-15 BUDGET**

It was confirmed that the assumption regarding the salary increase (1%) did not include contractual incremental rises which had already been built into the budget figures. The Chairman reminded Councillors that real pay in the public sector has fallen by 16% which was much greater than the 2.9% overall median. The capex figure was questioned as to whether it needed to be so high. The Chairman confirmed that the £250k was a recommended limit and the Standing Committees would need to consider their individual capex requirements. However, it needed to be borne in mind that income generation is reduced as investments are sold to fund capital projects. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that Councillors approve the following for inclusion in the 2014-15 budget:**

- **an assumed rate of inflation of 2.5%.**
- **an assumed across the board salary increase of 1%.**
- **an overall recommended capex limit of £250,000.**

46. **PLANNED MAINTENANCE**

The Town Clerk introduced the paper. He confirmed that £70k of precepted money is ringfenced each year to manage/maintain the Council's buildings. Keith Douglas Partnership undertook the first 5 year plan covering each of the buildings and their various requirements. There had been some additional unforeseen expenditure such as Red Lion Lawn which was also met from the Planned Maintenance budget. The scope of the next plan will be widened to include the mechanical and electrical elements of the buildings (and land). Although it was normal practice to obtain 3 quotes, only two companies responded on this occasion due to the specialist nature of the work. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that Councillors recommend that the quote presented by Company A in the sum of £6,250 is accepted, and that the Accountant appoints a chosen electrical contractor and heating/plumbing contractor to undertake condition surveys in the sums of £1,000 and £1,200 respectively in their specialist areas on all HTC properties.**

47. **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

It was confirmed that details of Harpsden's proposal to amend the existing boundary had not been seen and that a request should be made to have sight of a copy. It was noted that the Community Governance Review ToR made no reference to the fact that the Neighbourhood Plan is in progress. The District Council has delegated powers concerning the Review and will take the decision on the changes in 2014 to come into effect from the local elections in 2015. The Neighbourhood Plan referendum will take place in 2014 and the timing may cause confusion amongst the public. It was

**RESOLVED (under delegated powers) that the Town Clerk writes to SODC highlighting the circumstances of the timing of the Neighbourhood Plan & referendum and that of the boundary changes before the consultation deadline date of 30 September.**

48. **RENEWAL OF CONTRACT WITH ADVISORS ELLIS WHITTAM**

The Town Clerk confirmed that Ellis Whittam had provided an extremely good service over the years. They have had a great deal of input into the Council's procedures to ensure that they are compliant with the latest employment and H&S legislation. As legislation in these areas change regularly, it is important there is ongoing support. It was felt that the company provided good value for money when compared with alternative HR providers. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND approval of the continuing contract with Ellis Whittam at a rate of £3,000pa for three years from September 2013.**

49. **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 10 SEPTEMBER 2013.**

50. **CONFIDENTIAL**

i) **LEGAL UPDATE**

Bath Site

Only one of the annual licences was outstanding.

*(Accountant's post meeting note: this remaining licence holder is paying monthly by special concession, such that the full amount will be paid off within the period of a year)*

Fairground Rides

The Town Clerk reported that he had a very productive meeting with the tenants the previous day which will result in some minor changes to the wording in the lease. The Council's solicitor has been advised.

ii) **KIOSK AT MILL MEADOWS**

The meeting noted the draft lease and no comments were made. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that Councillors approve the content of the lease and authorise the Town Clerk to progress the matter to an agreed conclusion with the intention to have the final document signed at Full Council on 1 October.**

iii) **GARAGE AT MAKINS**

The meeting noted the draft lease and no comments were made. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that Councillors approve the content of the lease and authorise the Town Clerk to progress the matter to an agreed conclusion with the intention to have the final document signed at Full Council on 1 October.**

iv) **BARN**

The meeting noted the draft lease and no comments were made. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that Councillors approve the content of the lease and authorise the Town Clerk to progress the matter to an agreed conclusion with the intention to have the final document signed at Full Council on 1 October.**

v) **MOORINGS – RENT REVIEW**

The Town Clerk explained the monitoring role performed by Mr Hooper which involved a daily presence on the site, liaising with Council staff, policing unauthorised moorers and protecting boats during flood conditions. It was felt that he provided a very useful service. In future, the Council may consider sub-contracting the management of the Little White Hart moorings and Mr Hooper may be able to play some part in this. However, it was recognised that this was a matter for the R&A Committee and will need to be added to a future agenda.

*Action: R&A Committee Administrator*

The meeting could not agree on the appropriate level of increase in the rent and felt that guidance should be sought from an independent valuer to get an accurate commercial valuation. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that an independent valuation is carried out to determine a proposed level of rent which would be considered by the Finance Committee.**

vi) **PAVILION – RENT REVIEW**

The Town Clerk explained the situation surrounding the rent review. The SODC rates revaluation, requested by HTC, had resulted in the Council's liability reducing but unfortunately the nursery became separately assessed (as an exclusive user of the top floor) and their rates bill increased substantially. The increase has been applied from April 2013. The tenant has the ability to appeal against the decision should she wish. In view of this increased cost, the Committee was reluctant to increase the rent. Consequently, it was

**RESOLVED to note that that the service charge has been reduced to £2,250pa from 1 April 2013 to reflect the separate rates assessment now charged on the tenant directly and that the electricity charges are recharged at cost on a quarterly basis retrospectively; and**

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council approves a 0% increase in rent for the two years (1 October 2013 to 30 September 2015)**

**vii) 40 ACRE FIELD**

The meeting noted that there had been very few issues associated with the current tenant and were content that a new tenancy be granted. It was

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that a new 3 year tenancy is granted on the basis;**

- the tenant to be responsible for the Council's proper legal fees,
- the annual rent to be fixed at £2,300pa.
- the agreement to specifically refer to the requirement to keep the trafficked area clear of debris.

**viii) REQUEST TO PURCHASE HTC LAND**

The meeting considered a letter from the River & Rowing Museum offering to buy that part of the freehold land of Mill Meadows where the Museum stands plus the freehold of their car park and the land in front of the Museum. The Town Clerk had responded to the letter to say the matter would be considered at his meeting with a recommendation to Full Council on 1 October and that they could expect a substantive reply after this date.

The Committee felt that this area was amenity land for the benefit of all current and future residents and should not be sold. In addition, by retaining the land in Council ownership it would prevent any onward sale. It was unanimously

**RESOLVE to RECOMMEND that the offer to sell the land is declined and that the River & Rowing Museum are advised in writing stressing that the Council is looking forward to working in partnership with them on this key site in Henley.**

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

Chairman  
11.9.13