

Present:

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor S Gawrysiak
Councillor M Akehurst (Vice chair)
Councillor W Hamilton
Councillor Miss L Hillier
Councillor Miss K Gehrman (substituting for Cllr Mrs E Hodgkin)
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

47. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from The Mayor, Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin and from Councillor Mrs J Wood for a possible late arrival.

48. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

49. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION**

Mr D Dickie (St Katherine's Road)

Mr Dickie thanked the Committee for the grant that was made to Café Scientifique and for the support the venture had received generally. He confirmed that most of the speakers had come from the Henley area. Events are widely advertised in the Henley Standard, the Council's notice board and will be promoted on the Council's website.

The Chairman suggested there may be a link between the ideas behind Café Scientifique and the Schools Science Competition and suggested that Mr Dickie explore this aspect.

Mr Dickie said that he hoped that no Council monies had been spent on the forthcoming Police Commissioner elections and that he had not seen any literature on the subject. The Chairman confirmed that resources were only spent covering elections to the Town Council.

Councillor Mrs J Wood joined the meeting at 7.35.

50. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee held on 25 September 2012 were received, approved and adopted and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

Due to the projected late arrival of one of the Investment Managers, it was

RESOLVED that the order of business be varied in accordance with Standing Orders and that the Agenda item 6 (Progress Report) be moved forward to the next item of business.

51. **PROGRESS REPORT**

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

Energy Reduction

The meeting was impressed with the speed of installation of the PV panels and the Town Clerk was thanked for all his hard work on the project especially with regard to the numerous and complex forms which had to be completed in time to benefit from the current Feed in Tariff rate. The Town Clerk was aware that the Henley Standard had received letters of complaint regarding the PV panels. He will be responding to the comments made by the paper's deadline.

The Town Clerk advised the meeting that a separate report would be presented to the next R&A committee covering the possible installation of PV panels on the Pavillion roof at Mill Meadows. The report will also contain photos as requested. If the installation is recommended, the matter will return to FS&M to examine the financial implications.

It was also agreed that a post implementation review takes place and a report submitted to FS&M.

Electoral Review of South Oxfordshire

The results of the Review are expected by the end of November.

52. **PRESENTATION BY THE INVESTMENT MANAGERS**

The Investment Managers (IM) Rupert Baron (Rathbones) and Charles Heaton (Investec) had already supplied the figures which the Accountant had incorporated into the summary attached to the Agenda.

Charles Heaton spoke to the figures and the narrative in his report and confirmed that it should be possible to achieve a c£90k income figure for the Council which exceeded the request of £80k per IM. He confirmed that the Council's portfolio was not exposed to any high risk areas and there was the expectation of continued capital growth and income generation. His full report has subsequently been circulated to Councillors.

Rupert Baron also gave a short presentation revolving around the figures and narrative he had supplied. He stressed that, from the Council's point of view,

investments must always keep ahead of inflation to ensure that services can be delivered to the same degree in future as now. Although the Council's level of income request was manageable should large drawdowns from capital become more frequent this will make it increasingly difficult to satisfy revenue requirements. On average, every £100k drawdown will reduce the revenue generation by £4k. He asked the Council to think carefully in future whether its priority was for income generation or capital growth as this would affect the IM's type and spread of investments bought/held. Rupert did point out that when Rathbones did not generate the level of income required by the Council, investments were sold to make up the quarterly payments to the Council of £21,250 (£85,000pa).

One Member asked why one portfolio had performed better than the other when both IMs followed the same Council investment policy. It was stated that there were no specific reasons although one of the IMs may have exposure to slightly higher risks (but still within the agreed parameters). It was pointed out that there was a benefit in having the portfolio split between two IMs to ensure that differences are evened out.

It was noted that the Council's Investment Policy was to limit the investments in equities to no more than 70% and it was queried whether this figure should be reduced to 60%. It was acknowledged by the IMs that 70% is considered at the high end of the 'medium' risk range and certainly should not be increased, but that a reduction to 60% could reduce their flexibility in achieving the aims set by the Council.

In answer to a question as to the right time to sell investments, the IMs confirmed that a drawdown of £100k would not be noticeably detrimental as the quality of stocks held were good although it would have a knock-on effect on the ability to generate income. In the long-term, there cannot be a constant requirement for capital drawdown and the same expectation for income.

A member expressed the opinion that the stock market follows a 10 year cycle and with the amount of quantitative easing that had taken place over the last few years, it would not be surprising if inflation were to rise and consequently were the IMs cognisant of the types of assets that were preferable under the circumstances. It was confirmed by the IMs that their preference would be to move into index linked gilts, companies with property holdings etc.

It was explained that the Council may be looking to make a large capital spend in the future and would look to obtaining a loan from the Public Loans Works Board. However, approval for the loan is only made at the last minute and if the request was refused would the IMs be able to raise the required sum at very short notice. Both confirmed this would be possible.

The Chairman thanked both the Investment Managers for attending the meeting and presenting their respective cases and also participating in the Q&A session.

The Annual Treasury Management Strategy was also part of this agenda item. No comments were made on the contents. It was

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the 2013-14 Annual Treasury Management Strategy 2013-14 be approved.

53. **FINANCE**

i) **Budget Monitoring**

There were no material comments on the report.

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.

iv) **Cumulative suppliers**

It was pointed out that the grant made to Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin for her duties as Mayor was more than the allocation in the budget to cover grants to local organisations. It was

RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

54. **FINANCIAL PLANNING & SCRUTINY GROUP**

The notes of the 23 October meeting were reviewed. The Chairman reminded the committee that the role of the FPS Group was to act in an advisory role and flag up issues for other Committees to review.

The Accountant had provided the list of cleaning supplies used by the Council to Councillor Hillier who was confident she could source the materials at a more cost effective price.

It was pointed out that the minutes were misleading where reference was made to the small Christmas Trees Scheme. The Lions had not taken over this project from HTC, their involvement was limited to canvassing traders as to whether they wanted to purchase trees. The Lions received a small commission from the supplier which they donated to their charities.

The level of the proposed NOMAD grant was discussed (£10k). Although everyone felt it was a worthwhile organisation which undertook a vital role, a Member queried whether the level of grant was appropriate. Strong support for the increase was expressed by other members and it was agreed that Sue Prior (NOMAD) be invited to present to the Committee on NOMAD's work and its value to Henley. It was suggested that Sue Prior (NOMAD) should apply to the Community Fund for further assistance.

The question of the £60k for the Mill Meadows toilets was raised. The figure had been arrived at by requesting ball-park figures from two building companies. The project is a refurbishment as opposed to the proposed scheme 3 years ago which involved much greater structural changes (and was commensurately more expensive). The project is being progressed through the R&A Committee. This is not, at present, considered a capital project but would be included in the planned maintenance. It was

RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

55. **2013-14 BUDGET**

It was noted that a 'sinking fund' was needed for a number of items including the future refurbishment of the toilets (after the current project is completed). Provision needs to be made each year for the big ticket items and precepted so that there is not an unnecessary draw on capital. A financial strategy will be developed to take account of this issue which will give comprehensive guidance and clarity.

A Member asked for a breakdown of the 2012-13 Professional Fees as the budgeted figure looked high. The in-year figure only appeared underspent as legal fees were not invoiced until each case was finalised so the true picture would not emerge until nearer the end of the financial year.

Action: HTC Accountant to provide breakdown of professional Fees

It was agreed that if there were any queries on individual entries in the Budget, they could be e-mailed to the Accountant direct.

The Town Clerk was asked to investigate the legality of obtaining a loan to fund capital projects. It is illegal to borrow money at a low interest rate to invest it at a higher rate. Whilst the loan applied for would not directly be invested at a higher rate, the act of obtaining a loan would mean that investments (that yield a higher rate of return than the interest rate payable on a PWLB loan) do not need to be drawn down, which could be viewed as tantamount to the same thing. The Town Clerk should report back to FS&M whether a loan is a practical solution.

There was the suggestion that the budget for part-funding the PCSO should be removed and greater effort should be made to explore whether the expense would be covered elsewhere e.g. TVP or SODC. However, it was agreed that the provision should remain. Consequently, it was

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that

Councillors note the progress made on the 2013-14 and the need for final decisions to be made at the FSM meeting on 18 December;

Councillors recommend for approval a capital expenditure limit of £100,000 for 2013-14, and note the wish list of currently suggested capital schemes;

Councillors recommend that the Accountant contact the Investment Managers with a view to making funds of £50k on each portfolio readily available while stock values are buoyant, to finance all the capital expenditure for 2013-14 in case the Council is not eligible to take out a loan. These funds to be held in interest bearing stocks until required;

if Councillors wish the Accountant to investigate further the possibility of taking out a PWLB loan, they agree to a loan term of 10 years at a fixed rate of interest, repayable in equal 6 monthly instalments.

56. **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

When the Council's new website was developed, the decision was taken not to have links to any social media websites. However, it is now accepted that the Council should be more receptive to this idea as it will aid communication with all sectors of the Town and its population. The issue had arisen as the Henley in Bloom committee wished to use this aspect to promote their work.

The draft policy which was produced by the Town Manager was commended but it was agreed that the Press and Media Protocol currently in force should be adapted to cater for the social media aspect and re-named the Communications Policy. Section 15 (Internet Use) would need to be updated to include the following:

"HTC will use social media when the Officers, Committees, Working Groups or other authorised HTC entity decides that this is desirable. Such use must be regulated, monitored and moderated in the same way as other media as specified in Section 6 of this document. Communication of this sort should be regularly reviewed by the commissioning committee/group"

Concern was expressed that there may be a resource implication as all traffic would need to be monitored and moderated by officers. It was agreed that use of social network sites should be considered on a case by case basis and a review should be undertaken in six months time. It was

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that

Members approve the principle of adopting social media channels on the Council website;

the Media Protocol document is renamed the Communications Policy and that section 15 Internet Use has the following added:

"HTC will use social media when the Officers, Committees, Working Groups or other authorised HTC entity decides that this is desirable. Such use must be regulated, monitored and moderated in the same way as other media as specified in Section 6 of this document. Communication of this sort should be regularly reviewed by the commissioning committee/group"

An updated copy of the Policy document is attached.

57. **FREE USE OF COUNCIL BUILDINGS**

The meeting was interested in the values of the free use given to organisations as this is the first time it had been presented in such detail. It was also noted that a couple of the organisations also benefitted from cheaper than commercial rents in their leased properties. It was appreciated that the free use evenings (on Mondays and Tuesdays) were the least popular for commercial hirers so material income was not being lost. It was

It was RESOLVED that

Councillors note the levels of free use being made of Council rooms in the quarter to 30th June 2012, and

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that

Councillors approve the list of additional organisations contained in the report for inclusion on the list, and continue to support all those at Section 1 of the schedule.

58. **BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND**

No discussion took place on this item. It was

RESOLVED that the letter be noted.

59. **CHRISTMAS ARRANGEMENTS 2012**

It was recognised that the staff had worked hard during the year and had contributed to the successful running of the Council. It was pointed out that the award would be made from public funds but it was felt that, nevertheless, the payment should be made. It was

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that

the Town Hall is closed from Tuesday 25th December 2012 through to Tuesday 1st 2013 inclusive, and that three days are granted to staff as additional, discretionary, non contractual leave, subject to any cover arrangements required by the Town Clerk.

staff required to provide cover during the normal working hours of 27th, 28th and 31st December 2012 i.e. Park Services and Wardens be granted time off in lieu on a straight one for one basis.

the Council considers making a contribution of £450 (+VAT if applicable) towards the staff Christmas festivities as a token of the Council's thanks and appreciation for their work throughout the past year. The money to be spent in Henley (if possible).

60. **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 6 NOVEMBER 2012.

61. **CONFIDENTIAL**

i) **LEGAL UPDATE**

Makins & 18 Harcourt Close

Members considered the response from the Simmons and Son and their assessment of the valuation of the parcel of land forming part of the land at Makins Recreation Ground. Having regard to the former use of the site, its possible contamination and cost of reclamation works it was

RESOLVED that the matter be deferred to the next meeting.

ii) **HENLEY TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB**

The final draft version of the lease had been circulated to the meeting and no queries or questions were raised. It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that the final version be signed and sealed at Full Council on 27 November.

iii) **CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU**

The report gave details of the proposed merger of the Citizens' Advice Bureau at Henley, Abingdon, Didcot and Thame. Members considered the implications for the Council having regard to the fact that a new lease would be required for the occupation of 32 Market Place by the new merged management board.

The Committee considered certain conditions that it would seek from the new CAB before entering into a new lease as set out in the report. Members discussed further additional assurances but having regard to the lateness of the hour, it was

RESOLVED that the matter be deferred to the next meeting.

iv) **BATH SITE**

Having regard to the lateness of the hour, it was

RESOLVED that the matter be deferred to the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 10.20 pm.

Chairman
7.11.12

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Local Government publicity is guided by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. The Code is statutory guidance and therefore Councils must have regard to it and follow its provisions.

Failure to follow the revised policy could lead to a breach of the statutory Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and the risk of adverse publicity, which could damage the Council's reputation.

It is important that all Members and officers who might come into contact with the media understand the implications of this code. The Council's policy explains this within a local context.

Without proper co-ordination it would be difficult to ensure that the messages put out by the Council are consistent and accurate. However, if communication is managed effectively, the Council will be able to create and seize opportunities to communicate with stakeholders and the public and build an accurate and positive reputation.

This policy acts as a simple reference tool for any officer or Member who might need to engage with the media. It can clarify roles and responsibilities and help manage expectations.

1 Introduction

Henley Town Council regularly receives enquiries from the media, issues news releases, organises photo opportunities, arranges broadcast interviews and publishes news items on its website www.henleytowncouncil.gov.uk

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Town Clerk, all officers and Members involved in dealing with the media, and to provide guidance on how to handle media interest.

The Council recognises the need for openness and this should be reflected in how the media communications are dealt with.

The aim of the policy is to ensure that the Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner. In all cases, the Council's approach to the media should be:

- open and honest
- proactive
- responsive and timely

2 The Legal Context

This policy reflects the guidance contained in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2001 (as amended). All publicity will be produced in line with the Council's Equal Opportunities policy.

3 Henley Town Council's Approach to Publicity

The media plays a huge role in informing residents about what the Council does and how it spends their money (at all tiers of Government). It is therefore vital that the Council communicates effectively with the media and wherever possible will take a positive approach to meeting media requests for information and interviews.

This approach will help achieve the following objectives:

- Ensure that the Council is recognised as one which is open, accountable, accessible and which listens
- Share and celebrate the Council's successes
- Give information about policies and services and about the democratic process so that people feel more informed about the Council's work
- Handle negative issues clearly and decisively

4 The Media

The local press generally only covers stories relevant to people living and working in Henley and the immediate surrounding areas. They include newspapers such as the Henley Standard and the Reading Chronicle. Other local media include radio stations and local news on BBC and ITV.

Where Henley Town Council is be involved in media communications at a national, international or specialist level, the policy remains pertinent in these cases.

The Internet is the fastest growing area of the media. All broadcasters and newspapers provide online news services about what is happening in Henley and with Henley Town Council.

5 Identifying Newsworthy Items

It is the responsibility of everyone working within the Council to identify worthy news items and this should be done as early as possible. This might include Mayoral engagements, Council run events or promoting successes of the Council. The Town Clerk will make the decision as to whether a news or press release should be issued.

6 Handling Media Enquiries

The Town Clerk (or Information Centre Manager) will co-ordinate all media enquiries into the town office. Officers who are directly approached by a member of the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without gleaning the full facts and should confer with the Town Clerk before responding. Members who are directly approached by a member of the media may respond in accordance with the guidance contained in this policy.

The Council should not pass comment on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Members. The phrase 'no comment' should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. The Council is open and accountable and should always explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

7 News or Press Releases

News / press releases are one of the key techniques for publicising Council activities, decisions and achievements.

There are two types of press releases – Official Council Press Releases and Councillor Press Releases.

Official Council Press Releases - An official Council release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole; it will be written by an officer and issued by the Town Clerk. It is non-party political and will normally include a quote from the relevant Councillor(s). This is usually the Chairman of the Council or Committee Chairman. Official Council press releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Council, contain relevant facts and include an approved quotation from the appropriate Councillor. Matters of style, presentation, punctuation, grammar etc are the responsibility of the author.

Releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual Councillors, identify a Member's political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.

All official Council news/press releases will be placed on the Council's website within one working day of issue.

It should be borne in mind that a news or press release is not always the best way to publicise an activity or event and alternative ways of advertising it should be considered e.g. posters, mailings, websites etc.

Councillor Press Releases - Councillor press releases are personal and are written and issued by the Councillor responsible. This release may or may not be political and should not include the name of any officer, use the Council crest or the Council telephone number as a point of contact. Councillors must make it clear that any views expressed, where different from Council Policy, are their own personal views. However, Councillors should take care not to misrepresent and/or bring the Town Council into disrepute, and must bear in mind their responsibilities under the Local Government Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer at South Oxfordshire District Council is available to give Councillors further advice. It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases, especially those of a factual nature, to be provided to the Town Clerk.

8 Interviews

Any officer contacted by a journalist requesting an interview should refer the journalist to the Town Clerk, the Mayor or the appropriate Committee Chairman.

The person put forward for interview will depend on the situation and the information required by the journalist.

Officers should never give their opinion on specific council policy but must keep to the corporate line and key messages. Their role is to provide expertise and factual knowledge only, in support of the council's approved and agreed policies.

9 Media Activity Ahead of Meetings

The media pick up many stories from agendas and reports ahead of meetings.

Members of the media are welcome to attend Council and Committee meetings. During meetings Members should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture, rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what can be a complex issue or report.

10 Publicity in Election Periods

The rules governing publicity change when an election has been announced. In the period between the notice of an election and the election itself (Purdah) all proactive publicity about candidates or other politicians is halted. This applies to local, national or European elections.

During this period council publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual Members or groups of Members. This is to make sure that no individual Councillor or political party gains an unfair advantage by appearing in corporate publicity.

In these circumstances, where a quote is required, the relevant officer may be quoted, in accordance with the guidelines in this policy.

11 Non-Council Related Media Activity

Officers and Members of the Council who have contact with the media in a personal capacity or as members of non-Council related organisations must not refer to their Council posts and must make it clear to the journalist concerned that they are speaking in a personal capacity or on behalf of the non-Council related organisation.

12 Managing Negative Issues

From time to time the Council has to respond to negative issues. It is important that these situations are managed carefully so as to limit the potential for negative publicity.

Members and officers must alert the Town Clerk as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest comes to light. They should not wait until contact is made by the media.

Members and officers must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statements, other information and carry out research even if no media have contacted the Council about an issue.

13 Correcting Inaccurate Reporting

Should the media (a newspaper or broadcaster) publish/broadcast something inaccurate about the Council, a quick decision needs to be taken on any action necessary to correct it.

The issue should be discussed with the Town Clerk to decide what action is appropriate. This could be a letter or news release, a conversation with the journalist concerned, a personal letter to the editor or legal advice. Also to decide who the most

appropriate person is to take the necessary agreed action i.e. the Mayor, Committee Chairman or Lead Officer.

It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain. Each case must be judged individually.

Occasionally the Council will get something wrong. In these cases damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by holding hands up, apologising, and stating how we are going to learn from the error or put it right.

14 Freedom of Information and Data Protection

Council Members are reminded that they must not misuse Council resources for political or other inappropriate purposes. Should the Council receive a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on a topic on which there is correspondence (email or written), normally that correspondence would have to be disclosed, unless it was exempt. The fact that the disclosure of the correspondence may prove embarrassing would not, in itself, prevent disclosure.

In addition, care should be taken when processing personal data. The Data Protection Act 1998 prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by their constituents.

15 Internet Acceptable Use Policy

Internet use covers all websites, networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Bebo etc, forums and blogs which may be used by both officers and Councillors.

If the above are used in an official capacity or on Council related business, the guidance in this policy must be adhered to and they must be used in a responsible and appropriate manner.

Under the consideration of Acceptable Use, when acting in the capacity of Henley Town Council, websites should not:

- contain content that may result in actions for libel, defamation or other claims for damages
- be used to process personal data other than for the purpose stated at the time of capture
- promote any political party or used for campaigning
- promote personal financial interests or commercial ventures
- be used for personal campaigns
- be used in an abusive, hateful or disrespectful manner

HTC will use social media when the Officers, Committees, Working Groups or other authorised HTC entity decides that this is desirable. Such use must be regulated, monitored and moderated in the same way as other media as specified in Section 6 of this document. Communication of this sort should be regularly reviewed by the commissioning committee/group

Approved by Council