

Present: The Mayor, Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin
Councillor Mrs G Dodds
Councillor A Follett (Chair)
Councillor Miss L Hillier
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith
Councillor C Pye
Councillor B G Gibson (substituting for Councillor Dr B Wood)
Councillor I Reissmann (substituting for Councillor Mrs J Wood)

In attendance: Mr M W Kennedy – Town Clerk
Mrs H King – Committee Administrator
Mrs L Jones – HTC Accountant
A member of the press
Two members of the public

70. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Mrs J Wood, Councillors Dr B Wood, Mrs J Bland and Dr P Skolar.

71. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin – Min 82 Legal Update (CAB) – personal & prejudicial – Council’s representative on the CAB

Councillor I Reissmann – Min 82 Legal Update (CAB) – personal – member of the Friends of Henley CAB

Councillor D Nimmo-Smith – Min 82 Legal Update (CAB) - personal – member of the Friends of Henley CAB

72. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee held on 24 November 2009 were received, approved, adopted and signed by the Chairman, Councillor A Follett.

73. **PROGRESS REPORT**

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

Highlands Farm

It was agreed the item could be removed from the Progress Report until such time as there were developments to report.

Local Transport Plan

Item to be removed from Progress Report until further developments.

Northfield End Highway

To remain on Progress Report. Councillor I Reissmann felt that OCC should have responded to HTC following the submission of evidence (other than just an acknowledgement). The Town Clerk was asked to contact OCC to determine a date by which a formal response will be received.

Action: Committee Administrator

Local Government Proper Accounting Practices

The Town Clerk reported that the expected guidelines had still not been received. It was agreed that this item could be removed from the Progress Report.

74. **FINANCE**

i) Budget Monitoring Report

Page 2. It was noted that the investment income to date (£98.4k) appeared well short of the year end forecast (£157k) and reassurance was sought that the final figure would be achieved. The Accountant explained that the Investment Managers only report 6 monthly so the figure shown was not the true position after 8 months. She was reasonably comfortable that the budgeted figure would be realised. The Chairman asked for an up to date position to be presented to the next FS&M meeting.

Action: HTC Accountant.

The recharge figure to OCC for Parking Wardens also appeared to be low in comparison to expected outturn. The Accountant explained that the latest invoice was about to be dispatched and the target figure was expected to be reached.

It was agreed that the 'dashboard' accompanying notes instigated by Chris Whitehead (previous accountant) should continue to be produced as it provided a valuable commentary to the figures.

ii) Investment Performance Update

Members had before them the Investment Performance Update report for the period 1 April – 30 November 2009, copy having being issued.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Investment Performance Report for the period be noted.

iii) Monthly List of Payments/Cumulative Supplier Costs

Members had before them the List of Payments and Cumulative Invoiced Costs, copies having being issued.

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

75. **ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER**

The Town Clerk explained that the Annual Audit Letter was the final element in the audit process. Committee had already seen the observations made and were obliged to note the report.

The letter stated that the Council was unable to produce its accounts by 30 September deadline. The Town Clerk explained that the delay was, in part, due to the auditors themselves but confirmed that no financial penalty had been levied because of the missed deadline.

There was a general discussion concerning the car park revenue and the ability of the Council to account for all the money collected. SODC were responsible for emptying the machines and banking the income and accounting for these monies to HTC. The Town Clerk stated that the auditors had looked at the system operating in early 2008. Since that date controls had become much tighter and with the assistance of Parkeon, the system was working extremely well. The separate Internal Audit report had confirmed that the system was robust. There was no evidence of malpractice and none had been suggested.

Councillor I Reissmann pointed out that it was disappointing that the Audit Commission had mis-spelt (Henley Upon Thames) the Council's name on the document.

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

The Annual Audit Letter be received and noted.

76. **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT**

The Committee considered the Internal Audit Report. The Town Clerk said the internal auditors should be considered as 'critical friends' whose job it was to point out weaknesses in the systems. They had confirmed that effective internal controls were in place. Reference had been made in the report to the Mill Meadows car park income. Reconciliation of the computerised returns and the cash takings, over a 6 month period, showed a variance of only 0.14% which was considered acceptable and the probable explanation for which was timing differences in collection.

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

HTC's response to the Internal Auditor's recommendations be approved and the Town Clerk is authorised to reply accordingly.

77. **COUNCIL TAX INFORMATION LEAFLET 2010-11**

Councillor Mrs G Dodds congratulated the author of the leaflet (HTC Accountant) as she felt the document was easy to read as well as being very informative. It was agreed that as reference was made to the Council website then the address should be included as well as the office telephone number.

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

the Council Tax Information leaflet be approved subject to the inclusion of this additional information.

78. **DISPLAY ENERGY CERTIFICATE**

The Town Clerk explained that an energy certificate was required for the Town Hall and this had been discovered during one of the energy company presentations to the VFM Group. The cost of the assessor/certificate would be met from the professional fees budget.

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

NIFES is engaged to produce the certificate and report, and

the Accounts Assistant provides sufficient information on utility costs to satisfy the assessor (and therefore not increasing their charge)

79. **HENLEY INFORMATION CENTRE WORKING GROUP**

The Town Clerk had already circulated (via e-mail) the presentation by KVB which had demonstrated good design ideas. The next step was for KVB to supply more detailed information on cost. As part of the redesign, the parking wardens would be relocated into the general office. It was recognised that the timescale for the move was critical although the Town Clerk had the process in hand. £30k had been allocated in 2009-10 for the move with a further £5k in 2010-11. Any potential shortfall this year could be found from other underspent budgets.

Councillor Gibson asked why the move could not be delayed until after the appointment of the Town Centre Manager as they may be able to bring some relevant expertise to the project. The Chairman pointed out that the TCM's role would be focused on the town's economic development and not tourism. In addition, the HIC project could not be delayed until March or later as all the work/planning carried out to date is aimed at an implementation/completion date of 1 April 2010.

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

the notes of the meeting of the Working Group be received, approved and adopted.

80. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

The Town Clerk's paper had suggested a trial period for public participation until the end of the local government year. He had not suggested that questions needed to be submitted in writing in advance and did not feel it necessary at this stage to issue written guidelines. However, speakers would only be able to ask questions specific to an agenda item. Each speaker would be limited to 2-3 minutes and the Chairman would be responsible for keeping the discipline throughout the public's participation.

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

the Council introduces a 10 minute Public participation session at all meetings of the Council's committees and sub-committees for a trial period of four months and that a future report be presented to the FS&M Committee in May.

81. **ESTATE INSPECTIONS**

The Committee noted the content of the paper. It had already been agreed that inspections would be carried out every six months and that the early ones were now overdue. It was agreed that it would be helpful if a list was circulated giving dates of the next inspections.

Action: Committee Administrator.

Councillor I Reissmann said he had details of a potential adverse possession case but could not discuss the matter in open session. He agreed to pass the relevant details to the Town Clerk.

The question of ownership of the Napoleonic wall on the Fairmile was raised. Although it marked the boundary of the HTC land, it was not clear where the ownership lay. As the wall was in a bad state of repair and could, in future, incur significant costs then it would be worthwhile carrying out some further investigation.

Action: Committee Administrator.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** that the report covering estate inspections is noted.

82. **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 12 JANUARY 2010.

i) LEGAL UPDATE

The content of the legal update was received and noted. In particular:

Registration of HTC land

It was likely that the meeting with Blandy & Blandy would take place on either 1st or 2nd February. Councillor Mrs G Dodds will also attend.

Bath Site

It was noted that the lease had not been completed and the Town Clerk was asked to keep the situation on track.

AFC Henley/Henley Hockey Club

The Town Clerk explained the difficulties and complexities of the case. Recent correspondence with AFC had complicated matters and it had been decided that all the parties involved should get round the table and come to an agreed consensus that could be converted into a legal document. The Mayor asked to attend the meeting to lend assistance and also express Members' frustration at the ongoing situation.

ii) VALUE FOR MONEY & RESOURCES WORKING GROUP

Members had before them the notes of the meeting of the Value for Money and Resources Working Group held on 5 January 2010. As regards the 2009-10 position, the Town Clerk drew the Committee's attention to the discrepancy in the repair/renewal estimate from the surveyor and that of the commercial company for repairs to the Town Hall Laylights. It was agreed that the Town Clerk should speak to the surveyor and query the amount and if correct to then proceed with the work at the lower cost.

Action: Town Clerk.

Councillor Mrs C Dodds pointed out that no final decision had been taken on whether the new public toilets will be 'pay on entry' and views will be sought from the architect. This is to be referred back to the Recreation & Amenities Committee for further consideration.

The items under the heading of *Asset Disposal*, minute no. 5, generated considerable debate. Members raised the question of the status of the VFM Group as it appeared it was taking decisions without reference to Committee. The Chairman explained that the role of the Group was to look at income generation and cost reduction and only preliminary work would be undertaken with all recommendations for action being referred to committee for discussion. However, it was felt that the powers of the Group should be limited to avoid absorbing officers' time. It was also agreed that not all the actions listed in the meeting note of 5 January should be pursued.

Future agenda items covering VFM should be entitled: 'To receive **and approve** the notes of the meeting' to make clear that that each recommendation needs Committee approval.

The following was agreed for each item listed:

36 Market Place.

No further action to be taken at this time on the VFM recommendation.

Leaver Road.

Investigation into equity share release to take place - support

Action: Committee Administrator.

Sports Centre Units.

Discussions with Nexus to take place concerning increasing commercial activities - support

Action: Town Clerk.

The Barn.

No further action to be taken at this time on the VFM recommendation. Town Clerk explained that hirers were normally offered the Town Hall rooms in preference to the Barn for daytime bookings. He was asked to clarify the guidance for use of the Barn during the day and how increased usage could be encouraged. As the building was a public space (paid for by public/lottery funds) it should be made accessible. A paper had already been commissioned from the Snr Committee Administrator detailing the hiring usage of the Council's buildings/rooms.

Action: Senior Committee Administrator

Wooton Manor Car Park

No further action to be taken at this time on the VFM recommendation.

The site was originally purchased by the Council to protect it from development. It was noted that there is a potential maintenance issue with the car park and when the weather improves, the area needs to be assessed and estimates gained for any required repairs.

Action: Town Clerk

Alabaster statue

A number of Councillors felt this was a piece worth keeping although little was known about it. The Mayor volunteered to undertake investigations. At this stage it was agreed that no sale should take place until further information was to hand.

Action: The Mayor

Mayor's Parlour carpet (old)

Although the carpet was old it was felt that it had a value and as such should be valued by an expert. Councillor Miss L Hillier had relevant contact details and undertook to pass them to the Town Clerk. The general view of the committee was that the item should not be sold.

Paintings

Mayor's Parlour. The Mayor felt that the paintings in the parlour were accessible. Councillor Reissmann opined that just because paintings were not on public display did not mean they were surplus to requirements and could be sold. He suggested that the paintings are rotated to give them maximum exposure. Councillor Miss L Hillier suggested that as part of the Film Festival, a documentary could be made on the Town Hall (and its assets) which could generate income from sales of DVDs.

Basement Corridor. The paintings would need to be removed as part of the HIC redevelopment and would be stored temporarily elsewhere in the building. They did belong to the old Post Office and should be returned if at all possible (and if wanted).

Action: Committee Administrator.

Councillor Gibson requested that a copy of the Accountant's paper which detailed the Councils assets and value.

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

The notes of the Value for Money Group meeting of 5 January 2010 be noted (subject to the minuted amendments above).

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.

Chairman
13.1.10