

THAME TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 13 October 2015 at 6.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall.

Present: Cllrs B Austin, D Bretherton, N Champken-Woods, M Dyer (Chairman), L Emery (Deputy Mayor), H Fickling, C Jones, P Lambert and T Wyse

Officers

G Hunt, Town Clerk

C Pinnells, Community Services Manager

M Robinson, Office Administration Manager

A Oughton, Committee Services Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Dixon (Council Business) and Dodds (Unwell). Cllr Butler (absent without apology). Janine Howells, Asset Manager (Unwell).

2 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Cllr Dyer declared an interest in Item 11 as a Trustee of the Museum and a personal interest in Item 12. Cllr Lambert declared a personal interest in Item 12. Cllr Bretherton declared an interest in Item 11 as a Trustee and a personal interest in Item 12. Cllr Emery declared an interest in Item 11 as a Trustee.

The Town Clerk had received and granted a dispensation to Cllrs Dyer and Dodds with regard to Item 11 and confirmed Cllr Emery had a dispensation in place as the Council Representative to the Museum.

3 Public Participation and Public Questions

There were no applications to address the Committee.

4 Investment Portfolio

Mr Andrew Hess, Investment Director of Rathbones, gave a review of the Council's Investment Portfolio. The Fund's value as at 30 September 2015 was £1.9m producing an estimated income of £36k. It had been an interesting year with fears around the slow down in China and the impact that may have combined with speculation around possible interest rate rises in the United States.

Despite a 'wobble' in the markets the Council's Portfolio had produced a return of almost 3.5%. Rathbones continued to follow the brief given to them to take as little risk as possible with half the investment in low risk index linked bonds to protect against any volatility in the markets. It was predicted that interest rates would remain low with continued low inflation.

Discussion took place on the Council's plan to draw down money from the capital investment fund in the next 12 months. It was reported that money had already been drawn down in relation to the refurbishment of the Skate Park and the agreed loan to Chinnor Rugby Club would be drawn down at the beginning of the New Year. Plans for the redevelopment of the Cricket Club would involve the release of capital investment. It was anticipated that there would be an increase in forward funding as had happened with the Sports Facility Strategy ahead of the release of S106 monies. This proposed financial activity had highlighted the need to produce a Capital Financial Plan.

The Committee thanked Mr Hess for attending the meeting and to Rathbones for their continued good management of the Council's investments.

5 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Item 11 - Local Council Award Scheme. The Town Clerk reported that officers had completed a great deal of work ahead of the first meeting of the Working Group and it was envisaged that the Quality Award (middle level) would be the level of Award the Council would initially aim to achieve.

Item 17 – Transport Study – no progress had been made to date but it was considered that a transport study could be discussed further at a Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Committee meeting.

6 Budget Summary

Members received the budget summary up to 31 August 2015. A question was raised on 115 Car Parks Expenditure, the Town Clerk reported that each month an accounting transfer was made to the Car Park Profit & Loss account which was then used to purchase equipment. This was under budget due to the reduction of income as a result of the increase in grace period from 5 to 10 minutes.

7 Health and Safety Update

Members noted the emergency expenditure that had been authorised by the Town Clerk to execute a fixed electrical wiring test at the Town Hall, an asbestos survey for the Town Hall and Southern Road Recreation Ground changing rooms and a Legionella assessment of Southern Road Recreation Ground changing rooms.

8 Reports from Representatives on External Organisations

- i. Barns Centre – reported noted.
- ii. Citizens Advice Bureau – report noted.
- iii. Health Summit – report noted. Cllr Champken-Woods reported that he would be attending a meeting tomorrow with the District Council.
- iv. NALC – report noted. Further discussion under item 9 on the agenda.
- v. Thame Business Forum – report noted.
- vi. Thame & District Housing Association – no report received.
- vii. 21st Century Thame – report noted. Cllr Fickling reported that Small Business Saturday would take place on 5 December 2015 and that more information could be obtained via the link <https://www.smallbusinesssaturdayuk.com>.
- viii. Welfare Trust – Cllr Champken-Woods reported that no meeting had taken place since the last report. The mini bus funded by the Welfare Trust would be shared by Meadowcroft and the Thame & District Day Centre once insurance cover had been confirmed.

9 OCC Working Together / Localism

The report from the NALC Conference on Localism set the scene for the discussion on opportunities for local Town and Parish Councils to undertake services currently provided by County and District Councils, some of which would be accompanied by funding.

Members felt that services such as grass cutting, hedge cutting, on street parking enforcement, the filling of pot holes, gritting and maintenance of public toilets could be undertaken by the Town Council relatively easily. However concern was raised as to how the Council would make a decision as to which services were the most important to take on or whether it should be decided on a task by task basis as the need arose.

It was agreed that this was a new initiative and at present it was not clear what tasks the County Council would have the power to devolve directly to Towns and Parishes and what would cascade down through District Councils. The clarity of the tasks had not been well defined; it was unclear what devolved funding would accompany the task; it seemed likely that an increase in the precept may be required.

There was some discussion regarding support for childrens services, youth services and those that supported adults with both physical and learning disabilities. The use of volunteers was also briefly discussed.

The discussion had raised awareness of the issue of devolved services and would enable the Town Clerk and Officers to continue conversations with the County Council with regard to the cost of the provision of current services and whether it would be feasible for the Town Council to take over the management of them.

Cllr Austin left the meeting

10 Flag Flying

Consideration was given to the dates for the flying of the Union Flag, the St George's flag and Armed Forces Day flag. Members were in agreement with the suggested dates as outlined in the report and that the Town Clerk and the Mayor be given delegated responsibility for agreeing short notice flag flying due to a specific event.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The occasions for flag flying (plus Armed Forces Day) and the provision for short notice flag flying as detailed in the report be approved.***
- ii) A recommendation be made to Full Council that £200 be released from the General Reserves to purchase the required flags as defined in the Resource Appraisal.***

11 Thame Museum

The Thame Museum Trust had undertaken preliminary investigations regarding design proposals to increase the floor area for exhibitions and improve disability access and sought the Town Council's agreement in principle to the proposal and initial funding of £5,000 to enable the necessary pre planning advice and design work to enable a planning application to be submitted.

RESOLVED that:

- i) Consent be given to Thame Museum Trust to develop the property as per the lease obligations.***
- ii) A recommendation be made to Full Council that £5,000 is released from Capital Reserves.***

12 Megan Biddle Memorial Bench / Southern Road Recreation Ground

The Town Council had been approached by members of the Biddle family to gauge whether permission would be given for the installation of a Memorial Bench on Southern Road Recreation Ground and approval of the proposed design before any fundraising was undertaken.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The installation of a Memorial Bench on Southern Road Recreation Ground be approved.***

13 Wi Fi

Discussion took place on the proposal to install free Wi Fi access within the town centre. The project had been identified through the SODC Economic Development Action Plan for Thame.

Concern was raised with regard to the security of the system, how usage would be monitored and that it may discourage visitors to the town centre from using local businesses that already offered free Wi Fi to their customers.

Others suggested it would be of benefit to visitors and would encourage longer dwell times in the town centre.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The proposal to fund free Wi Fi access within the Town Centre would not be recommended to Full Council.***

14 SODC Economic Development Projects

Discussions had taken place with the SODC Economic Development team which had resulted in the Economic Development Action Plan for Thame 2015/16. The projects, in many cases, required the funding provided by SODC to be matched.

Members were asked to consider in particular match funding for three projects to enable the creation of a web portal to integrate businesses within the town, the provision of the infrastructure to enable feather flags to be flown to promote events in the town and the provision of £4,300 to match fund revenue projects on a case by case basis.

RESOLVED that:

- i) A recommendation be made to Full Council that up to £5,000 to develop and launch a new Integrated Thame Business website and up to £2,000 to provide the infrastructure to enable feather flags to be flown be allocated from the Rolling Capital Fund.***
- ii) A recommendation be made to Full Council that up to £4,300 be allocated from the General Reserves to enable projects to progress, on a case by case basis, under the delegated responsibility of the Town Clerk and the Community Services Manager.***

15 CCTV

Members noted the report but raised concern as to the effectiveness of each camera and as such whether the number of cameras could be reduced. Due to the age of the system replacement parts could not be sourced which had resulted in the cameras being dependent on replacement parts being made available from decommissioned cameras in Henley.

16 Internal Audit Report

The First Interim Internal Audit Report recorded that the Town Council continued to operate sound and effective financial controls and procedures. Members expressed their appreciation to Council Officers in ensuring the controls and procedures were adhered to.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The First Interim Internal Audit Report 2015-2016 be approved.*

17 Severe Weather

The Severe Weather Policy formally documented procedures that had previously been in place but had not formally been approved.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The Severe Weather Policy be approved.*

18 Swimming Pool Update

The report provided with the agenda was noted. A confidential report had been commissioned from an external consultant the recommendations of which had been received. Work continued with the consultant and the Council's solicitors to draft appropriate further correspondence.

19 Cricket Ground

The inspection report for the Cricket Ground was noted.

20 Compliments and Complaints

The Compliments and Complaints report was noted.

21 For Information

Attention was drawn to the work under taken by the Office Administration Manager in limiting the exposure of the Council to a potential increase by the payroll provider.

As well as noting the Christmas closure the Town Clerk highlighted that the Information Centre would be closed on Wednesday 21 October 2015 between 9am – 3pm for staff training.

The meeting concluded at 8.22pm

Signed
Chairman, 16 February 2016