

THAME TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 1 November 2016 at 6.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall.

Present: Cllrs B Austin, D Bretherton, D Butler, N Champken-Woods, D Dodds, M Dyer (Chairman), H Fickling, C Jones and P Lambert (Deputy Chairman)

Officers

G Hunt, Town Clerk

Morag Robinson, Office Administration Manager

A Oughton, Committee Services Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence received from Cllrs Dixon (Personal), Emery (Council Business) and Wyse (Personal).

2 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Cllrs Bretherton, Dodds and Dyer declared an Appendix B interest in agenda item 22, given their involvement with Thame Museum.

A dispensation is in place to allow full participation.

3 Public Participation and Public Questions

There were no applications to address the Committee.

There were no questions put to the Committee.

4 Investment Portfolio

Mr Rupert Baron and Mr Andrew Hess of Rathbones presented a review of the Town Council's investment portfolio. The portfolio was managed on a discretionary basis with the objective of achieving Capital Growth with lower risk. Rathbones expressed a wish to meet with the Town Council next year to discuss the levels of risk and review the management of the portfolio.

The fund value was a little over £1.8m with a reasonable expectation of achieving £34k income representing a yield of 1.8% which was significantly higher than the current interest rates offered by the high street banks. There was a lot of 'chat' in investment circles and wider that interest rates could descend into negative territory which would result in serious consequences for all savers. The consolidated performance to the end of September showed a total return of just under 15%.

Globally economic growth in China continued but not at the same rate that had been seen in recent years. The US economy was also showing signs of growth. The bad news was that growth in continental Europe did not look healthy and required more stimulus. Rupert stressed that it was very rare for the markets to be so strong and warned the Council not to expect the same level of return on the fund next year.

After answering a series of questions, the Chairman thanked Rupert Baron and Andrew Hess for an informative presentation.

5 Citizens Advice

Mr Jon Bright, director of Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale (OSAV) gave a presentation and thanked the Town Council for its continued support. Jon was appointed director in May this year and was new to the organisation.

OSAV was formed following the merger of several CABs and gave advice to 8,000 people each year both face to face and by phone. The advice was provided by 160 trained volunteers and 10 full time staff across six Advice Centres. OSAV is a member of the national Citizens Advice but did not receive funds from the national charity or Central Government.

Any person in the community may experience a problem and need advice. Failure to tackle the problem, especially debt related, could lead to larger problems such as loss of a home, depression and loss of employment which then not only affected the individual but also their dependents. The top five advice topics were; benefits / tax, debt, employment, housing and relationships / family.

Jon stated that the volunteers made an extra ordinary commitment to the Citizens Advice through the initial training programme and keeping up to date through regular ongoing trainings as well as providing advice to clients. All were trained to give advice to a certain level and some cases specialised in fields such as debt and employment. All the volunteers provided a valuable service estimated to be equivalent to £642,814per annum.

After answering a series of questions, Jon was thanked for his presentation.

6 Thame Eco Fair / Thame Food Festival

Members noted that the organisers of the Thame Eco Fair and Thame Food Festival 2017 events were given opportunities to present, partly for budgeting purposes, but both had declined.

7 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 August 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

8 Financial Update

Members received the budget summary up to 30 September 2016. The Balance Sheet was noted.

The Town Clerk reported that he had met with Mr Derek Kemp to go through the budget. The forecast to the year-end currently showed a £26k surplus which would help replenish the General Reserve if realised.

9 Investment Update

The investment performance summary was noted.

10 Fixed Term Deposits

Members noted that in line with the Investment Strategy, and specific past resolutions re Treasury Management, that the Council had renewed the £100,000 that matured on 10 October 2016 into a new 12 month deposit maturing 23 October 2017 at 1.0%.

11 Reports from Representatives on External Organisations

- a) Barns Centre – The report was noted.
- b) Citizens Advice Bureau – Presentation given by Jon Bright, agenda item 5.
- c) Health Hub – The report was noted.
- d) NALC – The report was noted.
- e) Thame Business Forum – The report was noted.

- f) Thame & District Housing Association – The report was noted.
- g) 21st Century Thame – The report was noted. Cllr Fickling added that 21st Century Thame were very busy supporting Thame's entry in the Great British High Street competition.
- h) Welfare Trust – The report was noted.

12 Internal Audit

Members noted the First Interim Internal Audit Report for 2016-17. No issues had been identified following the visit and a vote of thanks was given to the Officers for their continued good management of the internal controls.

13 Financial Regulations / Delegations – de minimis

The Town Clerk was often called upon to make swift decisions that involve routine resource allocation that may not have already been specifically approved in a budget. Where there was a significant impact, such decisions were deferred to the next convenient Council meeting. There was currently no defined threshold / de minimis for such situations.

Following a short discussion Members agreed that the Town Clerk should be given the necessary authority to make such resourcing decisions.

RESOLVED:

- i) ***To add the following authority to relevant guidance, including Financial Regulations / Delegations: "The Town Clerk is authorised to make routine resourcing decisions, where time impact is less than a day or cost is less than £500, and it is in the public interest to do so, with relevant reporting back at a future Council meeting".***

14 Consultation on Referendum Principles

It was noted that even though not directly invited to respond, the Town Council had responded to the consultation from Central Government on the proposal to introduce Referendum Principles in relation to precept setting for Town and Parish Councils.

The Town Clerk reported that he had read responses from other councils and they covered a broad range of arguments. It was hoped that this would go some way towards swaying the Government against the proposal to introduce Referendum Principles.

15 Great British High Street

News that the Town had reached the national final three in the Small Market Town category of the Great British High Street competition and that Chris Hurdman had also been named as one of the top three in the Retail Market Champion category was well received by Councillors.

Members noted that the Town Council was supporting the 21st Century team in the final drive in their bid to be judged / voted number one in both categories. The judge's visit would take place on Friday 4 November 2016 between 10am – 12noon. Helen Johns and Sonja Francis will put together an itinerary which would include a planned walk around the town calling into various businesses followed by a reception in the Stables behind the James Figg.

It was noted that the Town Clerk had agreed matched funding of £500 each from the joint SODC / Town Council Economic Development Funding budget of £15,000 / £14,000 towards the cost of the final drive.

16 Charter Market Rent

Members considered a request from the Market Traders Co-operative for a rent free period during the time of the Highway maintenance of the footpath and drainage improvements works in the Upper High Street as compensation for the disruption caused.

It was noted that although the works had run into a fourth week the market had more or less moved back to its original position by 1 November 2016 and in some respects the repositioning of the market over the period had provided a wider thoroughfare for visitors. It was hard to quantify whether the traders had experienced a drop in their takings and the anticipated loss of 5-7 pitches during the works had not materialised.

Following discussions it was agreed that to provide an entirely rent free period would not be justified for the reasons already mentioned. Businesses did not receive compensation when highway works took place outside their premises and concerns that a precedent would be set to seek a reduction in the case of disruption during inclement weather or businesses to claim compensation for loss of business as a result of the impact of the Town Fairs. However, as a gesture of goodwill the Town Council agreed to provide the market traders with one free day of trading.

RESOLVED that:

- i) As a gesture of goodwill the Market Traders be offered one day of free trading, to be taken with the next 12 months.***

17 Bus Shelters – Howland Road

It was noted that to enable the Howland Road bus stops to come into operation, the Town Council had taken on responsibility for the insurance and maintenance of the bus shelters.

18 Grant Awards Policy

The Community Services Manager had sought input from the Grants Awards Panel with regard to changes needed to the Grants Award Policy. Suggested improvements from any Councillors should be sent to the Community Services Manager.

19 Lone Working Policy / Risk Assessment

The Lone working Policy and Risk Assessment describe the measures the Town Council consider necessary to manage the risk present when employees are required to work alone. Lone working included staff working alone in a building as well as working outside where there was no close, frequent or regular contact with other colleagues.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The Lone Working Policy and the Lone Working Risk Assessment be approved.***

20 Induction and Training & Development Policies

To date the Town Council had not had an Induction Policy or Training & Development Policy in place. Due to the recent engagement of new staff it had highlighted the need to formally adopt both of the policies.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The Induction Policy and the Training & Development Policy be approved.***

21 Disposal of Amenity Land at Pickenfield

The disposal of the amenity land was moving forward albeit slowly. The next step was for Officers to obtain a formal valuation of the piece of land and for a public notice to be placed in the Thame Gazette giving notice that the Town Council intended to dispose of the land.

22 Thame Museum Building Improvement Project

The report was noted together with the update from the architect circulated to Members today.

Some discussion took place and Members were advised that an amendment to the planning application would be submitted to the District Planning Officer tomorrow. The amendment included the addition of louvre windows to the side of the proposed extension, lightening of the railings on the disabled ramp and no overhang of the entrance canopy (a correction to a drawing previously submitted).

In the light of the new information received at the meeting it was agreed to let the amendment process take its course and for the Planning & Environment Committee to consider the amendment during the assigned consultation period.

23 Card Payment Machine

Members noted that the card payment machine in the Information Centre is now fully operational enabling debit and credit card payments to be made in person or via the telephone at greater convenience for our customers.

24 Compliments and Complaints

The report was noted.

25 For Information

The items for information were noted.

The meeting concluded at 8.24pm

Signed
Chairman, 7 February 2016