

THAME TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 7 February 2017 at 6.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall.

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

Officers:

G Hunt, Town Clerk
M Robinson, Office Administration Manager
A Oughton, Committee Services Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence received from Cllrs Butler (Unwell) and Lambert (Holiday).

2 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Cllrs Bretherton, Dodds and Dyer declared an interest in item 17, given their involvement with Thame Museum. Cllr Dyer declared an interest in item 15 as chair of the Business Forum and a member of the Steering Group organising the Open Doors event. Cllr Dyer moved to the public gallery during discussion of this item.

The Town Clerk reminded Councillors of dispensations in place to allow representatives of the Museum and external representatives for the Museum and the Business Forum to take part in discussion and vote.

3 Public Participation and Public Questions

There were no applications to address the Committee.
There were no questions put to the Committee.

4 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 Financial Update

Members received the budget summary up to 31 December 2016. The Balance Sheet was noted.

A question was raised with regard to the reduced income received from the Farmers Market. The Town Clerk reported that it related to fewer stalls, with the loss of one or two regular traders. Discussions were ongoing between the Charter Market, the Community Services Manager and the Market Town Co-Ordinator regarding the position and location of the Farmers Market with a view to increasing the profile and footfall, while not impacting on the Charter Market. In the meantime everyone is encouraged to shop there.

6 Financial Overspends

Members noted that an allowance had been made in the 2017-18 budget for the Town Council's new subscription to the Association of Town and City Management. The decision to join (in relation to the recruitment of the Market Town Co-Ordinator) was after the 2016-17 budget agreement. The additional £495 for 2017 subscription had resulted in a current overspend of this budget line by £362 which would be funded from General Reserves.

7 Investment Update

Members noted the summary of the investment performance.

A question was raised with regard to the reporting of realised investments, which were shown for the skate park, cricket club and rugby club but not for the purchase of the Depot. The Town Clerk agreed this would be included in future updates.

8 Fixed Term Deposits

It was noted that in line with the Investment Strategy, and specific past resolutions re Treasury Management, that the Council had renewed the £200,000 that matured on 6 January 2017 into a new six month deposit maturing on 6 July 2017 at 0.6%. In addition the Council had invested £50,000 in a new nine month Fixed Term Deposit maturing on 6 October 2017 at 0.7%.

9 Reports from Representatives on External Organisations

- a) Barns Centre – Cllr Dodds reported that the Barns Centre continued to do well and was on target for this year. The management team were to be congratulated on their continued good management and care of the asset. It was noted that wedding bookings were slightly down compared with the same time last year.
- b) Citizens Advice – The report was noted.
- c) Health Hub – The report was noted. Cllr Champken-Woods added that a representative from the Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust would present to the Full Council meeting on 14 February 2017. A meeting regarding the Oxfordshire Sustainability and Transformation Plan consultation will take place in Thame. Cllr Champken-Woods would let everyone know the date and time once it was finalised.
- d) NALC – The report was noted.
- e) Thame Business Forum – Cllr Dyer reported that a meeting had taken place today with an extremely lively and interesting discussion on the future provision of employment land in Thame. A planning policy officer from South Oxfordshire District Council attended the meeting to aid discussion. The topic would be included on the agenda for future meetings to allow for continued discussion and evidence gathering.
- f) Thame & District Housing Association – The report was noted.
- g) 21st Century Thame – Cllr Fickling reported that Tidy Thame / Muck Out Moreton Day would take place on Saturday 25 March 2017. Small Business Saturday, although held on a tricky date (national initiative) was considered a success. The Young Entrepreneurs Competition, again fell at the wrong time of year due to the clash with young people taking examinations but again was a success.

The group continued to encourage people to take the Midsomer Murder tours around the town. Plans for this year's Carnival were well underway. The equipment bank was doing well but needed someone to manage it. Leaflets continued to be distributed. The Eco Fair seemed to be in abeyance.

The Town Clerk added that Mary Stiles, a long standing director of 21st Century Thame had retired from the role and was thanked at the AGM for all her support and hard work. Sue Martin Downhill would take over as director.

- h) Welfare Trust – Cllr Champken-Woods reported the Trust was doing well and providing grants to local people in need.

10 Internal Audit

The second visit by the Council's Internal Auditor took place on 18 January 2017. No issues had been identified following the visit and the Council continued to operate sound and effective financial controls and procedures.

Members received the report and congratulated officers for their due diligence and hard work in achieving a good clean audit.

11 External Audit

Members noted that the Council had been unofficially informed, via SLCC and NALC news items, that the new Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments (SAAA) Ltd had appointed Moore Stephens as the External Auditor for all Oxfordshire Parishes for the five financial years from 2017/18 to 2021/22.

12 Investment Strategy

It was an annual requirement that the Investment Strategy be reviewed annually. Officers had reviewed the strategy, last adopted in February 2016, and suggested the following updates:

- a) To remove the sterling requirement (Item 6 – Investment Objectives), as some non-specified investments via the Town Council's Fund Manager were held in other currencies / commodities; and
- b) To reflect the practice of the annual presentation of the strategy to the Policy & Resources Committee rather than to Full Council.

RESOLVED that:

- j) The Investment Strategy as presented be approved for the next twelve months.***

13 Health and Safety Visit Outcomes

The annual Health and Safety visit had taken place on 11 January 2017, and as a result the Council had received the General Risk Assessment Report and the Safety Action Plan which detailed all aspects of the visit and offered guidance to undertake the recommendations as specified in the documents.

The Executive Summary showed 24 priority actions, a significant reduction from the Health & Safety visit in 2015 when 40 actions were reported. Work had already commenced and four of the 24 priorities had been completed to date. A question was raised with regard to whether security was covered as part of the visit. This was noted and would be discussed with the Health & Safety Consultant.

Members congratulated officers on their hard work to reduce the number of priority actions from 2015.

14 Grant Awards Policy

The Grant Awards Policy was adopted in 2016 and due to be reviewed in April 2020. Following the last round of applications it was felt that further clarity in the Policy would assist with the process of reviewing applications.

Members of the Grant Panel and Officers had met to review the Policy and suggested the following amendments:

- a) To insert “the Parish of “ so as to include Moreton
- b) To clarify that grant funding did serve the needs of Thame
- c) To highlight the priorities for capital, seed and revenue funding to ensure the funding given would really make a difference
- d) To remove reference to Citizens Advice (now treated separately)
- e) To set a 20% maximum request of the total budget for awards by one organisation. In doing so the total budget for grant funding will be made clear on the application form
- f) To not allow more than one grant application per organisation.

It was also agreed that from 2018-19 funding requests from Lighthouse Thame should be given the same consideration as the Citizens Advice and discussed separately as part of the Council budget setting process.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The Grants Policy, as presented be approved.*
- ii) From 2018-19 funding given to Lighthouse Thame be included in the annual budget setting process and removed from the Grant Funding budget.*
- iii) The Community Services Manager be given delegated responsibility to update the associated guidance and grant application form to reflect the approved changes.*

15 Business Forum Open Doors Event

Cllr Emery (Town Mayor) chaired this item.

Following the success of the Open Doors event over the last two years, the Business Forum working group is organising a third event in the Town Centre on Saturday 1 July 2017. Members considered the request from the working group to provide free use of the Town Hall, use of the external electrical points and closure of the Lower High Street car park from 7.30am to 4.30pm.

RESOLVED that:

- i) Free use of the Town Hall, use of the external electricity points and closure of the Lower High Street car park for the Open Doors Event on Saturday 1 July 2017 be approved.*

16 Disposal of Amenity Land at Pickenfield

Members noted the report.

The disposal of the amenity land at Pickenfield was progressing. The Town Council had obtained a quotation from the Valuation Office Agency to undertake a valuation of the land and Mr Smith had been informed of the estimated costs. Officers had agreed that Mr Smith could obtain a further quotation as a comparison to the Valuation Office Agency’s estimate provided the same criteria for the valuation was observed. A local surveyor has since been identified.

The next step would be for a public notice to be placed in the Thame Gazette giving notice that the Council intends to dispose of the land.

17 Thame Museum Building Improvement Project

Members noted the report. The Town Clerk reported that notification of planning permission for improvements to the Museum had been received 30 minutes after the report had been published. Cllr Bretherton reported that initial enquiries into grant funding looked favourable. The next step would be

to meet with the Town Clerk to discuss the way forward. If everything went well it was hoped that building would commence towards the end of next year.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that the Town Council had initially authorised £5,000 plus a further £5,000 to get the project to the planning stage. To date the Council has committed funds of £7,008.74 leaving a balance of just under £3,000 to be returned to the Rolling Capital Fund.

18 Town Hall Free Use

It was noted that the Town Clerk, through delegated authority, had granted free use as follows:

- a) The meeting room to Thames Valley Police for a community drop-in facility
- b) The Upper Chamber to Thames Valley Police for a meeting with retailers
- c) The Upper Chamber to 21st Century Thame for their AGM
- d) The Upper Chamber for the wake of an ex-Mayor
- e) Reasonable facilities to assist the Rotary Your Change initiative
- f) The meeting room for Thame and District Day Centre interviews.

19 Great British High Street

Members noted that Thame was named runner-up in the Small Market Town category of the Great British High Street competition (and that Chris Hurdman was named as a runner-up in the Retail Market Champion category) at the Presentation of the Awards held on Monday 12 December 2016. The prize money would be used to produce stickers for display in shop fronts in the town to celebrate the achievement.

The chairman encouraged everyone to vote for Atalay's Kebab Van in the UK Kebab Awards.

20 Upper Chamber Acoustics

The Town Council had sought advice from three independent acoustic consultants, one of whom had provided a quotation of £1,450 to execute an acoustic survey and provide recommendations for improvement.

Members noted that this may cause the Town Hall Maintenance budget to be exceeded, given £2,670 remaining for the last quarter.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The Asset Manager be authorised to proceed with the acoustic survey.***

Cllr Champken-Woods left the meeting at the end of this item.

21 For Information

The items for information were noted.

The meeting concluded at 7.22pm

Signed
Chairman, 11 April 2017