

THAME TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 14 October 2014 at 7.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall.

Present: Cllrs N Dixon (Deputy Mayor), M Dyer (Chairman), L Emery, H Fickling, V Humphries (Deputy Chairman), P Lambert, J Matelot Green (Town Mayor) and T Wyse

Non-Voting

D Laver

Officers

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 Bretherton (Holiday), Butler (Holiday), Dodds (SODC), Welply (SODC) and the Town Clerk.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Public Participation

There were no applications to address the Committee.

4 Investment Portfolio

Mr Andrew Hess, Investment Director at Rathbones presented a report on the Council's investment portfolio. Mr Hess reported that it was an interesting time to give the report as the markets had been unusually calm over the summer months but had just begun to fall back with fears of a possible triple dip recession and unrest in the Middle East and Ukraine. The experiment of quantitative easing was due to stop in the US but continues in Europe and Japan. Sterling had been strong on global markets but this trend had been reversed over recent weeks. Interest rates in the UK were unlikely to rise until after the general election.

The Portfolio had been helped by the lack of inflation although there was a lot of inflation protection included within it. There had been no wage inflation since 2008 and the view was that when inflation did kick into the system the only lever to pull would be to increase interest rates. The Portfolio remained very defensive and it was for the Council in reviewing the Investment Strategy to decide whether to maintain this low risk.

The Portfolio had delivered 8% growth since its conception and had a good balance with 50% invested in bonds, 10% in alternatives and 40% in equities.

It was agreed that the Annual Investment Strategy remain unchanged for the forthcoming year and that the Portfolio should be reviewed in July/August 2015.

5 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6 Budget Summary

Members received the budget summary up to 31 August 2014. A full set of the accounts were available at the meeting. A question was raised on the percentage figures in Expenditure 108 and 304 and Income 304. This would be investigated and Members informed.

7 Investment Update

The Investment portfolio was noted.

8 Reports from Representatives on External Organisations

- a) Barns Centre – Cllr Matelot Green reported that the 20th Anniversary celebrations were due to take place on 21 October 2014 with an open invitation to everyone to attend. A water feature that had been donated to the Centre was currently being installed in the garden. The Centre continued to thrive with bookings every weekend.
- b) Citizens Advice Bureau – No report.
- c) NALC – Cllr Dyer reported he had attended his first OALC meeting in Banbury with the Town Clerk. First impressions were that it was a good forum for Clerks to network and share information.
- d) Thame Business Forum - Cllr Dyer reported that John Howell, MP along with representatives from County and District Councils had attended the meeting in September. Provision of high speed broadband on the industrial estates remained high on the agenda. The main topic for the next meeting would be the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).
- e) Thame & District Housing Association – no report.
- f) Thame Museum Trust – Cllr Emery reported that it was expected that income would exceed the annual budget figure with expenditure close to the budget line. A new secretary had been appointed. The exhibitions on the Cuttle Brook Reserve and the Thame Remembers project had been very successful. There was a full programme of events for October and November. The winter closure would take place from 21 December 2014 to 14 February 2015.
- g) 21st Century Thame – Cllr Laver reported that the AGM had just taken place, a review of the finances showed there was £8k in the bank despite losses being reported in some of the projects that had been undertaken. There had been a turnover in members of the Steering Group and Sue Martin-Downhill had joined and taken on some responsibility for the Thame4Business and equipment bank projects. The equipment bank had been very successful and additional equipment had been purchased.

The group is looking at how to reinvigorate Thame4Business but it was difficult to get the local retailers involved. The Thame Loyalty Card was also being reviewed to assess how best to promote it. A representative from a travel marketing company had joined the group and discussions had taken place with the Town Council on tourism, wi-fi and the possibility of a local Saturday market. A new hosting service will improve the website and make it more user friendly. The group looking at signage on Lea Park continued to meet and this was an ongoing project.

- h) Welfare Trust – Nothing to report. It was agreed that Cllr Fickling would circulate a brief report on the work of the Welfare Trust.

Cllr Laver left the meeting at the end of this item.

9 Community Engagement Strategy

Following discussion on the Community Engagement Strategy at the last meeting no further comments had been received. The final draft was tabled for approval. It was agreed that two groups, 21st Century Thame and Thame4Business should be added to the end of section 3.1.

RESOLVED that:

- j) The Community Engagement Strategy be adopted with the amendment to 3.1 as detailed above.***

10 IT Equipment

Following the announcement that Microsoft would no longer be supporting the Windows XP Operating Systems the Council had reviewed its current operating software together with IT equipment.

RECOMMENDED that:

- j) Full Council be asked to approve the purchase of seven computers, the upgrade of another PC plus the purchase of 11 Microsoft Office Licences 2013 at a cost of £7580 from the Capital Rolling Fund.***

11 Grants Policy

The Working Group had met to consider amendments to the grants policy and were due to meet again on 28 October 2014. It was intended that adoption of the new Grants Policy be put to Council in January.

12 Ipads for Councillors

It was agreed that the introduction of the ipads had led to an increase in efficiency and a significant reduction in costs from the reduction in printing of reports, photocopying packs and delivery of Council papers to Members.

RESOLVED that:

- j) Ipads are purchased at the beginning of each new Administration.***

ii) Existing ipads be first offered for purchase to the user and those not acquired be sold for the best price achievable.

13 Civil Parking Enforcement

The County Council was due to take over the responsibility for parking enforcement. At present the County and District Councils were in discussion on how this would be undertaken. Members noted the difficulties with on street parking that existed in the town and urged the County and District Council to consider parking for town centre residents when drawing up the new enforcement policy.

14 Financial Regulations

The suggested amendments to the Financial Regulations before the Committee were technical changes that would allow the Council to undertake electronic banking.

RECOMMENDED that:

i) Full Council be asked to approve the amendments to the Financial Regulations.

15 Driving at Work

The Driving at Work Policy ensured the Council complied with its legal responsibilities and placed responsibility onto employees to assist with this.

RESOLVED that:

i) The Driving at Work Policy be approved.

16 Fire and Rescue

The Fire and Rescue Service in Thame had approached the Council to request the use of Lupton Road Depot as an emergency backup site in the event of a major incident taking out the use of the fire station in Nelson Street.

RESOLVED that:

i) The Depot be made available if required as part of Oxfordshire County Council's Business Continuity Plans.

17 Community Right to Bid

The Working Group reported that some work had been done to identify buildings and pieces of land within the Parish boundary that may be considered as a Community Asset.

18 Mayor Making

Any considerations arising from the Working Group would be reported back to the Town Clerk for distribution to councillors.

19 Compliments & Complaints

The report was noted.

20 CCTV

The CCTV agreement was due to expire on 31 March 2016. Ahead of entering into a new agreement it was agreed to set up a Working Group to review the current arrangements for provision of CCTV in the town and the financial implications of entering into any new agreement.

RESOLVED that:

- i) A Working Group of Cllrs Dixon, Matelot Green and Wyse be formed to review the CCTV contract and continuation of the current agreement.*
- ii) A report from the Working Group be available by 31 December 2014 to inform the budget estimates for 2015-16.*
- iii) A recommendation in regard to entering into a future long term (10+ years) agreement with SODC be made to a meeting of the Full Council before September 2015.*

21 CCTV

The report was noted.

22 For Information

The item for information was noted.

The meeting concluded at 9.23pm

Signed
Chairman, 17 February 2015