

## THAME TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 31 October 2017 at 6.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall.

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

**Officers**

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

### 1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Lambert (Business) and Wyse (Council Business).

### 2 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest.

### 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 Rathbone Investment Management presented the annual review of Town Council's investment portfolio.

Rupert Baron reported that the portfolio's primary objective, as agreed by the Town Council was to increase capital and adopt a low risk strategy. The fund stood at just under £2m, close to its original level. During that time investments had been realised to purchase the Depot, provide funding for Queen Elizabeth Circle, the new Skate Park, Cricket Clubhouse and provide a loan to Chinnor Rugby Club. The fund continued to perform well showing a return on the year to 24 October 2017 of 8.7%.

Andrew Hess advised that if the Town Council had a particular project(s) that required large capital spend, £500,000 could be accessed easily through the portfolio. He added a note of caution on future returns, the current 'Bull' market was the second longest ever on record and trying to second guess when it would change was difficult. Interest rates, inflation and the economy increasing significantly would influence a change in the market. It was widely expected that the Bank of England would announce an interest rate rise, probably of a 0.25%, later this week.

After Rupert and Andrew answered a number of questions, Cllr Dyer thanked Rathbones for the presentation and their continued good management of the Town Council's portfolio.

It was proposed that an additional Councillor be added as a trustee to the Rathbones Investment Account. Current trustees were Cllr Butler and the Town Clerk.

**RESOLVED that:**

- i) ***The Chairman of the Policy & Resources Committee, Cllr Dyer be added as a trustee on the Rathbones Investment Account.***

## **5 Citizens Advice**

Mr Jon Bright, Director, Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale began his presentation by thanking the Town Council for the financial support given to Citizens Advice (CA). He stated that CA continued to provide an important service to the local community offering advice to over 9,000 people each year, by phone and face to face at the five advice centres in Abingdon, Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford.

Many people assumed CA was part of a Government or national service which was not the case, the CA was a local charity reliant on raising money locally and represented good value for money set against the benefits for every pound invested. Thame had seen an increase of 5% in the number of clients on the previous year. The top five issues being; benefits and tax credits, employment, housing, relationships / family and debt.

A third party independent survey showed that 74% of clients had their problem resolved 6-8 weeks after their initial enquiry. The survey also showed the reduction in the client's stress level after receiving advice which had a positive impact on their health and well-being.

CA Oxfordshire South & Vale had undergone an external audit in the summer resulting in a green rating (over the threshold of 80%), a good indication of the quality of service being provided by CA. Jon finished with the success story that is the CA's volunteers, provided with good training they volunteered as advisers, telephone advisers, administrators, IT support, community trainers, supervisors and fundraisers. The majority of volunteers based in Thame had been with the CA a long time.

After Jon answered a number of questions, Cllr Dyer thanked Jon Bright for the update.

## **6 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 August 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **7 Financial Update**

Members received the budget summary up to 30 September 2017. The Balance Sheet was noted.

## **8 Financial Overspends**

It was noted that there were no budget lines greater than £100 overspent to report this quarter.

## **9 Investment Update**

The summary of the investment performance was noted.

## **10 Fixed Term Deposits**

Members noted that in line with the Investment Strategy, and specific past resolutions re Treasury Management, that:

- a) the Council has transferred the £50,000 that matured on 6 October 2017 (9 months at 0.7%) into the 32 day notice account at 0.32%.
- b) the Council has transferred the £100,000 that matured on 23 October 2017 (12 months at 1%) into the 32 day notice account at 0.32%.
- c) the Council has transferred an additional £100,000 from its current account (0.01%) into the 32 day notice account at 0.32%.

- d) the Council is progressing a further £100,000 transfer from its current account into a 12 month fixed term deposit at United Trust Bank at 1.45%.

The Council now had £450,000 in its 32 day notice account which would mean careful cash flow management (especially in February/March and July/August when spare funds were at their lowest).

Interest rates (currently at derisory levels) would be watched closely and the opportunity taken to transfer into higher return deposits should there be a better offer that materialised.

With regard to item d) the Town Clerk reported that consideration was being given to moving spare cash away from the Lloyds account to smaller banks who, with less overheads, could afford to pay higher interest rates. A decision would be made on Thursday once the Bank of England had announced any changes to the base interest rate.

## **11 Reports from Representatives on External Organisations**

- a) Barns Centre – nothing reported.
- b) Citizens Advice – update given under item 5.
- c) Health Hub – report noted. Cllr Champken-Woods stated that at the Community Hub Stakeholder meeting last week it was reported that there had been on average a reduction of 800 admissions to hospital per month since the trial began. Stoke Mandeville Hospital had now employed a GP to work in the A&E department.
- d) NALC – report noted. Cllr Dyer reported that he and the Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer had given a presentation at the NALC Conference this morning which had been well received.
- e) Red Kite Family Centre – report noted. Cllr Emery reminded Councillors that leaflets providing an update on the Red Kite Family Centre were available.
- f) Thame Business Forum – report noted.
- g) Thame & District Day Centre – report noted.
- h) Thame & District Housing Association – Cllr Butler stated that it was business as usual with nothing out of the ordinary to report.
- i) Thame Youth Memorial Trust – nothing reported.
- j) 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thame – report noted.
- k) Welfare Trust – nothing reported.

## **12 Internal Audit**

Members received the First Interim Internal Audit Report for 2017-18 and expressed their thanks to Officers for their hard work and attention to detail resulting in another clean Audit with no issues identified.

The Town Clerk reported that there would be an item on the next Full Council Agenda on the External Audit. When establishing final figures for presentation on the Annual Return, accountants DCK Beavers had double accounted for the figures on the Chinnor Rugby Club Loan and the revised figures would need to be approved.

### 13 Terrorism Policy

Due to the heightened security threat within the UK, it was timely for the Council to put a new Terrorism Policy in place which set out clear guidelines for staff and members to follow should a terrorism incident take place.

Members agreed the draft policy with some refinements to Section 5.1 – Suspicious Packages.

**RESOLVED that:**

- i) The Terrorism Policy be adopted with some refinements to Section 5.1.***

*Cllr Dixon left the meeting during this item.*

### 14 Insurance Strategy

The Strategy sets out guidelines that the Council should follow with regard to insurance and was last reviewed in 2013.

**RESOLVED that:**

- i) The revised Insurance Strategy be approved.***

### 15 Excess Charge Tickets

Currently the Town Council offered members of the public the option to make an Excess Charge payment by cash, cheque, BACS or credit / debit card (via Cardnet). It was proposed that, as an additional customer service, credit / debit card payments could be made via the Council's website. This would allow payments to be made outside of normal working hours at a time convenient to the customer.

Since publication of the report Officers had been made aware that an additional Cardnet Merchant Number would be required for payments via the website which may incur an additional £50 set up charge and a monthly minimum cost of £15 plus £5.50. It was therefore proposed that a decision on whether to proceed should be in principle only, subject to further feasibility and financial viability assessments.

**RESOLVED that:**

- i) In principle (and subject to further feasibility and financial viability checks) that Excess Charge parking fine payments be enabled via the Council's website.***

### 16 Thame Museum Building Improvement Project

Members noted the report. Cllr Bretherton added that costings were still being worked on and would be presented to a meeting of the Museum Trustees in two weeks. It was hoped to submit an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund once the Trustees had approved the application and finances.

### 17 Town Council Website

The report was noted.

### 18 Upper Chamber Acoustics

As reported at the last meeting further clarification had been sought on a number of the recommendations and comments contained within the commissioned report which the consultant had now provided.

There were a number of options, the one that would involve the least maintenance being the installation of acoustic panels to the ceiling. Further calculations from a specialist fitter were being obtained on the number of panels required and the expected impact. This together with baize covering for the tables would be the cheapest long term option.

It was agreed that the District Conservation Officer is contacted to see whether the installation of acoustic panels would need Listed Building consent.

## **19 War Memorial**

Members noted that at the Budget Working Group meeting on 10 October 2017 it was proposed to thoroughly clean (in line with War Memorial / Civic Society best practice) the War Memorial in advance of Sunday 11 November 2018, which will mark the centenary of the end of the first World War. Any further refurbishment works (along with the addition of missing names) will be scheduled with the Thame Remembers project for completion by 2021.

## **20 Memorial Bench at Southern Road Recreation Ground**

Cllr Bretherton reported that he had spoken with the manufacturer and work on the bench was beginning this week. A quote from the contractor to install the bench had been received, there was a couple of queries that needed to be resolved. Unfortunately the bench would not be installed in time for Megan's birthday but everyone involved was keen to complete the project in a timely manner.

## **21 Land Disposal**

The following land disposal requests were noted:

- a) That two separate requests received from residents to purchase public open space land on Pickenfield had been declined as in the opinion of the Town Clerk (in line with para 3.9 of the Land Acquisition and Disposal Policy) the requests did not meet the criteria for land disposal by the Council.
- b) A further request had been received with regard to the purchase of land to the rear of 54 Cromwell Avenue. In this case the Town Clerk did believe that a small triangle of land may meet the criteria. The Asset Manager will establish further details, which may include a survey of local residents, before bringing to the Committee for further discussion.

## **22 Free Use / De-Minimis Delegated Authority**

Members noted that the Town Clerk, through De Minimis delegated authority, had granted the following:

- a) Portable sound system temporarily loaned to the Fire Service.
- b) £500 contribution allocated from Localism Reserve to help solve long term flooding issue on footway in Lea Park.
- c) Insurance cover for Speed Indicator Device operation in Moreton.
- d) TAL provisional Upper Chamber dates for 2018 / 19 / 20.
- e) Town Hall stairs for art event as part of art crawl.
- f) Use of the Chamber at Charity Rate for Oxfordshire NHS

## **23 Memorial Policy**

It was noted that following requests for a memorial bench at the skate park and two further requests for benches / plaques at the Memorial Gardens work was underway to produce a Memorial Policy to ensure a consistent approach to such requests.

**24 Compliments and Complaints**

The report was noted.

**25 Parking Attendant**

Members noted that Roberta Silva, Saturday Car Park Attendant commenced employment on 17 August 2017.

**26 Maintenance Assistant**

It was noted that recruitment for a Maintenance Assistant was underway.

**27 For Information**

The items were noted. The Town Clerk drew Members attention to the CCTV report which included the latest discussions on the police review of cameras, replacement of cameras and the latest on the CCTV review.

The meeting concluded at 8pm

Signed .....  
Chairman, 13 February 2018