

THAME TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 30 October 2018 at 6.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall.

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

Non-Voting

Cllr Stiles

Officers

G Hunt, Town Clerk

M Robinson, Office Administration Manager

A Oughton, Committee Services Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Emery (Council Business) and Midwinter (Unwell).

Cllrs Butler and Dixon were absent without apology.

2 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations.

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 Thomas Weston-Davies of Rathbone Brothers plc presented the annual review of the Town Council's Investment Portfolio.

Rupert said the portfolio allowed Rathbones the freedom to act, within the mandate, to maximise the bottom line value of the portfolio whilst maintaining a low risk. The value of investments currently stood at £1.8m, with an estimated annual income of £30k representing 1.7% return. During the last year the Town Council had drawn down £140k. Broadly speaking over the year the fund had stood still but was in a good position going forward to cope with any 'bad weather as well as good' in the future.

Thomas talked through the investment performance analysis on page 4 of the report. Merian Global had performed the worst over the last year but the previous year had been the top performer. Rathbones constantly monitored the markets to make sure the right investment risks are taken to meet the Town Council's objectives.

Rupert reported that last month the stock market performance had experienced 'a bump in night' and it would be interesting to see how the markets performed over the next six months. His personal view was that it would be 'bumpy ride'. Overseas the US economy was growing robustly, the Chinese economy remained healthy but growth had slowed and the EU economy was beginning to show signs of slowing.

After Rupert and Thomas answered a number of questions, Cllr Dyer thanked them both for the update.

5 Citizens Advice

Mr Jon Bright provided the annual update from Citizens Advice (CA) which covered both South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse Districts.

Across both districts CA had given advice to just over 10,000 clients. Thame CA had advised 2,266 clients of which 631 were Thame town residents, this represented a 15% increase on the previous year.

CA provided a quality service, advisers are trained for 8 months, each advice session is managed by a paid supervisor. A rigorous process was in place to check the quality of advice given. Sample case reports are checked by a quality assessor and every quarter a sample of these are sent to a national CA assessor. The Oxfordshire CA received top marks in the annual audit.

The impact with regard to benefits to clients; the majority of clients had found a way forward following the advice received, 58% had their problem resolved after the first visit, three months later the percentage rose to 72%. Two in three people coming to the CA felt stressed or depressed, however, four in five people felt less depressed or stressed after receiving advice.

The impact with regard to value for money; the average cost of an advice session per client is £36 (half that of one or two neighbouring CAs). Every £1 invested in OSAVCA led to a fiscal benefit of £6.31, the value of volunteering in our area amounted to £781,472.

CA is working to prevent problems and working closely with the District Council Housing Needs Teams, Housing Associations, the County Council, NHS and former Childrens' Centres to help support vulnerable clients.

The Government had just announced funding for CAs to provide support with Universal Credit. Jon was not sure what was involved at this stage but the CA was gearing up to provide first rate support to clients on Universal Credit.

The CA was in the first year of a 5% reduction in grant funding received from the District Councils. Other funding after 2021 was very uncertain. The CA are looking at other ways to raise funds and Jon thanked the Town Council for their financial support.

After Jon answered a number of questions, Cllr Dyer thanked Jon for the update and stated the Town Council were very appreciative of the work the CA is doing in Thame and the wider district.

6 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7 Financial Update

All four items were noted; the budget summary up to 30 September 2018, the Balance Sheet, that new £40k and £10k loans have been made to the Thame Town Cricket Club and Chinnor Rugby Football Club respectively, in line with resolutions and that £500 has been allocated from the Localism Reserve towards solving drainage issues on the pathway adjacent to The Moats.

8 Financial Overspends

The following financial overspends against budget line items (greater than the agreed de minimis of £100 / 5%) have been recorded since the last meeting of the Committee:

- a) As reported by mail to all Councillors on 21/6/18 and in Q1 Budget Summary, Recruitment Advertising (101/4030) is overspent by approximately £400. The overspend resulted in a successful campaign for replacement recruitment of the Office Administration Manager.
- b) As reported to the Councillor members of the Cricket Club Clubhouse Redevelopment Working Group on 27/9/18, the cumulative legal expenses for the variety of legal requirements amount so far to £5,356, which is nearly £3,000 in excess of the arbitrarily annual budgeted amount for legal expenses (101/4056).
- c) A back charge for historic Town Hall water usage (102/4012) has resulted in costs so far this year of £773 against a budgeted amount of £640.
- d) The Neighbourhood Plan Stationary & Printing Budget (113/4026) of £1,000 has been overspent so far by £210, mainly relating to Green Living Plan publicity. An increase will be proposed in next year's budget.
- e) Because of the abnormal weather conditions, the normal supplier of hay cutting (201/4038) at Cuttlebrook Nature Reserve was unavailable. The necessity to continue with an alternative short notice supplier resulted in an overspend of £600.
- f) Rather than use the War Memorial Refurbishment Reserve for this year's additional cleaning of the Memorial Gardens and Moreton war memorials, the cost has been allocated to the respective maintenance budgets (211/4036 and 217/4100), where no allowance had been made for this once-off cleaning. The resulting overspend is around £1,200 but the result has been well received by the community.
- g) Provision of skips (212/4110) since the take-on of maintenance of St Mary's Churchyard have been £110 greater than the £500 budgeted so far. Part of this will be recovered from the church and greater understanding of volumes will be fed into next year's budget

All of the above will be covered initially by underspends elsewhere and ultimately from the General Reserve Fund.

9 Investment Update

The summary of the investment performance was noted.

10 Reports from Representatives on External Organisations

The reports were noted.

11 Internal Audit

The Internal Auditor's first visit of the financial year took place on 25 October 2018. The First Interim Internal Audit Report (2018-19) records that the Town Council continues to operate sound and effective financial controls and procedures with no issues identified which warrant formal comment or recommendation.

Members thanked the Office Administration Manager and members staff for all their hard work.

12 Parking Enforcement

The Town Clerk reported that recent discussions with the police, as work has been carried out in the latest attempt for South Oxfordshire District Council to take on district-wide civil enforcement, had suggested that there may be a legal way for the Town Council to take on the role of enforcing the two hour on-street free parking.

The Town Clerk had submitted a legal query to Oxfordshire County Council to establish the latest advice on the possibility of Thame Town Council taking on the function, preferably to operate identically to the 1 hour / 3 hour enforcement which is currently in place. And if so, what legal actions would be required. If it were legally possible, then it would be a fairly simple function to extend the current operation to also monitor the various blocks of 2 hour free parking in a way that was beneficial to the town.

The Town Clerk emphasised that he was seeking a 'just in case' resolution.

After discussion it was agreed to move forward with the extension of parking enforcement provided it is legal to do so, whatever is put in place remains cost neutral to the Town Council and that a common sense approach is adopted.

RESOLVED that:

- i) Approval be given to Officers (subject to legal feasibility and cost neutrality) to extend the current car parking enforcement operation to include enforcement of 2 hour on-street free parking within Thame Town Centre in a way that is beneficial to the town.***

13 Community Engagement Strategy

The Community Engagement Strategy was adopted in 2014 and reviewed on a four-year cycle. As well as some cosmetic refinements, the Strategy had been updated to reflect the different methods of Community Engagement deployed.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The revised Community Engagement Strategy be adopted.***

14 Officer Code of Conduct

The Officer Code of Conduct was adopted in 2014. The Code sets out the standards expected of all employees under contract with the Council and includes permanent, temporary, part-time, casual and agency personnel. The Code had been reviewed and a number of minor amendments made.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The revised Officer Code of Conduct be adopted.***

15 Local Government Pension Scheme – Pensions Discretions Policy / Terms of Reference

The LGPS Pensions Discretions Policy and the LGPS Terms of Reference were adopted in July 2014. The Discretions Policy has been updated to reflect the greater retirement flexibility introduced by the Government in May 2018. The Terms of Reference have also been updated to reflect the greater retirement flexibility introduced by the Government, the activation of Government defined auto-enrolment and to reflect the latest contribution bands.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The revised LGPS Pension Discretions Policy be adopted.***
- ii) The revised LGPS Terms of Reference be adopted.***

16 Play Area Inspections Policy

The Play Area Inspections Policy was last reviewed in 2014. The Asset Manager and the Maintenance Team continue to execute inspections in conformance with the Policy. After review no changes to the Policy have been identified.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The unchanged Play Area Inspections Policy be re-adopted.*

17 Working at Height Policy

Following review of the Working at Height Policy a number of minor cosmetic amendments have been made.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The revised Working at Height Policy be adopted.*

18 Health and Safety Visit Outcomes

The Health & Safety Consultant from Ellis Whittam carried out her final visit on 12 September 2018 of the current three year contract which was due to terminate on 13 October 2018. Overall the Consultant recognised the hard work and commitment the staff have towards health and safety in the work place and that the Council's organisational standards remain high.

19 Free Use / De-Minimis Delegated Authority

It was noted that the Town Clerk, through De Minimis delegated authority, has granted the following:

- a) 18 hours of free use of the Upper Chamber for Action for Carers from 2-4/10/18
- b) Free use of the Town Hall on 2/12/18 for the Festive Fun Run (if it goes ahead)
- c) Free use of Meeting Room for SODC Emergency Planning event on 5/9/18
- d) Free weekend use of Upper Chamber for the taking of Living Monument portraits
- e) Free use of Upper Chamber for Business Forum on 18/9/18
- f) Free use of Town Hall for Lord Williams's School art event in February 2019

20 Land Disposal

Members noted that a request had been received with regard to the purchase of land on the edge of the Cuttlebrook Nature Reserve for a rear garden extension. The Town Clerk and the Asset Manager will investigate further against the Land Acquisition and Disposal Policy when time allows.

It was thought a covenant was placed on the land, at the time of land transfer to the Town Council, that it could not be sold. The Town Clerk was grateful for this information and would investigate this further.

21 Security Service

It was noted that R&R Frontline Services Ltd, the organisation that has successfully provided security services for a variety of Thame events, both under and outside of the Town Council's responsibility, has been acquired by Securitas. These include security support for the September Fair and the Christmas Event, and separate Key Holding responsibilities.

The Community Services Manager is establishing the impact on these existing and future events / contracts and doing everything possible to ensure effective continuity of local expertise / knowledge.

22 Compliments and Complaints

The report was noted.

23 Staffing Update

To **note** that Karen Slater commenced employment as Office Administration Manager on 1 October 2018. To **note** that a meeting of the Personnel Committee is scheduled to take place later this evening.

24 For Information

The items for information were noted.

The meeting concluded at 7.55pm

Signed
Chairman, 12 February 2019