

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on Thursday 19th December 2013 at 5.30pm in the Committee Room at the Old Abbey House, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present:

Cllr Iain Littlejohn	Chairman
Cllr Alison Rooke	Vice Chairman
Cllr Lesley Legge	
Cllr Marilyn Badcock	
Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Ex-officio, Leader of the Council

In Attendance:

Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer	
Ms Johannah Aynsley	Guildhall Manager
Mr Steve Rich	Head of Service Delivery
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)
2 Members of the Public	

G82 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Samantha Bowring (Mayor) and Katie Nobes.

G83 Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

G84 Minutes

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 23rd October 2013, as circulated with the agenda.

Resolved: *that the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 23rd October 2013 be approved and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.*

G85 **Matters Arising**

Minutes G73 – Manager’s Report

It was noted that a delegation had been given to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Guildhall Manager to dispose of the old round tables. However, the Manager now considered that these tables may still be required occasionally if the Guildhall is particularly busy and therefore requested that the Committee approve their continued use by the Guildhall. The Committee **resolved** accordingly and noted that, for the foreseeable future, the delegation to dispose of the tables would not be exercised.

G86 **Public Participation**

Two members of the public had indicated that they wished to address the meeting.

Dr Philip Kenrick stated that he and local residents were pleased to have received notification of a recent wedding at which live music was to be played. However, it was unfortunate that the letter informing residents was not delivered until the day of the event and it had been photocopied in such a way that it was not possible to read parts of the letter. In relation to the Daylight and Sunlight Study, he had a few queries: on page 3, he stated that the document provides for the versions of the project drawings to be identified, but this had not been done. He felt that the report should confirm explicitly that the July drawings (and not the earlier ones) had been used, if this was the case, as there was a material difference in the roof height of the cinema between the two. In the first table in Appendix 2 (Vertical Sky Component) there were figures listed for windows 8a, 8b and 9a which were not otherwise identified. He queried what/where they were. He noted that there were four further windows in 7 Abbey Close of which no account had been taken.

Whilst he did not expect them to be relevant he stated that they should have been included. Also there were windows in 8, Checker Walk which would be affected, though only one of these was visible from the present escape-ramp behind the Guildhall.

The Town Clerk agreed to look into this matter and report back. Finally, Dr Kenrick noted that the Council had applied for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and asked what the timescale for the proposed works would be, should the grant application be successful. The Chairman of the Committee, responded that if successful, the Town Council would then enter the “development phase” which would involve applying for planning permission and developing the drawings up to the point at which the work would go out to tender. During this development period there would also be further work undertaken in relation to the business planning for the new facility.

Dr Jim Halliday concurred with Dr Kenrick that unfortunately the letter to the neighbours regarding the wedding was unreadable as it had not been copied correctly. He understood that the restructure of the way in which the Committee operated was resulting in the creation of a number of working groups. He understood the rationale behind this but asked that the Council remain as transparent as possible regarding its proceedings. In this regard, he had recently looked on the Town Council portal and noted that a number of meeting agendas and minutes had not been posted online. The Town Clerk stated that he would seek to ensure that the portal was up to date in this regard and would also be seeking clarification from Members regarding whether online agendas should also include reports, which they had not in the past, in line with many other councils; and at what point minutes should be published online, i.e. when they are draft subject to Committee approval or only after Committee approval.

G87 **Manager's Report**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Guildhall Manager as previously circulated. In relation to room hires, following a quiet summer, the autumn period was much busier and the Manager reported that there was a 23% room occupancy rate recorded for November as against the average annual building occupancy of approximately 10%.

The Committee considered the position regarding Guildhall organised events. Due to the limitations of the building, Members **resolved** that the Council should continue with the Comedy Night, which had been successful, but that no further Guildhall organised events should be organised until after the Improvement Project has been implemented. The Manager reported that she would like to consider changing the night of Comedy Night from a Thursday to a Friday. Ticket sales for Friday 27th December 2013 had already been good and it was anticipated that a larger audience would attend on a Friday evening. Members were content for this matter to be dealt with directly by the Manager.

The Manager reported that staffing costs were higher than anticipated this year for a number of reasons which had previously been reported. She could report in the open session that the policy to avoid lone working and training sessions for staff had also added to the costs.

The Manager reported that recently there had been a problem at a wedding when a key member of staff had had an accident which meant that she had to go to hospital and this had impacted adversely on the service which the Council had been able to offer on the evening, despite the best efforts of the staff remaining and also the much appreciated call out of an additional member of staff. She had spoken to the customers regarding this matter but whilst there was an explanation for the unfortunate problems which ensued, it

did raise the issue of the need to review systems and working arrangements so that there was more resilience should a similar set of circumstances present themselves in the future.

A Member stated that she had received a number of complaints from persons who had come to visit Father Christmas, who had been advertised as being in the Grotto at the Guildhall over the Christmas period. People had turned up expecting him to be there only to be disappointed. The Manager reported that unfortunately, whilst it had been hoped that Father Christmas would be at the Guildhall this year, she had been unable to find enough volunteers to make this possible. She had had conversations with the Chamber of Commerce and also the Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager regarding this matter and they were also organising a number of Christmas events, including Father Christmas on the Market Place and consequently it had been decided, with regret, to cancel Father Christmas at the Guildhall. She had attempted to give this publicity through the portal and also through notices on the door but it was a number of people had already seen Father Christmas advertised through the Town Crier magazine and had been disappointed.

The Manager reported that she had encountered some problems with updating the Abingdon portal, Guildhall section, and she was currently in discussions with the portal co-ordinator regarding sorting this out.

With regard to the Comedy Club, the Manager reported that she would review this matter in March and report back to Members. She also reported that the Ruby Vintage Fair was due back at the Guildhall on Saturday 22nd February 2014. In the past this had proved to be a very successful event.

Resolved: *that the Guildhall Manager's report be approved.*

G88 **Estimates 2014/15**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

The report detailed the projected net expenditure across the revenue cost centres for 2013/14 together with the budget proposal for 2014/15. As stated in his report, the Town Clerk reported that the budgets had been under considerable pressure this year and had resulted in projected net expenditure across the revenue cross centres amounting to £198,591 as against an original budget of £120,000. However, this outturn estimate included sums in relation to energy supplies incurred in previous years which, although anticipated, had not been invoiced by the supplier until the current financial year; in addition, the revenue budget also included staffing costs incurred in relation to the capital project. If these two items were taken out, the revised estimate for the revenue cost centres reduced to £149,645. This remained

above the original estimate and the reasons for this were explained in terms of increased staffing costs, Guildhall events not generating the income which had been anticipated in the original budget and lettings also failing to reach the original budget.

In looking forward to 2014/15 it had been assumed that would be a similar level of activity to the current year. However savings had been made against the marketing and property budgets and a reduction was anticipated against energy costs. Consequently the revenue budget for 2014/15 was estimated at £149,631 as against the original budget for the current year of £120,000 and £154,739 for 2012/13.

The Town Clerk reported that during the budget cycle, the Council was effectively undertaking an exercise to establish the amount of finance which it needed to raise for the following year, from both precept (Council Tax) and other sources. During the cycle capital projects were only considered in relation to any financing which they may require from the revenue budgets. The Guildhall Committee was developing the phase 2 Guildhall Improvement Project and this would be a major project for the Council. However at present there were no proposals for financing project costs from revenue during 2014/15 and therefore the capital project did not form part of the budget setting process for 2014/15. Matters in this regard would be further considered following the results of the HLF grant application.

It was recommended to the Finance and General Purposes Committee:

1. that the Guildhall Committee revised net budgets (ie gross expenditure less income) for 2013/14 be agreed at £198,591 (original £120,000), noting that adjustments to this figure indicated that revenue expenditure for the year could more accurately be represented as £149,645;
2. That a net budget of £149,631 be agreed for 2014/15;
3. That no bid be made for funding of capital or larger revenue items in relation to 2014/15 from the precept but that matters would be reviewed following the results of the Council's application to the HLF Enterprise Fund.
4. That the report of the Town Clerk be approved.

G89 Guildhall Working Groups

The Town Clerk reported that dates were being canvassed for a number of the working groups which had been established and that it was anticipated that a number of these would meet during the early part of 2014.

G90 Guildhall Improvement Project, Phase 2

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

The Town Clerk stated that as Members were aware, the Council had commissioned from an expert engineering consultancy a “Daylight and Sunlight Study” in relation to the approved plans for the Guildhall. This had been received and was previously circulated at the Finance and General Purposes Committee at its meeting on 11th November 2013. The document was not required for the HLF application or, in more general terms, at this stage of the Project.

Members had raised some queries on the report and these had been covered by the comments by Dr Kenrick in the public participation session, and the Town Clerk would seek clarification on these matters.

Resolved: *that the report be noted.*

G91 Date of next meeting and calendar of meetings

It was reported that the dates of the next meetings were due to be 16th January and 6th March 2014. In the eventuality, the January 2014 was cancelled.

G92 Exclusion of the Public Including the Press

The Chairman moved and it was **resolved:**

That in accordance with section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1060 (as extended by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972), the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

G93 Confidential Appendix to the Minutes of the Meeting of 23rd October 2013

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 23rd October 2013.

Resolved: *that the Confidential Appendix to the minutes of the Guildhall Committee meeting held on 23rd October 2013 be approved and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.*

G94 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting which were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

G95 **Confidential Report of the Guildhall Manager**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Guildhall Manager.

Members noted that the sourcing of a defibrillator was being explored and that there may well be a source of funding in this regard. Members requested that as part of this, consideration be given by the Manager to the necessary training for staff and also clarification over the duties of the Guildhall to members, staff and to the public, which it was understood were different.

It was noted that an application had been submitted to the District Council for a grant under their new Home Bonus Fund and that this was due to be considered by the District Council's Area Committee at its meeting on 4th February 2014.

The Committee thanked the Manager and the other Council Officers for their work in progressing the various funding applications.

Resolved: *that the Manager's report be approved.*

G96 **Guildhall Improvement Project Phase Two**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

Resolved: *that the report be approved.*

G97 **Royse Court Improvement Project**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Head of Service Delivery in relation to the above.

The Head of Service delivery reported that work was progressing very well in relation to the Roysse Court project. The building would be handed over to the Council in January 2014 and improvement works were also taking place in relation to the ground floor (Registry Office). The Head of Service Delivery stated that he was happy that any Members who had not recently visited the offices should contact him to arrange a visit.

Resolved: *that the report of the Head of Service Delivery be approved.*

The meeting rose at 7.04pm.