

FARINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Finance & Audit Committee meeting held on Wednesday 29th April 2009 in the Council Chamber, the Corn Exchange, Faringdon

PRESENT: Cllr. S. Leniec (Chairman)
Mrs. M.J. Barker
Mrs. J. Boulton
Ms. J. Farmer
J.C.W. Gillman
A.V. Hickmore
D. Price
M. Wise

In Attendance: Mrs. S. Thurston, F.C. & T.I.C. Supervisor
4 Members of Public
The Town Clerk

28/09 Apologies for Absence

No apologies had been received.

29/09 Declarations of Interest

Cllr. Ms. Farmer declared an interest in the grant application from Faringdon Arts Festival in her capacity as one of the organizers of the event.

30/09 Minutes of Last Meeting : 6th April 2009

The Minutes were signed as a correct record.

31/09 Matters Arising from 21st January, 11th March & 6th April

Min. 13/09(c): The Clerk reported that car parking permits had now been issued by VWHDC.

32/09 Public Speaking Time & Public Question Time

None of the members of public wished to speak at this time, and no questions had been received.

33/09 Faringdon Fossil Trust

Members were asked to consider payment of an invoice for Solicitor's fees for work carried out between 30th May 2008 and 31st January 2009 in the sum of £402.50, together with an estimate for further work required for the transfer of land from Builders Ede to the Town Council. Professor Snelling, a Trustee of the Trust, was invited to speak and spoke in support of the payment of the existing bill and agreement for further work which would resolve the status of the site, remove any ambiguity and protect the site from any further development by Builders Ede. Cllr. Leniec proposed that the existing bill be paid and that authorization be given for further work up to a sum of £650, both amounts to be

taken from reserves. This was seconded and CARRIED. Professor Snelling expressed his thanks for all the help the Trust had received from the Council.

34/09 2008/09 End of Year Financial Reports

The following financial reports were received:

(i) Office & Establishment & Grants

The Clerk highlighted the overspend on photocopier costs and stated that this was partly due to having to send out multiple copies of the same Minutes, often in the same envelope, because members failed to bring their papers to each meeting. She suggested that a ring binder be supplied to each member to be brought to each meeting, and this was AGREED.

(ii) Community & Tourist Information Centre

Cllr. Hickmore expressed the view that the stock turnover, although greatly improved, was still too low at 2.4% and suggested that more control was needed in terms of volume of stock.

(iii) Direct Council Expenditure

(iv) Summary of Council Income/Expenditure

It was NOTED that the end of year reserve figure was £105,048.

35/09 Community & Tourist Information Centre

(a) To receive report from the T.I.C. Supervisor

Mrs. Thurston tabled a written report, which included graphs showing visitor numbers and sales over the past two years. These showed a considerable increase between 2007/08 and 2008/09. Mrs. Thurston also tabled a draft leaflet of assessed accommodation which she had prepared and which had been funded by the accommodation providers. She was congratulated on her hard work and initiative.

(b) To receive paper setting out proposals for Community Awards

Mrs. Thurston tabled a paper outlining her suggestions for various community awards, and a discussion took place on the likely financial cost of the proposal. Cllr. Wise proposed that a sum of up to £500 should be authorised, from Council reserves, to fund the organisation of the awards and trophies and to make this recommendation to Council, which was seconded and CARRIED. It was suggested that an award ceremony should take place at the next Annual Town Meeting.

36/09 Applications for Financial Assistance

The following applications were considered:

1. Wantage Independent Advice Centre: £650 towards cost of continuing service to Faringdon residents.
A supplementary request had also been received for a further £300 towards the costs of a new weekly outreach service at Faringdon Children's Centre during term time. It was AGREED to award a S.137 grant of £950 in principle, but to ask the Advice Centre to submit an application for the further £300 to the next meeting.
2. ARCH (Assisted Reading for Children in Oxfordshire : £260 balance of funding required following previous request (Jan. 09).

- It was AGREED to award a S.137 grant of £260 as requested.
3. Faringdon Youth Centre : £4,300 towards costs of relaunch and ongoing service (deferred from January meeting).
It was NOTED that the building work on the new Youth Centre had stopped and there was no indication when the refurbishment would be completed. As a result, it was AGREED to defer this application until the opening date was known. Cllr. Hickmore also expressed the view that any grant should be match funded, to encourage the young people themselves to raise funds for the Centre.
 4. Ferendune Court Residential Home : £8,000 towards the cost of making their gardens accessible to all.
It was AGREED to offer a s.137 grant of up to £1,000 and suggest that the applicants also make applications to the VWHDC, Faringdon United Charities and organizations such as TOE. It was also agreed that a time limit be imposed on the grant to the end of September, to enable the funds to be reallocated to other applicants in the event of the project being unable to proceed.
 5. Faringdon Town Football Club : £2,500 towards cost of full refurbishment of pavilion.
Members considered that the reupholstery of seating in the club room was an inappropriate use of public funds, and suggested that the Football Club could submit a new application for sporting equipment, etc. which would be more favourably considered.
 6. Faringdon Retailer Group : £1,000 towards the cost of organizing Festive Faringdon.
Cllr. Leniec proposed that a grant of £1,000 under S.144/145 of the LGA 1972 be made, which was seconded and CARRIED.
 7. M.A.D.D. : £3,000 towards cost of organizing MADD May Fest 2009.
Members expressed concern at the apparent lack of publicity for the event, and the low turn out at various events in 2008. It was AGREED to award a S.144/145 grant of £2,000 and to inform the applicants that any future grant would be dependent on improved advertising.
 8. Faringdon Arts Festival : £3,000 towards the cost of organizing the Arts Festival weekend in 2009.
Cllr. Hickmore proposed that a S.144/145 grant of £2,500 be made, which was seconded and CARRIED. Cllr. Ms. Farmer stated that the reduction of £500 would create financial difficulties for the organizers, and requested free use of the venues to offset any shortfall in funding. Cllr. Ms. Farmer was advised to make her request direct to the next meeting of the Venues Committee.
 9. Faringdon Cricket Club : £1,904 towards the cost of a bowling machine.
It was AGREED to offer a match funding grant of £950 under the Local Government (Misc. Provisions) Act 1976, time limited to the end of September.
 10. Faringdon Baptist Church : £702 towards the cost of organizing an outdoor pursuits weekend for young people aged 8-14 years.
It was AGREED to award a S.137 grant of £702, as requested.

37/09 Corn Exchange Lease

Members received and considered Mr. A. Morgan's response on behalf of the VWHDC following comments made on the draft Agreement by full Council at their meeting on 8th

April, together with an email dated 20th April from the Council's Solicitor responding to the Council's queries. It was AGREED that Mr. Morgan's response was very disappointing and uncooperative and the Clerk was asked to forward a copy to the Vale's Chief Executive for his intervention.

The Solicitor's estimate of £300 to carry out searches was considered, and it was AGREED to authorize this sum and to instruct the Solicitor to proceed as soon as possible. The Clerk was also asked to arrange for a valuation of the Corn Exchange, and members gave her delegated authority of up to £500 for this to be carried out.

38/09 Corn Exchange Financing

Members received and considered a discussion paper on the financing for the refurbishment of the Corn Exchange prepared by Cllr. Hickmore, who expressed the opinion that Council should be considering borrowing a sum in the region of £100K from the PWLB to finance the refurbishment. His paper set out various options, which included using the £80K agreed from S.106 funds to repay the loan together with the Vale's contribution towards refurbishment costs during the next 3 years. Cllr. Hickmore expressed the opinion that the current low interest rates were unsustainable for a long period of time and suggested this was the best time to borrow funds, repayable over 20 years at a fixed interest rate.

Cllr. Leniec pointed out that the Finance Committee could not consider borrowing funds until a request had been received from the Venues Committee for funding, based on cost estimates for the refurbishment.

Cllr. Hickmore suggested that

- (a) a commitment be made, in principle, to finance the Corn Exchange by borrowing £100K from the PWLB
- (b) a working group, comprising of the same members set up under Min. No. 53/07 (amended to include Cllr. Hickmore under Min. No. 47/08) be appointed to ascertain whether or not the Council could use these to repay the loan.

Cllr. Hickmore's second suggestion was AGREED.

39/09 Capital Expenditure 2009/10

Members were asked to prioritise the Council's list of capital projects, and the following priorities were AGREED.

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| 1. Relocation costs of F.C. & T.I.C. to Corn Exchange | £5,000 |
| 2. New computer for F.C. & T.I.C. | £ 850 |
| 3. Bus shelter litter bins | £ 340 |
| 4. Audio/Visual Equipment for Pump House | £2,000 |
| 5. Replacement swing – Oakwood Park | £1,750 |
| 6. Corn Exchange toilet renovation | £5,000 |
| 7. Replacement for bridge – Tucker Park | £2,000 |
| 8. Willes Close – allotment preparation | £5,000 |

Cllr. Hickmore suggested that the sum of £1,500 proposed for the Recession Conference be withdrawn, and this was AGREED.

The Clerk was given authority to purchase the new computer for F.C. & T.I.C. up to the sum of £850, to ensure this was available as soon as the relocation of the F.C. & T.I.C. had taken place.

40/09 Staff Matters

(a) Members were asked to consider the implementation of a final pay award now agreed by NJC, which represents a 0.3% increase in addition to that already awarded, and is backdated to 1st April 2008. It was proposed, seconded and CARRIED to implement the pay award, and backdated, as outlined.

(b) To receive and consider Job Descriptions for Leisure Services Supervisor and Leisure Services Assistant.

The Clerk tabled proposed job descriptions, and these were AGREED.

(c) To nominate members to form an Interview Panel for the Leisure Services Assistant.

Cllrs. Mrs. J. Boulton and D. Price were nominated to form the Interview Panel with the Town Clerk.

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