

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2022**

Minutes of the meeting of the **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2022 at 7.15pm.

### **PRESENT**

#### **Councillor Arun M. Chandran (Chairman)**

Councillors Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Lindsey Aston, Jim Atkinson, Bob Fleming, George Gray, Ian Gray, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward, and John Woodward.

### **OFFICIALS**

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)

Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)

Mr. Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Officer)

Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administrative Officer)

### **54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Martin Ashcroft, Dorothy Bowman, Brian Haigh, Sandra Haigh and Wendy Hillary.

### **55. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS**

No dispensation requests had been received.

### **56. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Carl Robinson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda item 8, as a member of the Oakleaf Golf Club.

### **57. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

### **58. 2023/24 DRAFT ENVIRONMENT REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS**

Members considered 2023/24 Draft Environment Revenue and Capital Budgets report and appendices deferred from the Environment Meeting on 19th October 2022.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- a) the report be received;
- b) the draft 2023/24 Environment Revenue Budget be agreed;
- c) the savings proposals set out in Appendix 2 are agreed as set out in the table on the following page:

| Activity                             | Amount    | Savings Proposal  | Outcome   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---|---|
| Fees and Charges                     | £4,200.00 | If the fees and charges proposals are agreed this would increase cemeteries income.   | Agreed  |
| Dog Bags                             | £1,750.00 | The Council could consider introducing a charge for dog bags or withdrawing the service all together.   | Members voted unanimously to retain the provision of dog bags. A vote was taken to introduce a charge for them and carried. |
| Wildflower Area Maintenance          | £1,000.00 | Consider only cutting and baling meadows on GATC land.  | Not agreed. Officers to come back with a report on any proposed changes to wildflower area maintenance at a later date.     |
| <b>Other Savings Options</b>         |           |   |   |
| Street Equipment                     | -         | Consider seeking advertising on Council bus shelters.   | Agreed  |
| Environmental Waste Disposal Charges | -         | Consider encouraging DCC and Livin to more effectively litter pick their areas thereby reducing litter picked and disposed of at the Town Council's cost. | Officers to investigate reducing the work carried out litter picking on non-town council land and advise members of savings |

- d) Officers investigate reducing the level of maintenance undertaken at St Clare's Church and St Andrew's Church.
- e) Members advise officers of any further savings proposals to be investigated ahead of the final setting of the 2023/24 Revenue Budget in January.
- f) the draft 2023/24 Environment Capital Programme Budget is agreed.

## 59. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Jim Atkinson, seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam and

**RESOLVED** - that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 60. ACCOUNT CONTROL SHEETS

Account Control Sheets for the period 25<sup>th</sup> August 2022 to 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 and the General Bank Account for August (previously circulated) and September 2022 were submitted for approval.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that the Account Control Sheets the 25<sup>th</sup> August 2022 to 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 and the General Bank Account for August 2022 (previously circulated) and September 2022 be received.

## 61. GRANTS AND DONATIONS

The Town Clerk submitted a report setting out the Grants and Donations requests which had been received since the last meeting.

It was noted that the following funds are available: £2,728 in the Donations Budget, £1,500 Youth Council Grants Budget, £22,643 Community Grants Fund and £5,109 in the Community Benefit Fund.

It was suggested by Councillor Eddy Adam that the Council could consider advertising the funds remaining in the various grants and donations funds. This was agreed.

It was further suggested by Councillor Joanne Jones that the Council could consider asking the Mayor to undertake a formal presentation of grants and donations, and improve publicity of grant and donation awards. This was agreed.

The following grant and donation requests were considered:

### a) Neville Community Association - Application for a Donation

Neville Community Association submitted a donation request for £286 towards the cost of a Christmas Live Music Event to be held on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson and seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson and

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- i) A donation of £286 be given to Neville Community Association towards the cost of a Christmas Live Music Event.

### b) Durham County Golf Union – Request for Four Ball Vouchers

The Junior Committee of Durham County Golf Union requested two four ball vouchers to be used to help them raise funds to support the successful running of their boys' team and coaching programme.

The equivalent cost of two four ball vouchers would be £144.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and

Following a discussion, a vote was taken with a majority decision in favour of agreeing to the donation request.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- ii) A donation of two four ball vouchers to the value of £144 be given to the Junior Committee of Durham County Golf Union.

## 62. 2023/24 DRAFT POLICY AND RESOURCES REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

The Finance Manager submitted a report for Member's consideration, comments, and approval the draft 2023/24 Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Policy and Resources Committee.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that

- a) the report be received;
- b) the draft 2023/24 Policy and Resources Committee Revenue Budget be agreed;
- c) the savings proposals set out in Appendix 2 are agreed as set out in the table below:

| <b>Activity</b>                      | <b>Amount</b> | <b>Savings Proposal</b>  | <b>Outcome</b>  |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|--|---|
| Subscriptions                        | £110.00       | Cancel Local Council Magazine Subscription.  | Agreed  |
| Advertising of Meetings              | £900.00       | The Council stops advertising meetings in the Newton News.   | Agreed  |
| Council Newsletters and Consultation | £5,000.00     | The Council ceases publication of quarterly newsletter and investigates feasibility of e-newsletter.                         | Reduce to one newsletter per year for the annual report                                 |
| Youth Council                        | £3,000.00     | Remove Youth Council Grants and expenses budgets.  | Agreed  |
| Works Fuel                           | £1,500.00     | Double up the park patrol service on an evening thereby using only one vehicle and saving on fuel costs.                     | Agreed  |
| Fees and Charges                     | £450.00       | If fees and charges proposals are agreed there will be an increase in pre-school income.                                     | Defer decision to Special Policy and Resources Meeting on 31 <sup>st</sup> October 2022 |
| Water Coolers                        | £250.00       | Consider cancelling water coolers in the Works Section   | Retain works section water cooler   |
| Works Overtime                       | £823.00       | Consider holding political group meetings at the sports complex to save on works staff time opening and closing the offices. | Agreed  |
| Works Staffing and Fuel              | £2,175.00     | Consider recharging St Andrews Church for the maintenance of the church yard.  | Agreed  |
| Bedding Plants                       | £900.00       | Removal of raised beds from St. Oswald's Park.   | Not agreed  |
| Bedding Plants                       | £300.00       | Removal of beds around the bottom of trees in St Oswald's Park.  | Not agreed  |
| Bedding Plants                       | £320.00       | Removal of the flower beds at Simpature Park.  | Not agreed  |
| Bedding Plants                       | £500.00       | Hand back flower beds on Williamfield Way to DCC.  | Not agreed  |
| Bedding Plants                       | £1,400.00     | Consider leaving low priority beds 'fallow' over the winter period. Only plant up high priority areas in the winter.         | Not agreed  |
| Bedding Plants                       | £82.50        | Remove Summer hanging baskets from Council Offices.  | Not agreed  |
| Bedding Plants                       | £82.50        | Remove Summer hanging baskets from Stephenson Way Cemetery.  | Not agreed  |
| Bedding Plants                       | £330.00       | Remove Summer hanging baskets from lamp posts in St Oswald's Park.   | Not agreed  |
| Water Coolers                        | £200.00       | Council consider removing water coolers in the Council Offices.  | Retain Council offices water cooler   |

**Other Savings Options**

|                            |   |  |            |
|----------------------------|---|--|------------|
| Mayors' Allowance          | - | Could consider reducing Mayors Allowance.  | Not agreed |
| Council Donations          | - | Could consider reducing the donations budget.  | Not agreed |
| Staff First Aid Allowances | - | Consider reducing the number of first aiders (currently 33) to save on first aid allowance and training. | Not agreed |

*The meeting was adjourned at 8.53pm and reconvened at 9.02pm*

- d) Members advise officers of any further savings proposals to be investigated ahead of the final setting of the 2023/24 Revenue Budget in January.
- e) the draft 2023/24 Policy and Resources Capital Programme Budget was agreed.

Councillor Michael Stead advised that he had submitted a list of suggestions to the Town Clerk and Finance Manager prior to the meeting in time for the Medium-Term Financial Plan on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

A number of further suggestions for savings proposals be investigated ahead of the final setting of the 2023/24 Revenue Budget in January were discussed.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, seconded by Councillor Michael Stead to remove the tea/coffee machine from the Council Chamber.

A vote took place on the proposal with following results:

8 For  
9 Against  
1 Abstention

The proposal was defeated.

Councillor Eddy Adam proposed that the members allowance be reduced by 10%. This was seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson.

An amendment was made to the proposal by Councillor Arun Chandran to abolish the allowance.

It was advised that the above proposal would need to be tabled as a motion and added to a future agenda before the budget setting in January.

### **63. OVERALL DRAFT 2023/24 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET**

The Finance Manager submitted a report on the Council's overall draft 2023/24 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Budget for Members' consideration, comments, and approval.

Councillor Bob Fleming stated that he would support a 10.85% increase in the Town Council Tax in light of the financial difficulties faced and that the fall in Council balances and reserves needed to be addressed.

Councillor Michael Stead stated that he wished to see further savings identified to restrict the Council Tax increase.

Councillor Eddy Adam stated that services would be affected if further savings are sought and that further increases to fees and charges may help.

The Town Clerk advised that the savings agreed at this meeting and the Environment and Recreation Committee Meetings will be totalled and the impact of the level of Precept and Council Tax increase quantified and circulated to Members. The Council will then need to consider the maximum level of Town

Council Tax that would be acceptable, and this will then determine what further savings or fees and charges increases are required to balance the budget.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that

- a) the report be received;
- b) the overall summary of the draft 2023/24 Revenue Budget be agreed;
- c) the savings proposals set out in Appendix 2 are agreed as per the previous resolutions at Environment Committee, Recreation Committee on the previous agenda item.
- d) Members advise officers of any further savings proposals to be investigated ahead of the final setting of the 2023/24 Revenue Budget and Precept in January;
- e) Members agreed to defer the decision on the maximum level the Council would be prepared to increase the Town Council Tax by next year to the Policy and Resources Meeting on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022.
- f) the draft 2023/24 Capital Programme Budget be agreed subject to the installation of electric vehicle charging points at the Sports Complex being dependent on securing external funding.
- g) note the expected fall in the Council's Balances and Reserves to around £960,000 by the end of the 2023/24 year be noted.

#### 64. NOTICE OF MOTION

To consider the following motion from Councillor Michael Stead.

*“In light of the very challenging MTFP and proposed council tax rise in 2023/24, this Council agrees to bring forward the 2023 planned service review for the Oak Leaf Sports Complex in time for the final setting of the 2023/24 Precept in January 2023, in order to allow officers the best chance of finding further savings at the soonest possible time”.*

Councillor Stead advised that he wished to slightly amend the wording of the Motion as follows:-

*“In light of the very challenging MTFP and proposed council tax rise in 2023/24, this Council agrees to bring forward the 2023 planned service review for the Oak Leaf Sports Complex in time for the next update of the Medium-Term Financial Plan in order to allow officers the best chance of finding further savings at the soonest possible time”.*

The motion was seconded by Councillor Bob Fleming.

A vote took place and the revised motion was agreed by a majority decision.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that the following motion be approved:

*“In light of the very challenging MTFP and proposed council tax rise in 2023/24, this Council agrees to bring forward the 2023 planned service review for the Oak Leaf Sports Complex in time for the next update of the Medium-Term Financial Plan in order to allow officers the best chance of finding further savings at the soonest possible time.*

## **65. NOTICE OF MOTION**

To consider the following Motion from proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary and seconded by Councillor Bob Fleming:-

*“That with immediate effect, the Council implements a ruling that Officers must not attend meetings, either in person or via Zoom, whilst they are absent from work due to illness”.*

The Chairman proposed an amendment to the motion to change the wording from ‘must’ to ‘should’, which was agreed by the proposer.

Officers explained that they were working from home and not signed off sick at the time of the previous Policy and Resources Committee and Council Meetings.

It was further proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam and seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson that the motion be dropped as the explanation given by the officers was sufficient.

Councillor George Gray left the meeting at this point.

A vote was carried out on the original motion with the following results:

8 For

8 Against

The Chairman used his casting vote to vote against the motion.

The Motion was defeated.

## **66. KING CHARLES III CORONATION**

As agreed at the Events Sub Committee meeting held on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2022 it is requested that Members consider purchasing twenty non-themed Union Jack flags to be flown on the lamp posts Town Centre Park for the Coronation of King Charles III. The cost of the flags is £725 plus VAT and, if agreed, it is recommended that these are funded from the Large Community Events Budget.

A vote was taken and the proposal was agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- i) twenty non-themed Union Jack flags be purchased to be flown on the lamp posts Town Centre Park for the Coronation of King Charles III at a cost of £725 to be funded from the Large Community Events Budget.

Councillor Tony Armstrong left the meeting at this point.

**67. PRE-SCHOOL SUB COMMITTEE VACANCY**

It was advised that Councillor Joanne Jones has stepped down from the Pre School-Sub-Committee and it was requested that Councillor John Woodward be appointed to the vacancy.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- i) Councillor John Woodward be appointed to the vacancy on the Pre School-Sub-Committee.

**CHAIRMAN.**