

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 19th APRIL 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe on Wednesday 19th April 2023 at 7.15pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Arun M. Chandran (Chairman)

Councillors Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Lindsey Aston, John Clark, Neil Collinson, Bob Fleming, George Gray, Ian Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICIALS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)

Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)

Miss. Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)

Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administrative Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

Two members of the public.

113. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Martin Ashcroft, Jim Atkinson, Peter Bergg, Dorothy Bowman, Sandra Haigh, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, and Ken Robson.

114. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS

No requests for dispensation had been received.

115. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lindsey Aston declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 9 (Grants and Donations - Woodham Academy).

116. GUEST SPEAKER

Mr. Phil. Stephenson from Technology Services Group gave a presentation remotely via Microsoft Teams in relation to Agenda Item 7 on the upgrade and modernisation of the Town Council's information technology infrastructure.

There then followed a question-and-answer session where members had the opportunity to discuss the proposals and raise any queries or concerns.

Mr Stephenson answered a number of questions from members, following which the Chairman thanked him for his presentation.

117. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

118. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam, and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 8th March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

119. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY – OPTIONS FOR REPLACEMENT OF THE COUNCIL’S SERVER NETWORK AND USE OF CLOUD TECHNOLOGY

A report was submitted by the Corporate Management Team to provide information for members to consider a number of options in relation to the replacement of the Council's information technology server network.

The Town Clerk outlined the key issues from the report and previous presentation. The Finance Manager outlined the financial implications and strongly advised that in the current financial climate, the preferred option would be an on-premises server replacement with the transfer of all data to the Cloud (Option C).

Councillor Eddy Adam agreed with the Finance Manager's recommendations and thanked the Finance Manager for her update in regard to the Council's current financial status.

Councillor Adam requested that the Finance Manager provide for the costs of a full migration of servers to the cloud at the relevant time in the future, as part of the forthcoming update of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam, and seconded by Councillor Michael Stead and

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received.
- ii) the preferred option for the replacement of the Council's information technology server network be the on-premises replacement with Veeam Backup with transfer of all data to the Cloud using Microsoft OneDrive and SharePoint.
- iii) the Finance Manager provide for the costs of a full migration of servers to the cloud at the relevant time in the future, as part of the forthcoming update of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

120. ACCOUNT CONTROL SHEETS

Account Control Sheets for the period 9th February to 23rd February and 9th March 2023 and the General Bank Accounts for February and March 2023 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the Account Control Sheets for the period 9th to 23rd February and 9th March 2023 and the General Bank Accounts for February and March 2023 be received.

121. GRANTS AND DONATIONS

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

The final position on the grants and donations funds at the end of the 2022/23 financial year were advised.

It was further advised that the Council currently have the following funds available for the 2023/24 financial year:

Fund	Budget
Donations Budget	£5,000
Community Benefit Fund	£5,109

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received;

The following grant and donation request was considered:

a) **Woodham Academy**

An application was received from Woodham Academy for a grant towards the costs of students to visit Thailand.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam and seconded by Councillor John Clark that a donation of £1,000 be given.

A lengthy discussion then took place.

Councillor Bob Fleming expressed concern regarding the proposed donation amount, bearing in mind that it is still very early in the new financial year.

Councillor Tony Armstrong proposed a smaller grant of £250.

The Chairman suggested that the original proposal be changed to reflect a lower donation of £250.

This was agreed by Councillor Eddy Adam and Councillor John Clark and it was proposed that a donation of £250 be given to Woodham Academy in support of the students' trip to Thailand;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended:

- ii) that a donation of £250 be given to Woodham Academy from the Donations Budget.

A post grant questionnaire has been received from the Women's Institute in relation to a previous grant for information.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- iii) the information be received.

122. VAT ON LEISURE SERVICES

A report was submitted by the Finance Manager to update Members on a change to the treatment of VAT, by HMRC, on local authority run leisure services following challenges by a number of authorities and the matter being considered by the courts.

The Finance Manager briefed Members on the implications of the VAT change for the Council and the financial windfall potentially available both in the current financial year and in relation to backdated claims for the previous four years.

The Chairman proposed that the Council does not make any changes to the fees and charges for leisure services, and that the decision on how to use the monies be deferred until the monies have been received and, in the meantime, officers were asked to prepare a report detailing where best to utilise these funds.

This was seconded by Councillor Bob Fleming.

Councillor Michael Stead wished to have his thanks to the Finance Manager for the report recorded.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report regarding the changes to the VAT rules for leisure services be received;
- ii) it be noted that HMRC may refuse some claims and challenge the leisure activities included in claims;
- iii) the Sports and Golf Complex fees and charges continue to be levied at the level previously approved by Policy and Resources Committee which may result in additional income of up to £63,230 in the 2023/24 financial year;
- iv) any decision on the use of any backdated monies received from HMRC in relation to the previous four years be deferred until they are received.
- v) Officers prepare a detailed report, detailing their recommendations as to how any windfall monies should be utilised.
- vi) The Finance Manager be thanked for her report and work on this issue.

123. INTERNAL AUDIT PROVISION

A report was submitted by the Finance Manager to update members on the Council's Internal Audit provision and request consideration of a number of options in relation to the 2023/24 financial year:

1. Engage a Self-Employed Auditor.
2. Readvertise the Part Time Internal Auditor Post.
3. Engage the Private Sector Internal Auditor identified by Durham County Council Procurement.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson that the Council enter into negotiations with the self-employed Internal Auditor to provide an internal audit service for the 2023/24 financial year as soon as possible and that the savings that will be achieved from this new arrangement be banked and used to support the 2024/25 budget setting process.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) the report be received;
- ii) the Town Clerk and Finance Manager enter into negotiations with the self-employed Internal Auditor to provide an internal audit service for the 2023/24 financial year as soon as possible.
- iii) the savings that will be achieved from this new arrangement be banked and used to support the 2024/25 budget setting process.

124. DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONSULTATION

A report was submitted by the Corporate and Policy Officer regarding a consultation currently being undertaken by Durham County Council regarding their community engagement practices, with particular emphasis on the current Area Action Partnership arrangements.

A lengthy discussion took place on this item.

Councillor Eddy Adam provided an overview of the key issues from the consultation report advised that all Town Councillors should get involved in the consultation.

The Chairman requested that the Town Clerk circulate the electronic link to all members so that individual members and Durham County Councillors in particular, can submit their own response.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) the report be received;
- ii) the Town Clerk circulate the electronic link to the consultation to all members;
- iii) all Councillors consider submitting an individual response.

125. DRONE AND MODEL AIRCRAFT POLICY

A report and draft Drone and Model Aircraft Policy were submitted by the Corporate and Policy Officer for Members' consideration.

Councillor Eddy Adam questioned why the policy was needed, and how the policy would be enforced and communicated.

The Corporate and Policy Officer explained that it is due to an increase in drone use and the Town Council need to have a policy in place following advice at a Safety Advisory Group meeting.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received; and
- ii) the Drone and Model Aircraft Policy be approved and implemented.

CHAIRMAN.