

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 6TH MARCH 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe on Wednesday 6th March 2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Arun M. Chandran (Chairman)

Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Peter Bergg, John Clark, George Gray, Ian Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Simon Hocking, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, Brian McAnaney, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Miss. Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Mr. Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

Three members of the public.

103. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors: Jim Atkinson, Dorothy Bowman, Sandra Haigh, Wendy Hillary, Sandra Kirby, Anita Sparrow

104. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS

No dispensation requests had been received.

105. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Eddy Adam declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8 as an affiliate of Rotary Great Aycliffe and as the Chairman of the Governors at Woodham Burn School.

Councillor Carl Robinson queried his position as a member of the Oakleaf Golf Club in relation to Agenda Item 12 on the Driving Range Drainage and it was clarified by the Town Clerk that a declaration of interest was not required.

106. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A representative from Opera Nova spoke in support of their request for a grant towards their community outreach programme.

Members asked various questions regarding the organisation and any alternative funding sources including the trust responsible for the schools. The representative assured Members that no other funding has been given.

107. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and;

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on the 24th January 2024, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

108. AUDIT, RISK AND G.D.P.R. SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES

Councillor Carl Robinson noted that the word 'Vice' had been omitted from the resolution regarding the appointment of a vice chairman.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor John Clark and;

RESOLVED - that the notes and the recommendations from the Audit, Risk and G.D.P.R. Sub Committee held on the 24th January 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the addition of the word 'Vice' in the resolution regarding the appointment of a vice chairman.

109. ACCOUNTS CONTROL SHEETS

Accounts Control Sheets for the period 18th January to 16th February 2024 and the General Bank Account for January 2024 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the Account Control Sheets for the period 18th January to 16th February 2024 and the General Bank Account for January 2024 be received.

110. GRANTS AND DONATIONS

The Town Clerk reported that a total of £1,759 is currently available in the Donations Budget and £7,156 in the Community Benefit Fund.

He added that as the four grant and donation requests received totalled nearly £4,000, insufficient funds remained to agree the full amounts requested to all applicants. It was further highlighted that the Opera Nova request could be funded from the Large Community Events Grants Budget as it related to a series of events in schools.

The Finance Manager clarified that the Opera Nova events were due to take place in June and therefore any agreed grant would be taken from the 2024/25 Large Community Events Grants Budget.

The following donations requests were considered:

a) Rotary Great Aycliffe

A donation request was received from Rotary Great Aycliffe for funding to support the cost of their annual Model Railway Exhibition to be held at Newton Aycliffe Youth and Community Centre on 23rd March 2024.

The requested donation was £315.90 and would fund the booking of five rooms at the Premier Inn for participants at the event.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill, and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) A donation of £315.90 be given to Rotary Great Aycliffe to fund the booking of five rooms at the Premier Inn for the Model Railway Exhibition participants.

b) St Elizabeth's Church

A grant application was received from St Elizabeth's Church for a £965 grant towards the cost of a replacement carpet for the community hall within the church building.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam that a grant of £200 be given.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Tony Armstrong and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston that a donation of £500 be given.

A vote then took place on the amendment to the proposal and was agreed by a majority decision.

A further vote took place on the substantive motion and was agreed by a majority decision.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) A donation of £500 be given to St Elizabeths Church towards the cost of a replacement carpet for the community hall.

c) Great Aycliffe Cancer Support Group

A donation request was received from the Great Aycliffe Cancer Support Group for funding towards the cost of a laptop and printer.

It was proposed by Councillor Lindsey Aston, and seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary, that as the Council are still awaiting the audited accounts from the group, and delays in submitting accounts to the Charity Commission that the decision be deferred until the accounts are received.

It was further suggested by the Chairman that officers raise the questions raised by Members with the group ahead of the next meeting.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) The decision be deferred to the next meeting or such a time as the audited accounts are available and
- ii) Officers to contact the group to question the late submission of accounts to the Charity Commission.

d) Opera Nova

A grant application was received from a Middlesbrough based music charity; Opera Nova requesting funding towards the cost of an outreach project to be undertaken within the Great Aycliffe Parish.

The total cost of the project is £2,910 and Opera Nova had requested a grant of £2,000. The grant would be used to offset the costs of hall hire and staff costs for the project.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary and seconded by Councillor Peter Bergg that a grant of £2,000 be given from the Large Community Events Grants Budget.

A vote then took place with the following result:

For: 11

Against: 9

The proposal was carried.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) A grant of £2,000 be given to Opera Nova towards the cost of an outreach project to be undertaken within the Great Aycliffe Parish, to be funded from the Large Community Events Grants Budget.

111. HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT

The Town Clerk submitted the Annual Health and Safety Report which provided a list of accidents, including any reportable accidents under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR), for the 2023 year, as well as any reports from the Health and Safety Executive.

The report further advised on the Competent Person appointed to assist the Council in the Health and Safety provision and a list of any operational and health and safety training undertaken from January to December 2023.

Councillor Jed Hillary congratulated officers on achieving a successful year without any reportable incidents (R.I.D.D.O.R), especially as there were so many different services and work areas covered.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

112. 2023/24 STRATEGIC AIMS AND TARGETS END OF YEAR OUTTURN REPORT

The Corporate Management Team submitted a report to present the end of year outturn summary on the Town Council Service Delivery Plan Strategic Targets for the 2023/24 financial year.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The end of year outturn position on the Town Council Service Delivery Plan Strategic Targets for the 2023/24 financial year be agreed.

113. DRAFT STRATEGIC AIMS AND TARGETS FOR 2024/25

The Corporate Management Team submitted a report on the Draft Strategic Aims and Targets for the Town Council Service Delivery Plan for the 2024/25 financial year.

A small number of suggestions were put forward by Councillor Eddy Adam and added to the list of targets..

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The draft Aims and Targets for 2024/25 be approved subject the incorporation of the suggested amendments.

114. DRIVING RANGE DRAINAGE – ADDITIONAL BUDGET REQUEST

The Town Clerk and Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator submitted a report highlighting the income losses and additional costs being experienced at the driving range as a result of the very wet ground conditions and setting out a proposal for addressing the problems via drainage improvement works.

Members were asked to consider an additional capital budget approval to enable the works to go ahead.

The Town Clerk added that the driving range facility is now running at almost no cost to the tax payer, but that the ball plugging situation was now becoming unsustainable and resulting in significant additional expenditure on range ball stocks. A sustainable long-term solution to the root cause of the problem was therefore recommended via improvements to the drainage system. It was advised that the estimated payback period for the proposed investment would be five years, and less if driving range usage and income increased.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator then gave a verbal update to explain the proposed drainage improvement scheme highlighting that the estimated timeframe for the work would be approximately three weeks and would include day work which will mean the facility could open for evenings and weekends.

Councillor Carl Robinson indicated his support for the report and recommendations but expressed his concern at the lack of planned maintenance in previous years.

Councillor Eddy Adam thanked officers for the report but raised concerns regarding the lack of a guarantee that the works would fully resolve the issue bearing in mind the amount of capital investment requested. He questioned whether it may be an option to undertake the work on a phased basis over a number of years and for the works department to carry out some of the work .

There followed a lengthy debate with a number of Councillors asking questions of the officers including on the possibility that range balls are being stolen, the design of the proposed drainage improvement scheme and which were the wettest areas, and putting forward a number of suggestions for alternative methods of improving the drainage.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator responded to the questions.

He explained the limitations on the capacity of the works staff and highlighted that the contractors had better equipment to complete the work efficiently and effectively, and highlighted the benefits of undertaking the works all in one go.

It was further explained that ball picking has increased since the appointment of a dedicated ball picker and that trail cameras had been used to monitor potential ball theft and had not identified any concerns.

The existing matting system has been in place for almost twenty years and is now not keeping the balls at the surface and no longer fit for purpose. The plugged ball depths are up to two feet down in the ground and as many balls as possible will be recovered from the areas that are worked on. To manually dig them out would mean rotivating and reseeding the entire area.

It was confirmed that if the drainage improvement scheme goes ahead, regular verti-draining and clearing of inspection chambers will be built into the programme of maintenance works.

A concern was raised by Councillor Michael Stead regarding the sale of Oak Leaf range balls online. The Town Clerk reassured Members that Oakleaf branded golf balls have not been purchased for many years.

It was proposed by Councillor Peter Bergg, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson that the recommendations of the report be agreed.

It was further proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary that officers investigate the feasibility of banning golf bags from the driving range and report the findings back to the Recreation Committee.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The proposed improvements to the drainage system at the driving range are agreed.
- iii) An additional capital budget approval of £18,939.20 be agreed.
- iv) The possible income losses that would be incurred whilst the drainage works were being undertaken be noted.
- v) Officers investigate the feasibility of banning golf bags from the driving range and report the findings back to the Recreation Committee.

115. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE

A report was submitted by the Corporate Management Team to provide information for the Policy and Resources Committee to undertake the annual review of the effectiveness of the Council's Internal Audit Service for the 2023/24 financial year, in accordance with non-statutory best practice.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received and that the Policy and Resources Committee supports the conclusion of the Corporate Management Team that the Council's Internal Audit Service for the 2023/24 financial year has been effective.
- ii) the outcome of the Policy and Resources Committee's review of the effectiveness of the Internal Audit Service is taken into account in the consideration of the annual review of the effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control and the approval of the Annual Governance Statement later in the year.

116. EXEMPT BUSINESS

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam and

RESOLVED – that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted it was, in the opinion of the Council, advisable that the public and press be excluded from the meeting.

117. TOWN CLERK PAY PROGRESSION

The Corporate and Policy Officer requested that members consider the Town Clerk's pay progression for 2024/25, following the successful completion of his annual appraisal.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Peter Bergg, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the Town Clerk's salary increment be agreed for the 2024/25 financial year.

118. RE-ADMISSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, seconded by Councillor John Clark, and

RESOLVED – that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

CHAIRMAN.