

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 25TH OCTOBER 2023 AT 7pm

Minutes of the meeting of the **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe on Wednesday 25th October 2023 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Arun M. Chandran (Chairman)

Eddy Adam, Lindsey Aston, Jim Atkinson Peter Bergg, Dorothy Bowman, John Clark, George Gray, Ian Gray, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Sandra Kirby, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Anita Sparrow, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Ms. Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Phillip Hawkins
A representative from 1st Newton Aycliffe Scout Group

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors: Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Simon Hocking, Joanne Jones and Neville Jones.

57. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS

No dispensation requests had been received.

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

59. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A representative from 1st Newton Aycliffe Scout Group attended the meeting to give an update on the Newton Aycliffe Scout Supporters Association (N.A.S.S.A) issue.

She wished thanked the Town Council members and staff for attending the N.A.S.S.A Committee Meeting and the Special General Meeting and added that the Association is now in a good place with a grand re-opening coming soon and to watch social media for updates.

The Chairman thanked the representative for the update and clarified on Member's behalf that if the N.A.S.S.A group were to apply for any grant funding in the future from the Council, that Members must declare a pecuniary interest, although a dispensation could be considered by the Council.

60. 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 13th September 2023, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

61. SERVICE REVIEW WORKING GROUP NOTES

The notes and following recommendations from the meeting of the Service Review Working Group held on the 4th October 2023 were submitted for consideration and approval:-

- i) No changes are made to the catering service operation or kitchen layout at the current time and that the Sports Complex Manager is instructed to bring any new ideas, improvements or proposals forward at the appropriate time to the Recreation Committee.
- ii) Any proposals relating to the catering staffing are included in the staffing review meeting in March next year.
- iii) Delegated authority is given to officers to address the current staffing shortages within the budget available.
- iv) Prior to the next meeting, scheduled for December 2023, the Town Clerk sends a memo to all members asking them to put forward any suggestions they may have.

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

RESOLVED - that the notes and recommendations of the meeting of the Service Review Working Group, held on the 4th October 2023, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

62. ASSET MANAGEMENT MEMBER WORKING GROUP NOTES

The notes and following recommendations from the meeting of the Asset Management Member Working Group held on the 11th October 2023 were submitted for consideration and approval:-

- i) that the report and appendices be received and agreed.
- ii) that the draft Capital Programme Budget be approved.
- iii) that the woodland burial project be deferred, and a report to be submitted to the Environment Committee for the benefit of more recently elected members' information.
- iv) that the budget provision for the golf shop changing rooms be referred to the Recreation Committee for consideration and potential removal from the capital budget due to the underuse of the facilities.
- v) that the future use of the golf shop changing rooms is reviewed as part of the golf complex service review next year.
- vi) that the fencing at Aycliffe Village allotment site be deferred to a future year, subject to the repair of the two damaged posts being undertaken via the maintenance budget.

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

RESOLVED - that the notes and recommendations of the meeting of the Asset Management Member Working Group, held on the 11th October 2023, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63. ACCOUNTS CONTROL SHEETS

Accounts Control Sheets for the 7th and 21st September and 5th October 2023 and the General Bank Accounts for August and September 2023 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the Account Control Sheets for the 7th and 21st September and 5th October 2023 and the General Bank Accounts for August and September 2023 be received.

64. GRANTS AND DONATIONS

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

It was reported that a total of £2,591 is currently available in the Donations Budget and £7,156 in the Community Benefit Fund.

The following donations requests were considered:

a) Neville Community Association

A request was received from the Neville Community Association towards the cost of a Christmas live music event to be held at Neville Community Centre on Saturday 25th November 2023.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, seconded by Councillor Peter Bergg, and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) a donation of £332 be given to Neville Community Association towards the Christmas live music event to be held at Neville Community Centre on Saturday 25th November 2023.

b) Woodham Academy

A pupil from Woodham Academy has submitted a donation request for a contribution towards the cost of a school trip to Thailand.

c) Woodham Academy

A pupil from Woodham Academy has submitted a donation request for a contribution towards the cost of a school trip to Malaysia in 2025.

Members discussed items b) and c) together and it was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam and seconded by Councillor Wendy Hillary that no donation be given to either applicant as a grant had already been given to Woodham Academy previously to subsidise the cost of school trips.

It was requested that the Town Clerk write to the students to explain the grounds for the decision, and also write to the school to advise that the school may apply for a grant on behalf of all students for future year's trips as the Council would not be able to consider applications from individual students due to there being insufficient budget available for all students.

A query was raised from the Vice Chairman regarding the donation to Woodham Academy earlier this year as the Thailand trip had been cancelled.

It was agreed that the Town Clerk write to the school to clarify this.

A vote was then taken and the proposal was agreed by a majority decision.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- ii) no donation be given to the two students from Woodham Academy;
- iii) a letter be sent to the two students explaining the decision;
- iv) a letter be sent to Woodham Academy to explain the grants process and advising that the school should make a donation request on behalf of all students towards the cost of future trips rather than individual students applying.

d) Letters of Thanks and Post Grant Questionnaire

A post grant questionnaire was received from Ayclive Events and a basic income and expenditure account giving a summary of the costs of holding the event.

The Town Clerk read out a statement received from the organisers thanking the Council for their grant, help, advice and assistance.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- v) the information be received from Ayclive Events be received as submitted and that the Internal Auditor is not required to review the Ayclive accounts.

A letter of thanks was received from Community Spirit in relation to the recent donation made towards their Christmas event.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- vi) the letter be received.

65. NEWTON AYCLIFFE SCOUT SUPPORTERS' ASSOCIATION SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted a briefing note on the Special General Meeting of Newton Aycliffe Scouts Supporters' Association which was held on Tuesday 10th October 2023 at the Scout Hut.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Carl Robinson for attending in his place and also thanked the Town Clerk, the Corporate and Policy Officer and all members who played a part in resolving this issue.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the briefing note be received.

66. 2023/24 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET POSITION TO 30TH SEPTEMBER AND PROJECTION OF EXPECTED OUTTURN

The Finance Manager presented the six-month financial position on the Council's approved 2023/24 Revenue and Capital Budget up to 30th September 2023, along with a forecast of the expected year-end outturn position.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam, and seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary, and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the six-month financial position on the Council's 2023/24 Revenue and Capital Budgets and the early projection of year-end expected outturn be received; and
- ii) a further Revenue and Capital Budget Position Report be submitted at the January Policy and Resources Committee, detailing the financial position as at 31st December 2023 and an updated projection of expected outturn.

67. 2024/25 POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE DRAFT REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

The Finance Manager submitted the draft 2024/25 Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Policy and Resources Committee for Members' consideration, comments, and approval.

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;
- ii) the draft 2024/25 Policy and Resources Committee Revenue Budget be agreed as per the report;
- iii) the draft 2024/25 Policy and Resources Committee Capital Budget be agreed as per the report;
- iv) members report any feedback on the budgets to the Finance Manager.

68. 2024/25 DRAFT OVERALL REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET

The Finance Manager submitted a report outlining the Council's overall draft 2024/25 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Budget for Members' consideration, comments, and approval.

The Finance Manager advised that if Durham County Council agree to cut the LCTRS grant next year this would result in a Town Council Tax increase of 5.19%, which would increase the Council Tax in a Band D property to £1.19 and 79p for a Band A property.

If the grant cut is not agreed then the Town Council Tax increase will reduce to 2.23%, which would be an increase of 51p for a Band D property and 34p for a Band A.

Councillor Eddy Adam thanked the Finance Manager for the comprehensive report and for the excellent achievement in keeping the proposed council tax increase below the rate of inflation in very challenging circumstances.

Councillor Adam advised that he has grave concerns regarding the LCTRS grant cut and that the County Council pushing their financial difficulties onto the parish councils is wrong. He requested that Aycliffe County Councillors consider this when it comes to the County Council vote and do what is best for Aycliffe residents.

The Chairman added that once the final LCTRS grant figure is received from DCC, any grant cut will be included in the Town Council Precept and funded from an increase in the Town Council Tax.

The Finance Manager added that a resident's consultation on the precept will be starting in November.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received;
- ii) the overall summary of the draft 2024/25 Revenue Budget be agreed;
- iii) The draft 2024/25 Precept of £1,998,274 be agreed;
- iv) The proposed increase of 5.19% in the Town Council Tax is agreed on the assumption that the proposed reduction in LCTRS Grant is approved by DCC.
- v) If the LCTRS reduction is not approved the proposed increase in the Town Council Tax would be 2.23%;
- vi) The draft 2024/25 Capital Programme Budget of £333,450 be agreed including the proposed classification of the various capital projects;
- vii) The expected fall in the Council's Balances and Reserves to £1.207 million by the end of 2024/25 is noted.

69. COUNCIL TELEPHONE SYSTEM UPGRADE

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted a report to request members to consider a new telephone contract and upgraded telephone system for all relevant Council facilities, in view of the age and lack of functionality of the current system and in preparation for the forthcoming national move to digital telecommunications in 2025, when the current PSTN system will cease to function.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam, and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received;
- ii) the telephone information and financial analysis be received;
- iii) the purchase of a replacement telephone system proceed and the quote from Aspire be agreed; and;
- iv) Aspire be authorised to provide the SOGEA circuit for the Pre-School.

70. PURCHASE OF ADDITIONAL SAFE

The Events Sub Committee meeting on held 27th September 2023 recommended that the Council purchase an additional safe to store the additional cash required for the Senior Citizens' Excursions from the savings on the 2023/24 Senior Citizens' Excursions Budget.

Councillor Carl Robinson wished to record his thanks for the proposals put forward by Councillor Nev Jones which had helped generate the savings on the Senior Citizen's Trips Budget.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, and seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson, and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received and;
- ii) officers proceed in purchasing a safe to store the additional cash required for the Senior Citizens' Excursions from the savings on the 2023/24 Senior Citizens' Excursions Budget.

CHAIRMAN.