

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 24TH JANUARY 2024 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 24th January 2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Arun M. Chandran (Chairman)

Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jim Atkinson, Dorothy Bowman, George Gray, Ian Gray, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Neville Jones, Brian McAnaney, John Moore, 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)
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)
Mrs. Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

One member of the public.

91. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors: Peter Bergg, John Clark, Sandra Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Wendy Hillary, Sandra Kirby, Joanne Jones and Carl Robinson.

92. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS

No dispensation requests had been received.

93. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

94. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

95. 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 6th December 2023, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

96. SERVICE REVIEW WORKING GROUP NOTES

The notes and following recommendations from the meeting of the Service Review Working Group held on the 10th January 2024 were submitted for consideration and approval:-

- i) That delegated authority is given to the Sports Complex Manager to trial new ideas and initiatives and make changes within the sports complex, subject to these being within current approved budgets, staffing structures and Council policies, the reporting of all new
- ii) initiatives to the Recreation Committee in the New Developments Report.
- iii) The Sports Complex Manager investigates the feasibility of introducing darts as a sporting activity and brings forward a report to the February Recreation Committee including consideration of the most appropriate location, costs, health and safety and risk assessments, fees and charges, developing links with the local darts leagues etc.
- iv) That the bar opening time recommendations set out in the report are agreed and the Sports Complex Manager runs a trial of opening and closing the bar half an hour earlier, subject to the bar staff being consulted on the changes.
- v) The Sports Complex Manager is also given delegated authority to make further changes to the bar opening hours in response to operational needs e.g. to extend the hours if there is a large function taking place, within the approved staffing structure and budget.
- vi) That the Sports Complex Manager undertakes a review of the catering department staffing and opening hours and brings a report back to a future Recreation Committee with any recommendations.
- vii) That an update on the catering situation is provided at the January Recreation Committee Meeting via a briefing note and verbal update, quantifying the income losses experienced as a result of the staffing shortages, and setting out options to address the problem in the short term e.g. via use of agency staff or a temporary staff contract.
- viii) Investigate whether there are any grant funding schemes available to help develop sporting opportunities for low-income groups e.g. GP Referral Scheme.
- ix) Investigate the feasibility of running dominoes sessions in the function room.
- x) Investigate the feasibility of using other social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok to help the facility engage more effectively with younger members of the community.
- xi) Seek to re-establish links with Wellbeing for Life.
- xii) Investigate opportunities for offering e-gaming at the sports complex.
- xiii) Investigate developing links with local physical and mental health and wellbeing groups such as Man Health.
- xiv) Investigate the possibility of offering retro gaming machines in the bar or function room.
- xv) Work with local colleges and universities to access work placements and internships relating to supporting the complex with improving its social media presence and marketing.
- xvi) Any recommendations for capital expenditure be fed into the Medium-Term Financial Plan and budget setting process and brought to the relevant committee for consideration as appropriate.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and;

RESOLVED - that the notes and the recommendations from the Service Review Working Group held on the 10th January 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

97. ACCOUNTS CONTROL SHEETS

Accounts Control Sheets for 6th December, 21st December 2023 and 5th January 2024 the General Bank Accounts for November and December 2023 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the Account Control Sheets for the 6th December, 21st December 2023 and 5th January 2024 and the General Bank Account for November and December 2023 be received.

98. 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.

Since the last meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, no further grant or donation requests had been received.

A letter of thanks was received from Rotary Newton Aycliffe.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) the report be received;
- ii) the letter of thanks be received.

99. 2023/24 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET POSITION TO 31ST DECEMBER 2023 AND PROJECTION OF EXPECTED OUTTURN

The Finance Manager submitted a report providing the financial position on the Council's approved 2023/24 Revenue and Capital Budget for the nine months to 31st December 2023, along with a forecast of the expected year-end outturn.

The Finance Manager advised that savings on the Revenue Budget, VAT windfall monies plus restricted capital spending had contributed to higher levels of balances, but the financial situation remained challenging.

Councillor Eddy Adam stated that the report presented a positive picture but that there were a lot of uncertainties and issues outside of the Council's control, and that the Council needs to be prudent going forward.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the latest financial position on the Council's 2023/24 Revenue and Capital Budgets and the projection of year-end expected outturn be received.

100. 2024/25 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET APPROVAL

The Finance Manager submitted a report to seek approval from Members for the setting of the Council's 2024/25 Revenue and Capital Budget.

This will enable the 2024/25 Precept and Town Council Tax to be set at the Council meeting next week.

The Finance Manager advised that the cut to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) Grant by Durham County Council was less than initially indicated as it is being spread over three years and not two as previously noted.

This would result in a slightly lower Town Council Tax increase than indicated when the draft 2024/25 Revenue Budget was approved in October.

The increase to the Town Council Tax next year, including the cut to the LCTRS Grant, would be 4.38%, although it was stressed that the increase excluding the grant cut would have been 2.65%.

Councillor Michael Stead asked what impact it would have on the council tax increase if the contribution to capital reserves was not increased by £25,000.

The Finance Manager strongly advised against reducing the £75,000 contribution to capital reserves, advising that this budget was needed to replenish balances and reserves in light of substantial future capital budget commitments.

Councillor Eddy Adam requested that the cut to the LCTRS Grant be explained for the benefit of the member of the public present, which the Finance Manager then outlined as requested.

The member of the public then indicated that they wished to ask a question.

The Chairman then asked members to vote on whether to suspend standing orders to allow the member of the public to speak.

Members agreed to suspend standing orders by a majority vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 7.22pm

The member of the public expressed appreciation for the clear explanation of the budget and LCTRS grant cut and suggested that this should be communicated to the wider public in a similar manner.

The meeting reconvened at 7.25pm

Councillor Michael Stead clarified that Durham County Council is the only council in the country who still give out some form of LCTRS Grant to town and parish councils and clarified the situation in regard to council tax support for the most vulnerable members of the community.

The Chairman clarified the distinction between Revenue and Capital Budgets and the relationship with Council balances and reserves, stressing that the precept increase will compensate for the loss of the LCTRS Grant that Durham County Council are cutting.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the final 2024/25 Revenue and Capital Budget proposals and the changes made to the draft budget be received;
- ii) the feedback from the 2024/25 Budget Survey be received;
- iii) the Council's 2024/25 Revenue and Capital Budget as set out in the report and the attached appendices be approved;
- iv) the 2024/25 Precept at £1,974,773 be approved and the proposed increase of 4.38% to the Town Council Tax is agreed.

Note: If the LCTRS Grant is not cut following the Durham County Council Budget Meeting, officers will liaise with Durham County officers to determine if the lower Precept of £1,942,039 and Council Tax increase 2.65% can be set. This will be reported to the Council Meeting on 31st January if necessary.

101. COUNCIL SATISFACTION SURVEY

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted a report requesting Members' consideration and approval of the draft Council Customer Satisfaction Survey for 2024, entitled 'Your Parish, Your Choice, Your Voice'.

The responses to the survey will be used in the preparation of the forthcoming Town Council Service Delivery Plan 2024/25 and in the consideration of the setting of Town Council's Strategic Aims and Targets for 2024/25.

Councillor Jed Hillary suggested that the question regarding bus routes and cycleways be removed, that St Oswald's football pitch be included in the sports pitches section, that a separate link to the survey be included for the young person's section, and that the survey is included as a hyperlink on staff emails.

Councillor Eddy Adam suggested that the number of paper copies be minimised and that the use of a QR code is considered for the survey.

Councillor Michael Stead requested that the survey is promoted using an eye-catching advert or poster.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received;
- ii) the content and layout of the survey be agreed subject to incorporating the suggestions put forward by members;
- iii) the survey be issued and publicised using QR codes on posters, adverts on both social media and the local press, and that paper copies of the survey are minimised.

102. GOLF COURSE FOOTPATHS – ADDITIONAL BUDGET REQUEST

The Town Clerk presented a report from the Grounds Maintenance Service Co-ordinator requesting the use of the Revenue Budget Contingency Sum to purchase materials to repair, renovate and improve existing footpaths around parts of the Oakleaf Golf Course, and to consider the installation of an additional footpath.

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead, and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received;
- ii) an additional budget amount of £1,286 be approved to support the renovation and repair of existing golf course footpaths;
- iii) an additional budget amount of £1,166 be approved to support the installation of a new footpath between the 1st green and 16th tee; and
- iv) the additional monies be taken from the Revenue Budget Contingency Sum.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman thanked all members for passing the final 2024/25 Revenue and Capital budget unanimously.

CHAIRMAN.