

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2025**

Minutes of the meeting of the **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025 at 7.00pm.

### **PRESENT**

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

Councillors Eddy Adam, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jim Atkinson, Dorothy Bowman, John Clark, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Ian Gray, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Sandra Kirby, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

### **OFFICERS**

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)

Mr. Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)

Miss Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)

Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

### **IN ATTENDANCE**

One member of the public.

A minute's silence was observed as a mark of respect for the passing of former Councillor and Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee; Malcolm Iveson.

### **81. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Tony Armstrong, Sandra Haigh, Wendy Hillary and Brian McAnaney.

### **82. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS**

No dispensation requests had been received.

### **83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Eddy Adam declared a non-pecuniary interest at Agenda Item 9 on Grants and Donations relating to the Athena Sports Academy grant application, and indicated that he would leave the room for the debate.

### **84. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

## **85. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES**

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

**RESOLVED** - that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **86. PERSONNEL SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and;

**RESOLVED** - That the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Personnel Sub Committee held on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2025, be agreed, confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

## **87. AUDIT, RISK AND G.D.P.R SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and;

**RESOLVED** - That the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Audit, Risk and GDPR Sub Committee held on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 2025, be agreed, confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

## **88. ACCOUNTS CONTROL SHEETS**

The Accounts Control Sheets for the period 23<sup>rd</sup> January to 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025 and the General Bank Accounts for January 2025 were submitted for approval.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft requested clarification on a payment for a call out to deal with imagery problems with the Sports Complex CCTV System and why this was not covered under the warranty or service contract. The Town Clerk advised that he would seek clarification and report back to all members after the meeting.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that the Account Control Sheets for the period 23<sup>rd</sup> January to 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025 and the General Bank Accounts for January 2025, be received.

*Councillor Eddy Adam left the meeting at this point.*

## 89. GRANTS AND DONATIONS

The Town Clerk submitted a report setting out the current position on the Council's Grants and Donations Budgets and setting out any grant and donation requests which had been received since the last meeting.

It was reported that a total of £1,375 is currently available in the Grants and Donations Budget, £7,156 in the Community Benefit Fund and £1,550 in the Community Events Grants Budget.

The following grant application was considered:

### a) **Athena Sports Academy**

A grant application was received on behalf of the Athena Sports Academy for a grant to support a wider fundraising campaign to raise monies towards the costs of replacing the sprung floor and asymmetric bars used by the club gymnasts. The requested grant amount was £2,000.

The Town Clerk added that the Council's Grants and Donations Policy states that preference will be given to applications for grants and donations from local charities, community interest companies, voluntary or community organisations and other non-profit making bodies, and that the Council will not usually consider applications from private sector or 'for profit' organisations, advising that the Council will need to take this policy guidance into account in considering this application, but may consider that the profit-making nature of the limited company registration may be balanced against the fact that the sports academy operates as a community amateur sports club, providing services and opportunities to improve life for young people. It was also noted that the requested grant amount of £2,000 exceeds the resources remaining in the Grants and Donations Budget.

Following a discussion on the grant request, concerns were raised by several members that the academy is a profit-making limited company, and it was suggested that Durham County Council could be better placed to support this grant application as the academy are based in the Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre.

It was proposed by Councillor Neil Collinson, and seconded by Councillor John Woodward and;

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that;

- i) The report be received.
- ii) No grant be given to Athena Sports Academy as they are a profit-making entity.

*Councillor Eddy Adam rejoined the meeting.*

**90. 2024/25 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET POSITION TO 31<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY AND PROJECTION OF EXPECTED YEAR-END OUTTURN**

Members considered a report from the Finance Manager presenting the financial position on the Council's approved 2024/25 Revenue and Capital Budget for the ten months to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024, along with a forecast of the expected year-end outturn position.

The Town Clerk presented the report on behalf of the Finance Manager, outlining a number of positive budget developments in the current financial year which have generated savings and additional income and resulted in an improvement in the Council's financial situation.

As a result there have been savings of around £250,000 on the Revenue Budget up to the end of January and projected savings for the whole year of £300,000.

It was stressed that nearly £100,000 of this saving is due to the planned contribution to capital reserves and contingency sum which has had very limited use.

On the Capital Budget, there would be an expected outturn in the region of £230,000 against the budget of £515,000, with a number of provisional sums and non-essential projects likely to be carried forward to next year.

In overall terms, the forecast Revenue Budget underspend would offset the financing of the Capital Programme, meaning that Council Balances and Reserves will remain largely unchanged over the course of the year at £2 million.

It was highlighted that whilst this is a positive outturn situation, it comes at a time when the Medium-Term Financial Plan continues to forecast significant capital investment commitments and diminishing balances and reserves over the medium to long-term. It was also stressed that balances and reserves do not come close to matching the projected long-term investment in the Council's assets as set out in the Asset Management Plan, further highlighting the importance of continuing to deliver Revenue Budget savings and contributions to capital reserves.

Finally, attention was also drawn to the need to write off a small debt, and the recovery action being taken in relation to another large debt.

Councillor Eddy Adam indicated that he had some questions over the level of the savings made and whether some of these savings could be utilised in restricting council tax and fees and charges increases or passed back to the community in another way. He indicated that he had raised these issues with the officers in advance and received a satisfactory response and would be meeting with the Finance Manager next week to discuss the year-end outturn position and assumptions made in setting next year's budget.

Councillor Michael Stead expressed his surprise at the level of savings made and questioned how the Council delivers Revenue Budget savings, year after year, despite the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget highlighting the difficulties and challenges faced by the Council, and whether there may be any scope to reduce council tax.

Councillor Arun Chandran made a lengthy statement clarifying some of the savings made, explaining the financial planning process, the distinction between revenue and capital budgets, the asset management plan and long-term capital commitments issue and the need to replenish balances.

The Town Clerk advised that the level of savings in the current year was well in excess of officer and councillor expectations and whilst most of the savings have already been accounted for in the setting of the 2025/26 Revenue Budget and there is no scope to adjust council tax or fees and charges increases at this late stage, one way to pass back some of the savings to the local community, on a one-off basis, may be to carry forward some savings in the Revenue Budget Support Reserve and use these to boost the grants and donations budget.

Councillor Jim Atkinson thanked the officers for the report and proposed that the recommendations of the report be agreed, incorporating the Town Clerks' suggestion regarding the carry forward of savings to boost the grants and donations budget. This was seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam.

Councillor Lindsey Aston suggested that boosting the grants and donations budget would not be the best and only way to use any carried forward savings and suggested putting on another free event for the town.

The Town Clerk advised that the planning of events for this year were already in progress, with two additional events, the VE Day and a youth music festival having already been added, and he would be hesitant to put too much pressure on the events team to plan and organise another event.

Councillor Michael Stead said that helping residents by reducing their council tax would benefit more people.

Councillor Arun Chandran requested that the issue of carry forward of surplus savings be added to the agenda for the next Policy and Resources meeting in April for members to discuss more thoroughly.

Councillor Jed Hillary suggested that members submit any ideas for carry forward in writing to the Town Clerk.

The Town Clerk reiterated that the report is an expected outturn only and that he would suggest that the issue of the carry forward of surplus savings to next year be addressed in the final outturn report to the June Meeting. This was agreed.

The Town Clerk concluded by explaining the Finance Manager's responsibilities as Section 151 Officer to protect the Council's interests both in the short and long term and to exercise prudence and provide for the worst-case scenario in making assumptions around financial forecasts. He advised that he and the Finance Manager would be happy to discuss the Council's financial position with the political groups and explain each saving line-by-line, if required.

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

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

- i) The report and latest financial position on the Council's 2024/25 Revenue and Capital Budgets and the projection of year-end expected outturn be received.
- ii) The write-off of the outstanding debt of £27.74 in relation to pre-school fees be agreed.
- iii) The recovery action being taken in relation to the AJX Academy debt be noted.
- iv) The issue of the carry forward and use of surplus Revenue Budget savings be addressed in the Year-End Outturn Report to the June Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, and Members submit ideas of how best to utilise any savings.

## 91. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE

A report was submitted by the Corporate Management Team to provide information to enable the Policy and Resources Committee to undertake the annual review of the effectiveness of the Council's Internal Audit Service for the 2024/25 financial year, in accordance with non-statutory best practice.

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 Policy and Resources Committee supports the conclusion of the Corporate Management Team that the Council's Internal Audit Service for the 2024/25 financial year has been effective.
- iii) 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.

## 92. 2024/25 STRATEGIC AIMS AND TARGETS 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 2024/25 financial year.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and;

**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 2024/25 financial year, be agreed.

## 93. 2025/26 DRAFT STRATEGIC AIMS AND TARGETS

The Corporate Management Team submitted a report to present for consideration and approval the draft Strategic Aims and Targets for the Town Council Service Delivery Plan for the 2025/26 financial year.

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

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

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The draft Strategic Aims and Targets for 2025/26 be approved.

#### **94. DOCUMENT RETENTION POLICY UPDATE**

A report was submitted from the Corporate and Policy Officer requesting Members' consideration of the updated Document Retention and Disposal Policy, which provides the Council with a framework for managing and disposing of its documents in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

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

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The updated Document Retention and Disposal Policy be agreed.

#### **95. HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Annual Health and Safety Report was submitted by the Town Clerk for consideration and approval highlighting accident statistics, including any reportable accidents, any reports from the Health and Safety Executive and a list of any operational and health and safety training undertaken by staff.

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

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

- i) The Annual Health and Safety Report be received.

#### **96. COUNCIL OFFICES CAPITAL PROGRAMME WORKS**

The Works and Environment Manager submitted a report to update Members on the progress regarding the Council Offices capital projects identified as essential for the 2024/25 financial year and to consider and agree the various proposals.

Members thanked the officer for the thorough report.

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

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

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The officer recommendation to replace the automatic doors operating system, using Bridge Doors, at a cost of £3,484.75, be agreed;
- iii) The officer recommendation to complete the necessary office redecoration work, in the new financial year, using Braddec, at a cost of £3,710, be agreed;
- iv) The 2024/25 budget for flooring and carpets be carried forward to 2025/26 and officers to obtain up to date quotes to replace the Council Chamber and front office carpets, with a view to ensuring sufficient budget is set aside at such a time as this work is considered necessary.
- v) The unspent capital budget (provisional sum) for the replacement of the alarm system be carried forward.

**CHAIRMAN**