

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday, 26 January 2016, at Ashington Town Hall, Station Road, Ashington.

PRESENT:

Councillors: Kris Lavery (Vice-Chair)	Louis Brown
Marjorie Chambers	Avril Chisholm
Glyn Davies	Stephen Fenwick
Mark Purvis	Pauline Thompson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer
Sue Coulthard – Snr. Admin. Officer

FGP 16/567 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Les Alderson, Victor Bridges, Vicky Brown, Keith Chambers, Lawrence Henderson, Maggie Lang, Liam Lavery, Wyn Stewart, Ely Turnbull and Bob Walkinshaw.

FGP 16/568 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Cllrs M Chambers and L Brown disclosed personal and prejudicial interests should any discussion take place regarding allotments issues. Members were reminded that any disclosures could also be made during the meeting should matters arise during discussion or debate.

FGP 16/569 3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2016, were agreed and signed as a true record.

FGP 16/570 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

FGP 15/534 Ashington Memorial Garden : The Town Clerk reported that, following the last meeting, two additional Memorial seats had been installed in the Memorial Garden (one on behalf of the Royal Hussars

and one on behalf of the Town Council). Members were reminded that two additional interpretation panels were also being designed; one giving general background information on the delivery of the project and a list of project funders and the other providing information on the history of Ashington's war memorials.

15/565: Newcastle Building Society Community Awards: Cllr. Turnbull confirmed that, in a Mayoral capacity, he had presented Cllr. Thompson with her Newcastle Building Society community award in recognition of the work she had carried out with the Alligator Klub as mentioned at the last meeting.

FGP 16/571 5. APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

A grant application from "Choysez" to support Easter holiday activities for young people was fully discussed and considered.

Resolved:

That a grant of £550 be made to Choysez.

FGP16/572 6. SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

The Town Clerk submitted a full schedule of payments, made in the period 19 November 2015 to 21 January 2016.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Payments for the period 19 November 2015 to 21 January 2016 be formally agreed and approved.

The full schedule of payments is attached to the minutes as schedule 1.

FGP 16/573 7. DRAFT BUDGET REPORT 2016/2017

The Town Clerk reported that, following two meetings of the Budget Working Group, a draft Budget for 2016/2017 was now being submitted to the Committee for full consideration and discussion.

Members were reminded that the 2016/17 Budget and Precept requirement from Northumberland County Council needed to be formally approved by Full Council.

The Town Clerk presented the Draft Budget Report 2016/2017 in detail and drew members' attention to the following items:-

- **Employee Costs (Staff Salaries):** Following an indication that the part time Senior Admin. Officer would be retiring during the coming financial year, the Budget Working Group had recommended that the post be restored to a full-time position within the core budget.
- **Employee Costs:** Following a re-structuring exercise in December 2012, advice from the North East Regional Employers Organisation (NEREO) had been that the terms and conditions of the Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer post should be reviewed once the Council had fully reached its core service level.

It was suggested that be referred to the Personnel Sub-Committee for consideration and discussion.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the Sub-Committee membership was the Leader and Deputy-Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Council, together with the "Leader of the Opposition Group".

Members commented that given the current political make-up of the Council, this position was not currently held as there was no Opposition Group. It was agreed therefore that the Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee be added to the membership of the Personnel Sub-Committee.

- **Employee Costs (Pension – Employer's Contribution):** *Members were advised* that, in accordance with the new auto-enrolment pension regulations, due to apply to the Town Council from August 2016, provision had been made to cover the costs of four full-time equivalent employees in the Local Government pension Scheme.
- **Fees & Charges (Publicity & Consultation):** This amount had been reduced as a more cost effective local print supplier had been sourced and much of the design and content work was also now handled in-house.
- **Civic Events (Town Twinning):** It was reported that two visits from Remscheid representatives were expected during 2016 although they would not necessarily be formal hosted "civic" visits. The budget had been accordingly reduced and members

were reminded that the 2015/16 budget had included the cost of the detailed work in producing the new Town Twinning Charter.

- **Community Events:** Reductions of £500 and £2,500 had been made in the Community Fayre and Music & Arts budgets. However, an amount of £1,500 had been allocated to the annual support of the Northumberland Miners' Picnic viewed as a significant and key community event.
- **Community Events (Ashington Football Tournament):** An amount of £1,000 had been allocated to this event with the proviso that more detailed information was sought from the organisers regarding the overall costs involved in hosting the Tournament.
- **Wansbeck Music Festival:** An amount of £950 had been allocated in 2016/17 made up of £350 annual subsidy and also a £600 bursary to be provided should an Ashington student be identified during the Festival as "outstanding" and eligible to be offered a place a renowned European Music Summer School.
- **Direct Service Provision (Seasonal Lighting):** A reduction of £1,000 had been made.
- **Direct Service Provision (Bus Shelters):** A provision in the core budget of to £20,000 be introduced to meet the cost of further Bus Shelter renewal, replacement or new provision work.
- **Ashington Neighbourhood Services Partnership (ATC Partnership Contribution):** To remain at the current level of £250,000 per annum.
- **ANSP (Environmental Enhancements – Small Schemes):** Retained at £15,000.

The Town Clerk reported that there was no planned use of reserves during the next financial year and added that the result of the draft budget, if so agreed, would be an increase on the current 2015/16 Council Tax of 1.97%.

The Town Clerk read out a full 2016/17 Budget motion submitted by the Chair of the Committee (Cllr. V Brown) for the consideration and support of the Committee.

Members' particular attention was drawn to the following key points:-

(iv) The proposal that “infrastructure organisations” currently receiving an annual subsidy from the Town Council be invited to make individual presentations to the Committee, commencing February 2016.

The Town Clerk asked that the Committee consider making a recommendation that those organisations who subsequently received continued support in 2016/17 be asked to consider formal Town Council representation on their Respective Boards or Management Committees.

(v) The proposal that a new Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Group be Established to represent the Town Council be appointed in consideration and discussion of all matters related to the effective operation of Neighbourhood Services in Ashington, including the re-drafting of a new Partnership Agreement.

Resolved:

That:

- (i) the post of Senior Administrative Officer be included in the 2016/17 budget as a full-time position with effect from 1 April 2016,**
- (ii) in accordance with the advice received for the North East Regional Employers Organisation in December 2012, the terms and conditions of the Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer be referred to Personnel Sub-Committee for full review,**
- (iii) the Auto Enrolment Pension Regulations be referred to Personnel Sub-Committee for full consideration;**
- (iv) the aggregate sum for Subsidies and Grants to Local “Infrastructure” Organisations be retained and included in the budget at the 2015/16 level of £36,000 and that the identified organisations be invited to make individual presentations to the Finance & General Purposes Committee in support of funding requests, commencing in February 2016,**
- (v) the aggregate sum for the contribution to the Neighbourhood Services Partnership be retained at the 2015/16 level of £250,000**
- (vi) a 2016/17 Gross Budget of £675,750 be recommended to Full Council for approval,**

(vii) a Precept requirement from Northumberland County Council in the sum of £675,750 be recommended to Full Council in respect of the Financial Year Ending 31 March 2017; and that

(viii) A “Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Group” be established to represent the Town Council in consideration and discussion of all matters related to the effective operation of Neighbourhood Services in Ashington, including the re-drafting of a new Neighbourhood Services Partnership Agreement.

FGP 16/574 8. HIRST PARK REVIVAL PROJECT – 1ST ROUND HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND (HLF)

The Town Clerk circulated information relating to the sum of £139,300 secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund by Northumberland County Council (NCC) for the first stage of the Hirst Park Revival Project. Members were informed that the Stage 1 award would cover the further development of the full detailed project with a view to the full Stage 2 bid, likely to be in excess of £2m. Members were reminded that in relation to Stage 1 of the project, Ashington Town Council had agreed in principle a financial contribution of £5,000 should the Stage 1 bid be successful. The Town Clerk confirmed that NCC was now requesting confirmation that the sum would be available to draw down.

The Town Clerk informed members that Town Council Officers would be working closely as key members of the project steering group and would likely be taking responsibility for the production and distribution of agreed newsletters as part of the full communication and consultation process. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council’s contribution of £5,000 to Stage 1 of the Hirst Park Revival Project was a completely separate matter from the £10,000 previously earmarked allocated to assist NCC with the renovation of the Park Keeper’s House although this work had not been undertaken.

Resolved:

That the sum of £5,000 be agreed as the Town Council contribution to the cost the Hirst Park Revival Project Stage 2 submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

FGP 16/575 9. ALLOTMENTS CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Town Clerk circulated a summary of the capital works carried out on allotment sites across the town. The summary showed that between April 2013 – January 2016, £102,000 had been spent, with 55% of the funds coming from external resources, 36.3% from the Town Council and 8.7% from the allotment associations themselves.

The Town Clerk reported that fencing to the main entrance of the High Market & Wansbeck Road Allotment Sites was in a poor state of repair and needed replacing. Members were informed that this fencing also bordered the cemetery of the Holy Sepulchre Church, was unsightly and was frequently commented on by families visiting the Churchyard.

Members were informed that while it was likely that the fencing was a shared responsibility it was a very real likelihood that work would only be undertaken with the Town Council initiative as it had been in a bad condition for a number of years and long before the creation of the Town Council.

The Committee was asked to consider the allocation of a sum of £4,560 to replace 90m of fencing.

Resolved:

That the sum of £4,560 be approved from the 2015/16 Allotments Budget the completion of replacement fencing work at the entrance to the Wansbeck Road/High Market Allotment Site.

FGP/16/576 10. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There was no other urgent business.

FGP 16/577 11. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee was arranged for 6pm on Tuesday, 23rd February 2016, in the County Chamber, Town Hall, Ashington.

The meeting ended at 8.15pm.