

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 24 September 2019, at Ashington Town Hall, Station Road, Ashington.

PRESENT:

COUNCILLORS:

Lynne Grimshaw (Chair)	Victor Bridges
Marjorie Chambers	Nicola Chambers
Avril Chisholm	Matthew Cuthbert
Stephen Fenwick	Brian Gallacher
Lawrence Henderson	Jim Lang
Liam Lavery	Ken Parry
Mark Purvis	Pauline Thompson
Tom Wilson	

IN ATTENDANCE: Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
Stephen Humphrey – Projects & Funding Officer
Sharon Parmley – Senior Administration Officer (minutes)

FGS 19/971 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, Eleanor Armstrong, Kris Lavery and Bob Walkinshaw.

FGS 19/972 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS.

There were no disclosures of interest.

FGS 19/973 3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING.

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 30 July 2019, were agreed and signed as a true record.

FGS 19/974 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES.

FGS 19/967 6. CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP.

Cllr Lavery informed members that the first meeting of the Climate Change Working Group was scheduled to be held on Thursday 26 September 2019.

FGS 19/966 5. APPLICATION FOR FUNDING SUPPORT.

South East Northumberland Rail User's Group (SENUG).

The Town Clerk informed members that the Chair of the organisation had telephoned to thank the Town Council for the generous commitment of £500 towards the development of the new website and publicity material.

The Chair had stated that he would confirm the thanks on behalf of SENRUG in writing once the other required external funding had been secured enabling the project to proceed.

FGS 19/975 5. APPLICATION FOR FUNDING SUPPORT – KOAST RADIO LTD.

The Funding & Project Officer reported that an application had been received from Koast Radio Ltd for a grant of £5,000 towards the cost of upgrading the existing radio transmitter to improve radio signal strength. The overall costs of the project were stated as £6,672.

Members were reminded that Koast Radio Ltd was a community radio station based at Woodhorn Villas in Ashington. The organisation has been broadcasting on-line from 2010 and in 2013 they were awarded a full FM licence by Ofcom. The organisation broadcasts to Ashington and the surrounding area.

The organisation had previously received grants from Ashington Town Council in the past totalling £1,875 to enable set up and development of the first Ofcom licence.

The Chair reminded members that the Town Council had very recently undergone a full review of the Small Grants & Donation Fund and had introduced criteria stating that “except in exceptional circumstances, so agreed by the Town Council, the maximum grant available from the Small Grants and Donations Fund was £750”.

Members were also reminded that if funding requested was part of a larger overall scheme or project, applicants must be able to demonstrate that other funding is secured prior to the release of any agreed Town Council monies.

Resolved:

That the Finance & General Services Committee:

- (i) Agree to commit a £500 contribution to Koast Radio Ltd towards the project cost of the radio transmitter,**
- (ii) Actively encourage Koast Radio Ltd to seek funding from other external sources; and that**
- (iii) The agreed Town Council funding be released on confirmation that the remaining funding for the project had been secured by Koast Radio Ltd.**

FGS 19/976 6. PLANNING APPLICATION 19/03489/FUL.

Members discussed and confirmed support for the recently submitted application covering the long-awaited major regeneration application for the Town Centre covering the following matters:

- Full planning permission for the erection of a 2,599 sqm/27,975 sqft (GEA) cinema (use Class D2), incorporating 544 sqm/5,859 sqft (GIA) of ancillary restaurant provision (Use Class A3) and 120 associated car parking spaces.
- Outline planning permission for 1,115 sqm/12,000 sqft (GEA) of retail development (Use Classes A1/A2 and A3) and associated parking (no reserved matters discharged at this stage). Location - Lintonville Terrace, Ashington.

Members agreed to accept the planning proposals in full and confirmed that they had no formal planning objections. It was agreed that a letter of support welcoming the formal application and Town Centre development plans be forwarded.

Resolved:

That a formal letter of support for the application be forwarded on behalf of the Town Council.

FGS 19/977 7. CONSULTATION ON STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING.

Portland Park, Northern Relief Road,
Proposed Address – Portland Way.

Members expressed disappointment that the Town Council proposal of 'Woodlands Way' appeared to have not been properly considered as part of the consultation.

Cllr.Gallacher and Cllr.Chambers confirmed that the proposal had been made at the Ashington Project and Co-Ordination Group in June 2019, attended by NCC Senior Officers and Elected Members with the full expectation and belief that it would be properly considered by Northumberland County Council (NCC).

The Town Clerk reminded members that while clearly there was considerable disappointment that this had not happened, the letter before the meeting was for comment on the NCC proposed name of "Portland Way" and that if members were not supportive then there was now a further formal opportunity to object and make alternative suggestions.

In summing up the discussion, the Chair recommended that a formal response be made objecting to the proposed name and to again put forward the Town Council suggestion of "Woodlands Way".

Resolved:

That:

- **The Town Council be not supportive of the proposed naming of the new road as “Portland Way”; and that**
- **The Town Council proposal and suggestion of “Woodlands Way be formally submitted for due consideration by Northumberland County Council.**

FGS 19/978 8. SCEDULE OF PAYMENTS.

The Town Clerk submitted a full schedule of payments and income for the financial period 26 July to 20 September 2019.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Payments for the financial period 26 July to 20 September 2019 be formally agreed and approved.

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

FGS 19/979 9. ELECTED MEMBER – PRINTING & STATIONERY EXPENSES.

The Chair introduced this agenda item and referred to a very recent paper she had asked to be circulated entitled “*Paper versus iPad*”.

The Chair informed members that, in the light of the recent move towards the establishment of the Climate Change Working Group and the commitment to look at the town council’s own budget and systems then now would be an appropriate time to look at the idea of seeking to modernise the Council and to genuinely consider a move away from the practice of encouraging the printing of paper documents.

The Chair asked members to consider seeking to replace the current scheme of reimbursing printing and stationery expenses with the offer of acquisition of iPads for all elected members.

The Town Clerk confirmed that members had a legal right to request and receive printed documents and that any such proposal could only ever be voluntary. Members were also reminded that Northumberland County Council provided all members with a lap top and had for some time been actively encouraging the use of technology to both reduce costs and environmental impacts as well as the cost of democratic services in producing written reports for all members. The Town Clerk reminded members that the current scheme was one of providing an

annual payment to reimburse elected members for the estimated costs of printing and stationery i.e. paper, cartridges, etc incurred throughout the year in respect of Ashington Town Council work.

Members were reminded that the longstanding agreement for the payment for printing and stationery was not part of any formal allowances scheme under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (Statutory Instrument no.2003-1021) and should not be referred to as such.

The Chair reminded members that the reimbursement of expenses had been introduced when members, in the very early years of the Town Council, had agreed to receive all information electronically by email and to print the documents at home. The reimbursement payment had grown from £50 to £100 to £300 to reflect the increasing workload and growth of the Town Council over ten years and the Chair considered that now would be a good time to re-visit and clarify the scheme.

The Town Clerk advised members that the 2019/20 budget included the provision of reimbursement of printing and stationery expenses and that was the agreed current policy that would be honoured.

A lengthy discussion took place with members genuinely feeling that sufficient time had not been allowed to consider the "*Paper versus iPad*" document and that there was a whole range of items to be discussed and clarified before moving forward and committing to any new scheme for the introduction of iPads.

Cllr. Parry requested that the matter be deferred and that the option of establishing a Working Group be looked at in due course. The Town Clerk agreed that there were a number of related items that should be looked at in full and in proper detail before any formal schemes be introduced.

The Chair accepted the deferment of the matter but genuinely felt there was a clear need for the town council to properly consider and look into the option of providing an electronic option for members.

The Leader of the Town Council agreed to look into the matter and present options to the Council for discussion after full consideration with Council members.

Resolved:

That the item be deferred and that a full report be provided in due course covering all relevant matters.

FGS 19/980 10. BUDGET WORKING GROUP 2020-21.

The Town Clerk requested that in the preparation of a draft budget for 2020/21, the Committee consider the establishment of a Budget Working Group. Members were reminded that a similar Working Group had operated successfully in considering the proposals for the 2018/19 & 2019/20 Town Council budgets and that the group would undertake the preparatory detailed work, consider any capital schemes, growth or one-off areas of work and present detail to fellow members for consideration, full discussion and approval at Full Council.

The Town Clerk reminded members that that the Budget Working Group would have no delegated decision-making powers in relation to any matters.

Resolved:

That:

(i) That the Town Council establish a Budget Working Group to prepare a 2020/21 draft budget, with fully appraised options, for the consideration of Finance & General Services Committee and Full Council; and that

(ii) The Budget Working Group membership consist of:

**The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, Business Chair and Vice Business Chair of the Council and the Chair and Vice-Chair of Finance & General Purposes Committee.
(6 Members)**

FGS 19/981 11. ENTRANCE FEATURES WORKING GROUP.

Members agreed to establish an Entrance Features Working Group, to look at the design and styling of proposed new entrance signage to the town.

Resolved:

That the Entrance Feature Working Group consist of;

- Cllr. Marjorie Chambers**
- Cllr. Avril Chisholm**
- Cllr. Mark Purvis**
- Cllr. Liam Lavery**
- Cllr. Pauline Thompson**
- Cllr. Tom Wilson**

FGS 19/982 12. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS.

- Cllr. Marjorie Chambers reminded members that the first project for the Arts and Music Working Group was to be an Art and Photography Exhibition that it would take place from 26-28 September in Unit 1 on Wansbeck Square. The exhibition would feature work from the Ashington Art Group, Camera Club and Pitmatic Group.
- Cllr. Gallacher requested that the newly formed Climate Change Working Group consider the installation of electrical vehicle charging points in Ashington. Cllr Liam Lavery agreed to take information to a future meeting for discussion.

FGS 19/983 13. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING.

Tuesday 29 October 2019, at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

The Meeting ended at 7:45pm.