

# ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 29 October 2019, at Ashington Town Hall, Station Road, Ashington.**

## **PRESENT:**

**COUNCILLORS:**

Lynne Grimshaw (Chair)	Eleanor Armstrong
Victor Bridges	Marjorie Chambers
Avril Chisholm	Matthew Cuthbert
Stephen Fenwick	Brian Gallacher
Lawrence Henderson	Jim Lang
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)  
Members of the Public - 1

## **OPEN SESSION**

A member of the public in attendance asked questions and sought reassurances from the Town Council that the Neighbourhood Services Partnership and Environmental Enforcement arrangements with Northumberland County Council (NCC) were working as expected and leading to service improvement.

The Leader of the Town Council outlined that a new 5-year Neighbourhood Services Partnership, formalised in a contract agreement with NCC and signed in May 2019, had been drafted to specifically address the perceived weaknesses and shortcomings of the original agreement signed in 2014.

The Leader outlined that, although still early days, there were signs that the service had improved and that the key changes requested by the Town Council were having a direct impact, including the introduction of a dedicated rapid response team to address fly-tipping and hot-spot areas in the town.

The Leader also informed the member of the public that the Town Council would also be reviewing the service-level agreement for Environmental Enforcement which had operated as a “pilot-scheme” for 2 years and was scheduled to come to an end in March 2020.

The member of the public thanked the Council for the detailed responses and helpful information.

**FGS 19/984 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, Nicola Chambers, Kris Lavery, Liam Lavery and Bob Walkinshaw.

**FGS 19/985 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS.**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**FGS 19/986 3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING.**

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 24 September 2019, were agreed and signed as a true record.

**FGS 19/987 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES.**

**FGS 19/966 5. APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING SUPPORT.**

**South East Northumberland Rail User's Group (SENRUG).**

The Town Clerk informed members that the Chair of the organisation had formally written a letter of thanks for the Town Council commitment of £500 towards the development of the new website and publicity material. Members were informed that the organisation had now secured the remaining external funding required and were in the process of updating the website.

**FGS 19/981 11. ENTRANCE FEATURES WORKING GROUP.**

Cllr Chambers explained that a meeting of the group had been held and several options had been explored and put forward for the design of dedicated entrances signage. Cllr.Chambers reported that the draft designs and colour schemes had been forwarded to a local print & design company to provide worked up examples for the consideration of the Working Group and Committee. It was hoped that the designs would be available in time for the next meeting.

**FGS19/988 5. APPLICATION FOR FUNDING SUPPORT – ASHINGTON PANTOMIME GROUP.**

A small grant scheme application was received from the Ashington Pantomime Group. The sum of £200 had been requested to help support the costs of providing the Christmas pantomime “Jack and the Beanstalk” in November 2019.

**Resolved:**

**That a donation of £200 be made to Ashington Pantomime Group to support the costs of the annual Christmas Show.**

## **FGS 19/989 6. SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS.**

The Town Clerk submitted a full schedule of payments and income for the financial 21 September 2019 – 18 October 2019.

### **Resolved:**

**That the Schedule of Payments for the financial period 21 September 2019 to 18 October 2019 be formally agreed and approved.**

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

## **FGS 19/990 7. BUDGET REPORT.**

The Town Clerk submitted a Full Budget Report for the period 1 April 2019 to 18 October 2019.

Members were informed that there were no exceptional items that needed to be brought to the attention of the Committee at this time. Members were reminded that the full 2019/20 budget review and preparations for 2020/21 would soon commence and that there were a number of commitments and possible upcoming schemes that would require very careful consideration and financial planning including, but not restricted to:

- Climate Change Projects & Tree Planting Schemes
- Hirst Park Revitalisation Scheme – Maintenance Service-Level Agreement
- Planned Entrance Features & Signage
- Review of Environmental Enforcement Service-Level Agreement
- Station Road Floral Improvements

### **Resolved:**

**That the Full Budget Report for the financial period 1 April 2019 to 18 October 2019 be formally agreed and approved.**

## **FGS 19/991 8. FLORAL DISPLAYS AND PRESENTATIONS – STATION ROAD ASHINGTON.**

The Leader Cllr. Cuthbert presented a report to members following a discussion of a recent condition survey and options appraisal report commissioned by the Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board.

Members were reminded that the purpose of the report was to provide both current condition details and to look at the challenges faced and opportunities presented in seeking to improve the floral displays and presentations on Station Road, Ashington.

Members were reminded that, with effect from 1 April 2019 and in accordance with a 5-year (2019-2024) Neighbourhood Services Partnership Agreement signed with Northumberland County Council (NCC) on 9 May 2019, Ashington Town Council became directly responsible for all floral presentations in the town, with the exception of seasonal bedding displays within Hirst Park.

Members were further reminded that, within the Partnership Agreement and with the express permission of NCC as the highway authority, Ashington Town Council could “*engage either the County Council or another competent supplier to deliver additional floral displays*”. Members accepted that the service level and standard, design of presentations and range of plants now rested with Ashington Town Council as the client organisation.

Members unanimously agreed that Ashington Town Council had a clear intention to see continual improvement in the range and standard of floral displays within the town. It was also recognised that such improvement was not a short-term fix and would require a formal programme of gradual improvement based on a clear plan and direction.

The Leader reported that the Neighbourhood Services Board was advised by NCC to seek specialist horticultural advice and guidance in looking to set any brief or specification for improvement. The Board was also advised that they would need to look at the resource requirements of any programme for improvement and all-year round maintenance.

Further to consideration of that advice and following the findings of the site visit and the advice received, the Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board resolved to commission an independent options report to look at the design of the street and realistic options for improvement.

The Leader reported that, further to the initial meeting a formal project brief was issued by the Town Clerk, covering the following key points and requirements:

1. *Condition Survey - the current plant content and street design limitations*
2. *Realistic options for improvement and impact in the short and medium-term i.e. the period 2020-2021. Please include all options for plant removal, clearance of beds, introduction of additional floral planters, hanging baskets etc*
3. *Challenges faced in seeking improvement – including soil depth, street “clutter”, north and south based bedding etc*
4. *Seasonal work and timetabling requirements i.e. what should be done when?*

5. *Resource requirements in terms of personnel i.e. on-street permanent or seasonal presence (having regard for the current maintenance provision within the SLA with NCC) and*
6. *Any other matters that you consider relevant or appropriate at this stage.*

The Leader reported that an Independent full Condition Survey and Options Appraisal Report, including the results of a street survey was subsequently compiled and provided by a local horticulturalist and garden designer, Mr Richard Timson in mid-October. The executive summary, key findings and full street survey results had been circulated for the consideration of all members.

Members unanimously agreed that the report was an excellent piece of work and clearly set out the scale of the challenge faced by the Town Council in positively seeking to improve the floral presentations within the Town Centre.

The Chair reminded members that the report made clear that the options for improvement presented were of course reliant of the Town Council addressing and funding all aspects of the all-year round resource requirement. Members unanimously endorsed the full report and all recommendations.

**Resolved:**

**That the Finance & General Services Committee:**

- (i) Formally accept the details and findings of the Station Road Condition Survey and Option Appraisal Report as the basis for developing a formal work improvement programme for floral presentation and displays,**
- (ii) Seek to appoint a Full-Time Horticultural Officer, initially on a two-year fixed-term contract, to oversee and manage all aspects of the floral improvement work and all other botanical and horticultural issues for the Council; and that**
- (iii) Subject to agreement of (i) and (ii) above, the funding for the improvement work and resource costs, including the new employee, be met from the existing Environmental Enhancements budget and be discussed as part of the 2019-21 budget process.**

**FGS 19/992 9. ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT – SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT (SLA).**

The Leader Cllr. Cuthbert presented a report to members and reminded the meeting that the current SLA, due to end on 31 March 2020, required that a review would take place in the last quarter of the

18-month period and that the review should cover the costs, risks and benefits of the existing arrangements.

Members were informed that the Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board had chosen to bring forward the review in order that any “in principle” decision or option considered by the Council with a financial impact could be properly considered as part of the 2020/21 budget process.

The Leader advised members that the options available to the Town Council on completion of the current SLA at 31 March 2020, were:

1. Continuing with the current SLA content and discussing the duration and cost of any further extension,
2. Continuing with a revised SLA to be properly discussed; or
3. Discontinuing the SLA meaning that the service provision would cease with effect from 31 March 2020.

The Town Clerk informed members that any decision taken to continue with the SLA placed an onus on the Council to identify appropriate 2020/21 resource requirement from within the core service revenue budget.

**Resolved:**

**That Finance & General Services Committee:**

- (i) Agree “in principle” to the continuation of the current Environmental Enforcement SLA for a further period of one-year, subject to the identification of appropriate revenue funding for the 0.5 Full-Time Equivalent service, and that**
- (ii) The Budget Working Group be delegated to enter into early discussion with NCC regarding the projected costs and to report back to Finance & General Services Committee.**

**FGS 19/993 10. ACQUISITION OF NEW PLAY EQUIPMENT – PADDOCK WOOD PLAY AREA.**

Cllr. Lang requested that members consider and discuss the acquisition of play equipment for Paddock Wood Play Area, after recent damage to previous equipment and subsequent theft by persons unknown.

Cllr. Lang reminded members that Paddock Wood Play Area was a well used and valued play facility in North Seaton and that it was properly used by many young children, particularly during the school holiday periods. Members were informed that until recently it had been relatively free of misuse or vandalism.

Cllr Lang reported that he had been approached by a number of residents requesting that due consideration be given to the replacement of the aging swings with a new swing offering a cradle swing also for very young children.

**Resolved:**

**That the Finance & General Services Committee:**

- (i) Agree the replacement of the damaged and stolen equipment with the purchase of a new 2.5m high double bay swing frame (2 x flat seats, 1 x cradle seat and 1 x inclusive swing seat,**
- (ii) The £4,548 (ex VAT) estimated cost of the equipment be agreed to be met from the Town Council's 2019/20 budget for Play Areas to include:**
  - Removal of the existing swing frame; and**
  - Supply and installation of a new swing frame and seats**
- (iii) Kompan Ltd be appointed to carry out the full work on behalf of the Town Council.**

**FGS 19/994 11. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS.**

There were no other items of urgent business.

**FGS 19/995 12. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING.**

Tuesday 26 November 2019, at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

**The Meeting ended at 7:00pm.**