

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 21 January 2020, at Ashington Town Hall, Station Road, Ashington.

PRESENT:

COUNCILLORS: Lynne Grimshaw (Chair) Victor Bridges
Marjorie Chambers Avril Chisholm
Matthew Cuthbert Stephen Fenwick
Lawrence Henderson Mark Purvis
Pauline Thompson

IN ATTENDANCE: Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
Members of the Public - 0

FGS 20/008 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, Eleanor Armstrong, Nicola Chambers, Brian Gallacher, Jim Lang, Kris Lavery, Liam Lavery, Ken Parry, Bob Walkinshaw and, Tom Wilson.

FGS 20/009 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS.

There were no disclosures of interest.

FGS 20/010 3. DRAFT BUDGET 2020/21.

The Chair thanked the members of the Budget Working Group for the detailed work carried out in considering and drafting the 2020/21 budget for full consideration of the Committee.

The Town Clerk presented the 2020/21 draft budget and highlighted the major commitments and planned work programmed carried out by the Council in 2019/20 together with policy decisions made impacting on the 2020/21 budget. The Town Clerk thanked members for their sound and prudent management of the Council's finances and the positive approach taken to actively investigate all external funding options.

The Town Clerk took members through major changes and highlighted new services due to come into effect in 2020/21 requiring financial provision in the core budget.

The key areas discussed related to:

- The impact of the new Neighbourhood Services Contract for 2019-2024
- The Environmental Enforcement Service Level Agreement with Northumberland County Council (further to completion of the 2-year pilot programme 2018-20)
- The Environmental Enhancement and Improvement budget and the full responsibility for Floral Displays and Presentations in Ashington with effect from 2020/21 and
- The agreement to contribute to the ongoing maintenance of Hirst Park on completion of the major capital refurbishment.

The Town Clerk reported savings in relation to individual budget heads and also the reduction in provisions made for election expenses and service charges.

The Chair thanked the Town Clerk for the comprehensive report. The draft budget report and recommendations were unanimously agreed.

Resolved:

That Finance & General Services Committee recommends to Full Council that:

- (i) The 2020/21 gross budget expenditure of £832,930 be agreed, inclusive of the specified use of £36,750 from the general reserves balance,**
- (ii) Ashington Town Council's precept requirement from Northumberland County Council in respect of the Financial Year Ending 31 March 2021, be agreed at £796,180**
- (iii) The Precept (Council Tax) increase for 2020/21 be agreed at 2% for a Band D property in Ashington, equivalent to an annual increase of £2.09 and that**
- (iv) While recognising that in 2020/21 the Government proposes to continue with no referendum principles ("capping") for Town and Parish Council's, Ashington Town Council resolves to take all available steps to mitigate the future need for Council Tax increases, including:**
 - the responsible use of non-earmarked general reserves,**
 - maximising all external funding opportunities; and**
 - examining "invest to save" projects and options that will lower on-going costs.**

FGS 20/011 4. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING.

Tuesday 25 February 2020, at 6:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

The Meeting ended at 7:45pm.