

Ashington Town Council

DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 17th January 2023, in The Council Chamber, Town Hall

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllrs Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Eleanor Armstrong, Caroline Ball, Michelle Brannigan, Victor Bridges, Louis Brown, Vicky Brown, Glyn Davies, Lawrence Henderson, Jim Lang, Mark Purvis, John Tully and Pauline Thompson.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE:

Sarah Eden – Clerk/RFO, Stephen Humphrey – ATC Assets and Facilities Manager, Sharon Parmley – Administration (Minute taking)

FGS 23/309 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Marjorie Chambers, Matthew Cuthbert, Sophie Robinson and Bob Walkinshaw.

FGS 23/310 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Cllrs. Louis Brown and Victor Bridges declared an interest in item FGS 23/317 DRAFT BUDGET, in matters relating to allotments.

FGS 23/311 DISPENSATIONS.

Cllr Louis Brown requested dispensation to ask questions relating to FGS 23/317 DRAFT BUDGET, in relation to allotments.

FGS 23/312 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public.

FGS 23/313 MINUTES OF FGS MEETING HELD ON 13th December 2022

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 13th December 2022 as a true record.

FGS 23/314 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** a verbal and tabled update on items actioned since the previous meeting.

Neighbourhood Week of Action

Police - Neighbourhood Week of Action 23rd – 29th January 2023

Inspector Wayne Daniel has shared that the college of policing have planned a nationwide week of action. Inspector Daniels is aiming to bring in other partners and invited the Town Council and Cllrs to get involved and is open to suggestions.

Our general aims for the week are:

- *Early Intervention to reduce Crime and ASB*
- *Problem Solving to prevent Crime and ASB*
- *Improving Trust and Confidence in Policing*

Town Council staff and Cllrs can be involved in the walkabout on Monday 23rd January and street clean-up on Tuesday 24th January. The Rapid Response team will be present to remove fly-tipping from Council land, in the areas visited and NCC Enforcement will be delivering leaflets at the same time.

Ashington Town Council**DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 17th January 2023, in The Council Chamber, Town Hall*****Town Hall Closure***

Damp Course work will take place from 6th February for two weeks so the building will be closed. Office staff will work at home and post will be delivered to Sharon. We are looking to book North Seaton Community Centre for the FGS meeting on 14th February, providing there is not anything for Valentines.

Bus Shelters

New bus shelters have been installed outside Alexandra Road play area, on Woodhorn Road and on A197. The survey that was carried out for a bus shelter on Woodhorn Road (outside the Abbey Tandoori) was inconclusive. 20 surveys were sent, and 5 replies received. In summary 1 in support, 1 in support if moved further down the road, 2 against, and another with no concerns. The information has been fed back to ward Cllrs and the Council will be asked to take a decision based on their recommendation.

All shelters will have ownership stickers in the spring, which will include the phone number and QR code to report damage.

Allotments**Damage at Hirst East End**

Damage was attended to as agreed by the Council. Unfortunately, there has been further vandalism at the site; the police are involved.

Asbestos

Asbestos was promptly and safely removed, as agreed by the Council in December.

Play Areas

Following the recent completion of the Alexandra Road Play Area, work will commence with Haydon Ward Councillors in identifying improvements to Aintree Close and Epsom Drive Play Area. These two play areas are recognised as priorities requiring improvements.

Defibrillators

The Council agreed in July to commence the project to install twelve defibrillators in the town and to seek financial support from County Cllrs. County Cllrs were positively unanimous in their support and pledged to fund all twelve, two each.

Several locations in each ward were identified that would become custodians of the defibrillators, with the Town Council meeting the cost of install, and consumables in perpetuity. Some prospects responded positively straight away, and the paperwork has been completed for some time. Some took several months but are now completed, and others responded only in December and January that they did not feel they could be part of the project, either as they had concerns about the defibrillators being on their building, or about being the custodian.

Recently alternative sites have been investigated and thankfully all are positive and very enthusiastic about having the equipment available, and to being part of the project. Some are being signed off with landlords, but a complete list will be brought to the February meeting and the Council will be asked to agree to place the order.

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Telephone System

Sharon is looking at alternatives to the current office telephone system which has various shortcomings.

Enhanced Services

Sarah is meeting with the Clerk at Blyth to understand how they are navigating their own Partnership Agreement ending in 2024.

Warm Spaces Funding

Thanks were received from all funded groups on notice of award.

Word of Life Church further updated: "We will utilise the monies provided by the council matched by our own funds. Should we need to apply for more funds we will do so in the near future. We have already supplied 18 blankets and hot water bottles and have provided 3 Friday warm spaces events and 1 this Tuesday when the temperatures were extremely low.

We may decide to open up on more days should the need become greater. So far, we have had an additional 20 people attend."

FGS 23/315 TOWN TWINNING – REMSCHEID, DAY OF ASSOCIATIONS

It was AGREED to RECEIVE an invite to the above on Sunday 3rd September 2023.

It was FURTHER AGREED to respond to the visit invite from 1st – 4th September 2023 and agree as soon as possible the three members of the Council who would go to represent Ashington.

The Town Twinning Association has been informed of the visit and several members of the group will be attending. The Chair of the Association has informed the council that a meeting is to be held soon to arrange travel and accommodation for the trip.

FGS 23/316 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2022/23

a) Updated Budget Report

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the updated budget report sent out in advance of the meeting.

a) Accounts Paid

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a schedule of accounts paid since the December FGS Meeting and to endorse those accounts paid according to the Council's Financial Regulations.

It was FURTHER AGREED to endorse two invoices which had just recently been received for the CCTV provision at Ashington Community Woods and Paddock Woods.

FGS 23/317 DRAFT BUDGET

Cllr Tully proposed the following recommendations in respect of the 2023/24 budget.

Precept

That there should be no increase to the precept for 2023/24.

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Grant Aid, Small Grants, Subsidies & Sponsorship

That the three separate budget headings be combined with a cumulative increase of £17,000 across them, with details to be agreed at a later date, but all coming under 'Community Support'.

Environmental Enhancements

Increase environmental enhancements by £22,000 and allocate £5,000 to each ward for projects.

CCTV

Increase CCTV budget by £4,000.

Events

Increase the allocation to events by £40,000 across Community Fair Day, Northumberland Miners Picnic, Christmas Lights Switch-On, Town Twinning, Commemorative Events. This is usually £23,000 across all to £63,000, and repurposing to Events and Community Engagement. To remove the allocation to the Garden Competition in view of the very low numbers in comparison to the workload required.

Environmental Enforcement Officer

To remove the commitment to an SLA for dedicated 0.5 FTE Environmental Enforcement Officer and monitor the impact of this over the coming year.

Cllr Tully proposed that notional balances were used to off-set the Precept, in addition to those savings made in the budget, and that the remaining money is allocated by reducing the Reserves and Contingency Budget.

The proposals were seconded on mass.

The Clerk sought clarification on the budget towards Environmental Enhancements, clarifying that the funds included in the skeleton budget were accounted for. To allow a further £5,000 per ward would require £30,000 not £22,000.

Cllr Louis Brown proposed £3,500 per ward, which was accepted by Cllr Tully as the original mover.

Cllr Brannigan proposed an amendment that the Community Support heading reflect a budget of £100,000, which was accepted by Cllr Tully as the original mover.

Cllr Grimshaw **FURTHER PROPOSED** the following recommendations in respect of the 2023/24 budget.

Allotments

Cllr Grimshaw stressed that it was essential that the proposed water works be carried out on the allotment sites still to be done, to avoid potential water bills and repair bills. Cllr Grimshaw proposed any further funds required for the water systems be taken from General Reserves and Contingency.

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Cllr Louis Brown agreed with the allotment funding and sought assurance that the creation of an Allotment Liaison Group was progressing. The Clerk responded that the formation of the group was on the Full Council meeting to consider.

Youth Worker

Cllr Grimshaw proposed that the General Reserves and Contingency allocation be further reduced to support the potential for detached youth work in the town.

The Clerk advised that detached youth work is provided in teams of at least two, and sessions are usually 3.5 hours. If the Council was considering 2 youth workers over two nights this would require a budget commitment of at least £15,000. The Council could directly fund a provider to deliver this or could put the opportunity out to tender.

Cllr Ball fully supported the proposal, ensuring the Council maintained an input on delivery and monitoring. Cllr Brannigan also suggested the two Youth Workers have an Ashington Town Council branded work wear.

It was AGREED that £20,000 be added for Youth Provision, to be taken from the allocation to General Reserves and Contingency.

CCTV

Cllr Grimshaw voiced that £4,000 may not be sufficient to upgrade the CCTV Provision in the town. Members sought clarity on this.

The Clerk advised that the Council must base decision on the information they have now and the advice given but should desired plans be priced above the allocation made, the money could be taken from General Reserves and Contingency, which is the reason the Council is financial prudent to have it.

Christmas Lights

Cllr Grimshaw proposed an increase in the Christmas Lights budget, to allow for the replacement of broken lights and to extend the provision slightly each year.

The Clerk advised that should the Council wish to extend the displays, it would be helpful to have a budget in mind so that the provider can come up with some options, and it would be sensible to make this available in the budget.

Cllr Davies proposed an additional 10% of the current budget of £25,000. **It was AGREED.**

The Chair confirmed that the agreed proposals would be drafted into the Budget for 2023/24 and presented to Full Council for agreement on Tuesday 31st January 2023.

FGS 23/318 NCC PLANNING ENFORCEMENT STRATEGY

It was AGREED to receive the 2022 NCC Planning Enforcement Strategy sent out in advance of the meeting and to respond that the Council noted the details therein.

FGS 23/319 DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 14th February 2023, 6:00pm, venue to be agreed due to works at the Town Hall.

Meeting ends 7:45pm