

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Finance & General Services Committee Meeting held at 7:00pm on Tuesday 19 January 2021, via Zoom.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
Stephen Humphrey- Funding and Projects Officer
Sharon Parmley – Senior Administration Officer (minutes)
Members of the Public - 0

FGS 21/048 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

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

FGS 21/049 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS.

There were no disclosures of interest.

FGS 21/050 3. DRAFT BUDGET 2021/22.

The Town Clerk presented a comprehensive report and referred members to the detailed papers circulated for both the 2020/21 projected out-turn and a draft budget prepared for full discussion.

Members were reminded of the full discussion that had taken place at the December 2020 meeting outlining the expected savings resulting from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to date.

Key points highlighted to members included.

- Savings made on Election Casual Vacancies.
- Community events all cancelled due to pandemic with savings being re-directed to COVID-19/Winter Support Fund.
- Saving on the Hirst Park SLA which was not required in 2020/21
- Development of in-house service for town-wide floral presentations and discussions regarding the location within Hirst Park Growing Zone.
- Room hire – savings made due to on-line Zoom meetings.

- Website review to be carried out by Widescope for compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) including possible development of a new website for the future.
- Publicity and consultation, now moving towards electronic newsletters, making a substantial saving. Possibly print hard copies for public buildings etc.

The Chair thanked the Town Clerk for all the work carried out on the budget and agreed that it was prudent to have general reserves, especially when the immediate future held such uncertainty. Cllr.Gallacher reminded members that 2021/22 would be the last budget for the current council. Cllr.Gallacher thanked the Town Clerk for the detailed and thorough budget report and commended members for ensuring that projects were pushed forward.

Resolved:

That further to full consideration and discussion, Finance & General Services Committee recommends to Full Council that:

- (i) The 2021/22 gross budget expenditure of £898,060 be agreed, inclusive of the specified use of £100,000 from the General Reserve balance,**
- (ii) Ashington Town Council's precept requirement from Northumberland County Council in respect of the Financial Year Ending 31 March 2022, be agreed at £798,060,**
- (iii) The Precept (Council Tax) for 2021/22 be agreed at £106.94 for a Band D property in Ashington, representing no increase in the charge set for the previous financial year 2020/21,**
- (iv) While recognising that in 2021/22 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; and that**
- (v) From within the proposed "Floral Displays & Environmental Enhancements" core 2021/22 budget of £47,000, the aggregate sum of sum of £9,000 be delegated to ward members for small environmental improvement schemes, representing the sum of £1,500 for each of the six individual wards.**

FGS 21/051 4. TREE REPLACEMENT PROJECTS – SEATON WARD.

Cllr. Jim Lang presented the following projects to the Council;

- (i) Exeter Close - History – Cllr.Lang reported that when the Northumberland Church of England Academy was built, the developer's installed a row of trees along the long path from Windsor Road to the gates of the school. Members were informed that over the years most of the trees had been lost leaving only 3 remaining. The purpose of this project is to return these trees along the same line with 14 trees to be installed. The trees would be heavy duty, have protection guards and would be planted by staff from Ashington Town Council together with young students from the Academy primary school. The site has been surveyed by Ashington Town Councils' Horticultural Officer and a report has been sent to NCC Tree Officer with no adverse comments.

- (ii) South Side - History – Cllr.Lang reported that this area of North Seaton was dominated by a range of mature trees which were planted a number years ago when the North Seaton Manor Hall was there. Over the years, several trees were hit by Dutch Elm disease and had to be removed. Those trees were never replaced with the remaining tree stumps only being removed earlier this year. The planned project was to re-plant 3 new trees to add colour to the walk and to also plant crocus bulbs and other flowers to add to the environmental impact.

Resolved:

That further to presentation of the full proposals to the Finance & General Services Committee for consideration and discussion:

- (i) The proposed tree replacement projects at Exeter Close and South Side, North Seaton be agreed,**

- (ii) The overall project cost of £5,525.80 be agreed, the work to be undertaken by the Horticultural Officer; and that**

The project cost be met from within the Town Council's 2020/21 budget provision for Climate Change Project's and Initiatives.

FGS 21/052 5. PLAY AREA IMPROVEMENTS – BYWELL ROAD.

Cllr. Marjorie Chambers presented a proposal with options for additional play equipment and wet pour surfacing at the Bywell Road Play Area.

Cllr.Chambers referred to recent repairs to current play equipment at the Bywell Road facility and considered that acquisition of two new pieces of play equipment would bring the area up to a modern fit-for-purpose standard.

Resolved:

That:

- (i) The proposed acquisition of two new pieces of play equipment for Bywell Road Play Area be agreed,**
- (ii) The overall project cost of £9,444.50 (exc.VAT) be agreed,**
- (iii) The work be undertaken by KOMPAN Scotland Ltd as the appointed contractor at the earliest opportunity; and that**
- (iv) The agreed sum of £9,444.50 (exc.VAT) be met from the General Financial Reserves of the Town Council.**

FGS 201/053 6. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING.

The next meeting of the Finance and General Services Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 23 February 2021 at 7:00pm, on-line via Zoom.

The meeting ended 8.25pm.