

**Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on
Thursday 18th December 2014
at the Mechanics Institute, Percy Street, Alnwick at 7.00pm**

Present: Cllrs S Allcroft, P Allcroft, P Broom, G Castle, D Farrar, B Grisdale, G Mavin, R Roberts and A Symmonds.

In attendance: W Batey, Chief Officer and Town Clerk, J Pibworth, Administration Assistant.

FP 14/23 Apologies

Councillor S Patience.

FP 14/24 Declarations of Interest

The following pecuniary interests were declared in relation to the grant applications (Item 4.) listed below because the Councillors/officer held positions of responsibility in the organisations:

- Alnwick Playhouse Trust – Councillors Castle, Farrar and Roberts
- Northumberland Touring Theatre Company – W Batey
- Bailiffgate Museum - Councillors S Allcroft, P Allcroft, Farrar, Grisdale and Roberts
- Alnwick & District Sports Council – W Batey
- Alnwick Town Juniors FC - Councillor Castle
- Alnwick & District Choral Society - Councillors Castle, Grisdale and Roberts
- Friends of Bullfield Community Orchard - Councillors Farrar and Roberts
- Friends of Abbeyfield - Councillor Castle

FP 14/25 Budget update 2014/15

The Town Clerk circulated the committee budget as at 17th December 2014. This showed expenditure at £61,553 compared to £45,517 in October and includes the payments approved at the December Council meeting. This was reviewed line by line with the following highlighted by the Town Clerk:

ADMINISTRATION - currently at £27,225 and will be slightly above the budgeted figure due to pay award which comes into effect in January 2015.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - expenditure £13,347. End of year predicted figure will be £16,650 (budgeted figure of £12,000 and a grant of £4,650). A payment of 10% of the grant will be paid on completion of the Neighbourhood Plan.

GRANTS - Alnwick Playhouse Band have already received a grant of £350.

MAYOR'S CHAIN - actual cost of repairs was higher than budgeted at £1,454.

RESOLVED: To receive the budget update.

FP 14/26 Consideration of the 2014/15 grant applications

The Town Clerk reported that 22 grant applications had been received which is the most the Town Council has ever received. A summary document was distributed to councillors, each one having been reviewed against the grant criteria by the Chairman and the Town Clerk, which included initial recommendations for grant amounts. Each application was considered in-turn and the following 20 grant awards were agreed:

Organisation	Agreed support from Town Council	Grant Award
Alnwick and District Playhouse Trust	Assistance with running costs	£1,000
Alnwick Garden Club	Assistance towards the cost of purchasing a projector and screen	£200
Northumberland Touring Theatre Company	Support for core activities.	£500
Alnwick Community Centre-Play	Assistance to cover material costs for sessions	£500
Alnwick Branch of Arthritis Care	Help with transport costs	£150
Alnwick Young Peoples Association	Contribution towards core costs for drop in sessions	£600
Bailiffgate Museum	Assistance with core costs	£1,250
Lionheart Radio & Media	Assistance to cover licence costs and insurance	£500
Northumberland CAB (Alnwick Office)	Assistance with running costs and in particular training etc of volunteers	£1,300
RE-NU-IT	Help with van running costs / electric costs	£350
Hospice Care North Northumberland	Assistance with running costs	£1,000
Alnwick & District Sports Council	Assistance with annual sports awards which are held at the Playhouse	£350
Mighty Oaks	Contribution to running costs of distribution of free drinks in Alnwick	£250
Alnwick Town Juniors FC	Assistance with running costs including training coaches / referees, grass cutting	£350
Alnwick & District Choral Society	Assistance to fund a concert at Rock featuring up to 5 Alnwick Choirs	£200
Friends of Bullfield Community Orchard	Assistance to establish 2 raised beds	£350
Friends of Abbeyfield	Assistance to plan 6 visits during 12 months	£250
Alnwick Wheel Sports Facility Association	Assistance to use as matched funding for larger applications	£350
Alnwick Recreational Runners	Assistance to buy equipment	Equipment to the value of £100
Alnwick Amateur Boxing Club	Contribution towards purchasing new training gloves or mobile multi-station unit for open workshops	£400 (accounts needed)

Councillors also considered a request for funding from Alnwick MACPI (Multi-agency crime prevention initiative) who requested funding to be able to give grants to continue to support Alnwick Boxing Club, Alnwick Training Corps and the Alnwick Community Centre Summer Play schemes. However, as the grant criteria excludes giving grants to organisations that then use them to fund other groups, no grant was awarded. Councillors also considered a request for funding from Alnwick Tourism Assn. who requested funding towards the cost of a tourism booklet; this was deferred until councillors had had an opportunity to review the booklet. The Councillors awarded grants which currently total £9,950.

RESOLVED: i) That the grants listed above be awarded from the 2014/15 budget; ii) To revisit the grant application from Alnwick Tourism Association when the latest tourism booklet had been received.

FP 14/27 Report on visits to Outside Organisations and the forming of conclusions / recommendations

The Town Clerk issued a briefing paper about the visits made to Ashington Town Council, Glendale Gateway Trust, Amble Development Trust plus a telephone discussion with Ponteland Development Trust. The main message from all the discussions was that cash flow is key and without guaranteed income setting up a Development Trust was difficult.

The Town Council also needed to deliver some of the Community Action Plans (CAPs) from the Neighbourhood Plan where they are named as the lead organisation. The Events Working Group had also identified a high need for festival and event organisers in the town was assistance with support for funding bids etc.

Councillors discussed the idea of recruiting a part time Project and Funding Officer (3 days a week) to: deliver the Town Council's actions in the Neighbourhood Plan (when it is approved), deliver the CAP actions where the Town Council is named as the lead, help deliver other Town Council projects and signpost and assist local organisations including funding opportunities for festivals and events.

Councillor Symmonds commented that the Town Council should look at ideas from each of the visits. He also felt that the idea of a Project and Funding Officer was a good way forward.

Councillor Roberts felt it was important to test the market to set the right salary level.

Councillor Castle supported the idea of the new post and felt that replacing the Development Trust would be difficult.

Councillor G Mavin thought it was important that the Town Council prioritised the right things for the new post.

Councillor Symmonds felt that jobs and training had to be the main areas of focus.

Councillor S Allcroft asked if the Town Council could apply directly for grants. The Town Clerk confirmed they could apply for some but were excluded from others.

Councillor Farrar asked on whose behalf the new post would apply for grants.

Councillor Castle felt it important that the post holder had the right criteria to work against and suggested a working group was set up to identify Terms of reference.

The Town Clerk confirmed that it would be important to steer the post holder on the priorities.

Councillor Farrar commented that most of the grants applied for in Ashington were for community groups. Councillor G Mavin explained that some had been joint applications for grants and a similar example existed with the new catering college in Amble.

Councillor Castle confirmed that he supported the new post and felt that a percentage of their time should be on supporting community organisations.

RESOLVED: To allocate £21k in the budget for 2015/16 for a Project Officer.

FP 14/28 Addressing the actions in the Neighbourhood Plan/Community Action Proposals

The Town Clerk explained that there were a number of Community Action Plans (CAPs) and Policies in the Neighbourhood Plan which identified Alnwick Town Council as the lead. There were also a number of other Policies which were unallocated at present but which may be allocated to the Town Council in the future. He issued a sheet showing the CAPs and Policies which currently have the Town Council as the lead organisation which also showed the potential cost of the CAPs identified for year 1, (this included a Housing Needs Survey).

RESOLVED: To allocate £10k in the 2015/16 budget for the Town Council to deliver its Neighbourhood Plan actions.

FP 14/29 Staffing Report/Review

The Town Clerk and Administration Assistant left the meeting so councillors could undertake the staff review. Councillor Symmonds and the Mayor outlined that the annual performance review of the Town Clerk had been completed. As part of the review the Clerk's current salary which was set in 2010 had been reviewed and had been benchmarked against other similar councils and the National Association of Local Councils recommendations. In the light of the performance review conclusions it was recommended that the Clerk's salary be adjusted to Spinal Column Point 37 with effect from 1st April 2015. The budgetary implication of this being an additional £2,690 in 2015/16.

RESOLVED: To recommend that with effect from 1st April 2015: i) The Town Clerk's salary be adjusted to Spinal Column Point 37 (within the grade SCP35-38) and appropriate adjustment to the budget made and ii) that arrangements for performance review for the Town Clerk in December 2015 are recorded.

The Town Clerk re-joined the meeting for the remainder of the staff reviews.

ADMINSTRATION ASSISTANT – The Town Clerk outlined that the Admin Assistant was working on average 10 hours a week. However, to make better use of the post holder's skills and to incorporate some project work into the job description he recommended that with effect from 1st April 2015 the job title be re-designated as Assistant to the Town Clerk and the salary regarded as Spinal Column Point 20-23 and furthermore the hours be increased to 15 hours per week. Councillors were supportive of this and also suggested that the post holder be offered a contribution to a private pension scheme in line with the scheme previously offered to the Town Clerk.

TOWN HANDYPERSON – The Town Clerk outlined that the Town Handyman had been employed since November 2013 and was working up to 20 per week. The initial appointment was for up to a year and at the last meeting of the committee this had been extended until March 2015. The Town Clerk recommended that the Council make this a permanent post operating up to 20 hours per week.

The budgetary implications in respect of the two posts above amount to an additional £8,700 in 2015/16.

RESOLVED: To recommend that with effect from 1st April 2015: i) The Admin Assistant's job title be re-designated as Assistant to the Town Clerk and the salary regarded as Spinal Column Point 20-23 and the hours be increased to 15 hours per week; ii) The post of Town Handyman be made a permanent post operating up to 20 hours per week; iii) That appropriate adjustment of £8,700 be made to the budget in 2015/16.

FP 14/30 Consideration of the Draft 2015/16 Budget

The proposed 2015/16 budget, in the budget summary which was issued, was reviewed and discussed. The following changes were recommended:

ADMINISTRATION – be increased by £6,610.

TOWN HANDYPERSON - be increased by £4,781.

RENT - be increased by £300 to cover committee meetings at other locations.

GRANTS - be increased by £500 to £11,000.

PROJECT / FUNDING WORK - to allocate £21,000 to fund a new Project Officer post.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN/COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN DELIVERY - to allocate £10,000 to deliver the Neighbourhood Plan CAPs, where the Town Council are identified as the lead organisation.

RESOLVED: To recommend that the Finance & Policy Committee draft budget for 2015/16 be increased to £124,130.

FP 14/31 Consideration of the Draft 2015/16 Precept

The Town Clerk issued information showing a comparison between the Alnwick Town Council precept and other Town Councils. This showed that based upon the 2014/15 figures, Alnwick had a below average town council precept of £71.88 for a Band D dwelling.

Based on the total draft budget for the Council for 2015/16 of £214,355 (Finance & Policy £124,130, Recreation & Amenities £63,670 and Cemetery £26,555) and using the Tax Base figure of 2558.38, this would give a Band D equivalent Town Council element of £83.78 per annum. This would be £1.61 per week in 2015/16 compared to £1.38 in 2014/15 giving an increase of 23 pence per week.

The Town Clerk reminded councillors of the reserves policy which states that these should be a minimum of 4 months and a maximum of 8 months gross expenditure. Councillors were of the opinion that this year, reserves should not be utilised to reduce the precept.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Full Council that the precept for 2015/16 should be £214,355 and the reserves should not be used to reduce the precept.

FP 14/32 Review of Council Boundaries

The Town Clerk informed the committee that he had spoken to Denwick Parish Clerk who had confirmed that there would be a meeting after Christmas. He also confirmed that he had asked that the following three items be included on the agenda - A&D Neighbourhood Plan; Cemetery fees and possible boundary changes in light of the new development south of Alnwick. He also confirmed that he will write with the issues and asking them to invite the Town Council to their meeting.

Councillor Farrar said he was happy to go with the Town Clerk's recommendations but asked that if a reply was not received, NCC be requested to undertake a governance review.

RESOLVED: i) Town Clerk to contact Denwick Parish Council by letter; ii) To ask for a governance review if no reply is received.

FP 14/33 Any Other Urgent Business

None.

Meeting closed at 9.45pm