

**Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on
Thursday 25th October 2018
at the St James's Church Centre, Pottergate, Alnwick at 7.00pm**

Present: Councillors S Allcroft (Chair), P Broom, G Castle, B Grisdale, G Mavin, J Humphries, S Patience, M Swinbank, A Symmonds, G Watson and L Wearn.

In attendance: W Batey, Chief Officer and Town Clerk; J Pibworth, Assistant to the Town Clerk; Councillor A Waton.

FP 18/18 Apologies
None.

FP 18/19 Declarations of Interest
The Assistant to the Town Clerk declared a pecuniary interest in Item 6.

FP 18/20 Minutes of the last meeting - matters arising not on the agenda
FP 18/13 CCTV – The Town Clerk reported that a meeting had taken with the police to discuss additional cameras including NPR cameras and that prices were being obtained.

Councillor Swinbank had previously asked if there were any additional costs associated with NPR cameras. The Town Clerk advised that the maintenance costs would be absorbed into the existing contract with AGS.

He reported that our CCTV provider, AGS, has been sold to The Protector Group Ltd. of Team Valley, Gateshead which is chaired by Lord Stevens of Kirkwhelpington, a former Chief Constable of Northumberland and Metropolitan Police Commissioner. AGS will continue to trade and there will be no change to ATC's existing contract with AGS. AGS will continue to operate as it is and all AGS staff will continue in their current roles.

FP 18/15c BUS STATION - The Town Clerk reported that a further meeting had been arranged for November 14th.

FP 18/21 Budget update 2018/19

The Town Clerk went through the circulated budget as at 22nd August 2018. He highlighted the following lines of expenditure:

ADMINISTRATION – 4 months paid to NCC and bills for July and August just received.

TOWN TWINNING – slightly over budget due to two Twin Town visiting Alnwick.

AUDIT FEE – internal and external fees now paid.

N PLAN / COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN / OTHER COUNCIL PRIORITIES – Willowburn Inquiry – nearly all costs now in. approx. £130 outstanding for printing.

CCTV – £175.50 call out charge for non-working camera.

INCOME - £5,000 received from Cussins towards the cost of the new bus shelter near Barter Books.

Councillor Swinbank asked of a budget was needed for the NCC Consultation event. The Town Clerk advised that he would use some of the Communications budget from the Recreation & Amenities budget to purchase display boards which would be used at the Consultation event then at the new offices in Greenwell Lane.

RESOLVED: To note the update.

FP 18/22**Grant Process**

The Assistant to the Town Clerk issued copies of the current grant criteria and application form used in 2017 which councillors reviewed.

Councillor Castle thought that a question asking if they had applied for financial support from any other organisation would be helpful.

RESOLVED: To add an additional question about other requested funding then upload onto Town Council website and issue a press release to the Gazette.

FP 18/23**Staff comparisons with other similar Councils and future requirements**

At the last Committee meeting a report on staffing levels had been requested. The Town Clerk gave a summary of the comparison sheets he had distributed to councillors. The comparison sheets contained precept details, number of posts, job titles and hours and additional payments for activities undertaken by others. The data related to the following Town Councils: Alnwick, Amble, Ashington, Berwick, Hexham, Morpeth and Prudhoe.

He explained that his research had shown that no two councils in Northumberland operated in the same way. Many paid money to NCC to undertake services in their town or parish or paid private contractors for some of the functions Alnwick's Town Handyman undertakes, such as installing and maintaining seats and bins.

In Alnwick, the Town Council operates the Cemetery so has equipment which they can use elsewhere in the town. They also have a good cemetery store and storage space in the Willowburn unit.

Councillor Broom asked if the Town Clerk knew the percentage of the precept spent on staffing. The Town Clerk advised that this was not easy to work because of the different operational practices.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the Town Council cut grass in the play areas in the town. The Town Clerk advised that we cut the grass at Allerburn Lea and Alnwick North play areas.

Councillor Swinbank felt that it was not easy to work out the cost of the activities for each council and work out the efficiencies.

Councillor Wearn felt it was difficult to compare the information and that it would be useful to have details of the total services and what was outsourced.

Councillor Grisdale felt that as the Town Clerk was leaving in 2019 an away day early in the new year would be helpful to look at the future including the role of the new Town Clerk.

Councillor Symmonds felt that the NCC Service Level Agreements needed reviewing to provide more accountability with feedback on their services and issues documented and actions reviewed.

Councillor Castle agreed that there were issues of control with NCC paid for services. He added that the Town Council should grow for the future to benefit the town and its residents.

Councillor Patience asked if there were any support networks for Town Councils. The Town Clerk advised that there is a local branch of the Society of Local Council Clerks which he did not attend, the Town Council is a member of NALC and he did use their advice on a regular basis.

Councillor Wearn thought each committee could produce a report for the away day.

Councillor Swinbank asked when the Town Council know about the budget from NCC. Councillor Castle advised that this would be as soon as possible and that he would check and feedback.

The Assistant to the Town Clerk left the meeting.

The Town Clerk outlined to Councillors that he had reviewed the staffing levels having had regard to the comparison data, discussions with staff and the needs of the service. He outlined his intention to retire from his post on 30th June 2019, which would enable him to complete the 2018/9 accounts and Annual Return.

At this stage, he felt that a small amount of additional administrative support would be helpful. He suggested that the Assistant to the Town Clerk's hours be increased from 22.5 hrs per week to 25 hrs. This would cost approximately an additional £627 this financial year, if implemented straightaway. He also suggested that he did not feel any further administrative support was necessary at this stage, but that it be reconsidered when a new Town Clerk was in position.

The Town Clerk felt the Council would benefit from additional operational resources in 2019/20 and suggested an additional full-time seasonal employee (April – Oct) or a permanent part time employee (18.5 hrs). This would cost approximately £11,000 per annum and would give more resource to do grass cutting (including the bike track) and more timely maintenance work, especially as more assets have been taken on. The alternative was to pay NCC to employ an additional worker and to enter into a SLA with them.

Councillors discussed the Town Clerks suggestions and generally there was support for directly employed staff and possibly for looking at an administrative resource to undertake minutes.

The Assistant to the Town Clerk re-joined the meeting.

Councillor Symmonds asked if the Town Council had enough staff at present to look after the bike track as it might be high maintenance. The Town Clerk advised that at present this was fine but it would need more resources once the grass cutting season started. He added that at present track maintenance, litter picking and tidying was being undertaken.

Councillor Mavin said that he felt that the additional NCC toilet cleaning wasn't working. The Town Clerk advised that he felt the quarterly deep clean undertaken by Initial and paid for by the Town Council was making a difference.

Councillor Wearn felt it would be useful to look at the committee structure as part of the away day.

Councillor Symmonds explained that the Town Clerk and Assistant to the Town Clerk had looked at staffing levels and were happy to leave them as they currently are and review again when the budgets were put together and the new Town Clerk was in post. He said that the Town Council had exceptional staff and he had requested that staffing levels be reviewed, as part of the Duty of Care to the staff.

Councillor Castle explained that NCC Officers were being given more work to undertake with no extra resource.

RESOLVED: i) To recommend a Town Council away day in January 2019 and for Town Council committees to prepare reports for the away day; ii) To increase the Assistant to the Town Clerk's hours by 2.5 hours per week from 29th October 2018.

FP18/24**New office accommodation, expenditure and budget**

The Town Clerk reported that Landlord's Approval was now in place and that the Town Council had not had to pay any legal costs. He reported that the operational costs would be less in this financial year as the move had taken longer than expected. The official moving date to Greenwell Lane was November 9th.

The Town Clerk issued a sheet showing the costs associated with the move to the new office including furniture and a new computer. He advised that improved printing / copying was needed and would be more cost effective. He had requested quotes from three companies for this. A decision was needed on the supplier and whether this would be lease or purchase.

RESOLVED: To receive the update and delegate the decision on the new copier/printer, including lease or purchase, to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair of the Finance & Policy Committee

FP18/25**Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

Meeting closed at 8.24pm