

**Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on
Thursday 22nd December 2011
in the Committee Room, Clayport Street, Alnwick at 6.15pm.**

Present: Cllrs E Blakey (Chairman), S Allcroft, A Symmonds, G Castle, B Hewison, K Gray, J Thompson, S Walton and G Watson.

In attendance: W Batey, Chief Officer and Town Clerk.

FP 11/12. Apologies: Cllrs Grisdale, Patience and Waddell.

FP 11/13. Declaration of Interests

The following personal and prejudicial interests were declared in respect of grant applications (agenda item 4)

- E Blakey – Alnwick MACPI
- G Castle – Alnwick Town FC
- A Symmonds – Alnwick CAB
- W Batey - Alnwick Sporting Club, Alnwick and District Sports Council, NTC.

G Watson declared a personal & prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 (Bailiffgate Museum).

FP 11/14. Review of the current budget position

The Finance and Policy Committee expenditure and estimates were considered in detail. These gave the position as at 8th December and the estimated out-turn at 31st March 2012. It was noted that an underspend of at least £5,000 was likely. Councillors were in support of transferring some of this underspend to the grants budget and it was suggested that an additional £3,000 be used, making a grants budget of £9,000.

RESOLVED: That the 2011/12 budget update be received and the grants budget be increased by £3,000 to £9,000

FP11/15. Consideration of Grant applications

The Clerk reported that a total of 19 applications had been received. These had been reviewed against the grant criteria by the chairman and the clerk and all were eligible. Some initial recommendations were circulated to assist discussions. Each application was considered in-turn and the following decisions were made by the Committee. Councillor Harrington addressed the committee in support of the Alnwick MACPI application.

Organisation	Grant Request	Grant award
Alnwick Young Peoples Association/Gallery Youth	Support for the Youth Forum. External facilitator to help improve debating skills and engaging with Town Council – grant to cover cost of facilitator, venue hire and travel costs	£300
Alnwick Rugby Club	Looking to refurbish shower and bath facilities at cost of £5384 Looking for help with the second phase	£300
Northumberland Touring Theatre Company	Loss of Arts Council Funding. Want help to produce autumn production at the Playhouse& help assist with guaranteeing NTC's future in the town.	£500
Alnwick Community Centre	Funding for junior youth club (under 11's). previously available funds no longer available	£750
Alnwick Branch of Arthritis Care	Meets Monthly 25 members. Need help with running costs	£100
Alnwick Playhouse	Loss of Arts Council funding of 8.9% (£37k). looking to replace this and want support for core costs	£1,000

Lionheart Radio & Media	Recently granted permission to continue broadcasting until 2017. Need £5815 to cover licences/ insurance over next 12 months	£500
Bailiffgate Museum	Need help with the varied events and exhibition programme for 2012 (which is the Museums 10 th anniversary).	£1,000
Alnwick and District CAB	Need help with the training and support of volunteer workforce	£600
Alnwick Sporting Club	Providing improved hockey, football and tennis facilities at Greensfield. Planning application made Dec 2011 for £1.3m scheme. Need help with admin costs to help deliver scheme	£500
2 Times Around (RE-NU-IT)	Non-profit furniture recycling project run by volunteers in Alnwick North. Need help to keep van on the road	£300
Alnwick MACPI (Multi-agency crime prevention initiative)	Grants to various crime diversionary projects in town, - rock solid youth group, Mighty Oaks, Youth forum at Willowburn, Escape Family Support	£600
Hospice Care North Northumberland	Contribution to running costs which are £300k pa. Support for Hospice at Home service	£500
Alnwick & District Sports Council	Funding cut from NCC in 2011. Gives small grants to local clubs to help with qualifications and equipment and runs annual awards evening	£500
Alnwick Stroke Club	Weekly meetings. Require assistance with transport costs which are anticipated to be £4.5k in 2012	£150
Alnwick Town FC	Looking for assistance with the junior club (u8 – u16) for equipment	£500
Carers Northumberland	To maintain and expand the Alnwick support group meetings for careers	£400
Alnwick Boxing Club	Proposal to set up a new boxing club in Alnwick	£500

It was agreed that a grant application made in respect of the Alnwick Spring Show should be considered at the next council meeting, as this was an event.

The award to the Gallery Youth project was given towards the development of the Youth Forum rather than the external facilitator and the award to '2 Times Around' was subject to accommodation issues being resolved. It was also agreed to give the Alnwick Playhouse a three year commitment to funding and to agenda an item for discussion at the next council meeting regarding the disparity of county council funding between the various arts venues across the county.

RESOLVED: That Grants totaling £9,000 be awarded as outlined above.

FP11/16. Request from Bailiffgate Museum for support from the precept.

The clerk outlined that a letter had been received from the Museum requesting £10,000 of support from the precept. Councillors considered this and whilst acknowledging the importance of the facility they did not feel that they could offer that level of assistance. It was also noted that a grant of £1,000 had been given to the Museum, under the previous agenda item. Councillors felt that the situation facing the Museum and the disparity of county council funding for similar facilities could be included in the council agenda item for January.

RESOLVED: Not to agree to the request from the Bailiffgate Museum for additional support through the precept.

FP11/17. Review of Staff Salaries and Hours

The clerk left the room for this part of the agenda item and the Mayor presented a paper which had been previously circulated, dealing with the clerk's hours and pension contribution. Following the annual performance appraisal, the Mayor reported that the clerk's workload was increasing and proposed that his hours be increased from 25 to 30 with effect from 1st April 2012. The cost of this would be £4,120 in 2012/13. Furthermore, when the clerk was appointed in September 2010, it was agreed that the town council would make a contribution into a mutually agreed private pension; this had never been implemented, even though some budgetary provision had been made. Having reviewed available advice the Mayor recommended the council pay a contribution of 6.6% of salary (which would match the equivalent employee contribution of a post holder paid the clerk's salary in the LGPS). He felt this was reasonable and would fulfil the council's obligations as a good employer.

**RESOLVED: a) The Town Clerk's contracted hours be increased from 25 to 30 hours per week with effect from 1st April 2012, and
b) That the Mayor be given authority, to establish a mutually agreed private pension scheme with the clerk, with a council contribution of 6.6% of salary. The implementation date being 1st April 2011.**

The clerk then took the Committee through a paper which related to the salaries of the cemetery staff. These were last reviewed in October 2009. The paper proposed using the Local Government salary scales as a guide. It was recommended that the Cemetery Superintendent be placed on Scale 4 starting on Point 19, and at the same time, a new job description should be issued which widens the range of duties; this should assist in reducing overtime. It was also recommended that the Cemetery Operative be placed on Scale 3 starting on Point 16 and a new job description issued which widens the range of duties and includes inspection of assets taken over from the county council. Furthermore, it was recommended that the changes are implemented with effect from an appropriate date in January 2012, once new job descriptions are agreed and that the next increment be then awarded in April 2013, with both posts potentially reaching the top of their grade in April 2013 or 2014. The impact on budgets was likely to be under £500 in 2011/12 and approximately £1900 in 2012/13.

RESOLVED: The Clerk is given delegated authority to implement the changes to the cemetery staff salaries and job descriptions as outlined in the report, in consultation with the Chairman of the Finance and Policy Committee.

FP11/18. Proposed Finance & Policy Budget 2012/13

The committee discussed the budget provision for 2012/13 and the breakdown circulated by the clerk. Councillors agreed to dispense with the St Cloud bursaries and allocate £300 towards welcome events for the three intakes of students (an overall saving of £700 against the 2011/12 provision). Consideration was also given to making budgetary provision for updating of the Mayor's chain, but it was decided to leave this until 2013/14. The grants to outside bodies budget was also increased by £1,000. The savings arising from the St Cloud Bursaries were added to the Committee contingency and the staff hours and salary changes outlined in this report were included to give a total budget of £66,500, an increase of £6,500 over 2011/12.

RESOLVED: The 2012/13 estimates go forward into the 2012/13 budget setting process.

FP 11/19. Consideration of the Finance and Policy precept and the draft Council Precept for 2012/13

Having agreed the budget for 2012/13, the Committee then agreed this as their precept requirement.

RESOLVED: The Finance and Policy Committee precept requirement of £66,500 go forward to council for the 2012/13 budget setting process.

The clerk then outlined the recommendations made by each of the committees. These are summarised below:

Committee	2011/12	2012/13 Recommendation
Cemetery	£23,000	£24,000
Recreation & Amenities	£40,403	£48,000
Finance & Policy	£60,000	£66,500
TOTAL	£123,403	£138,500

The total precept in 2011/12 was £123,403. The 2012/13 increase of £15,097 represents a 12.2% increase. It was highlighted that the Town Council is budgeting for over £15,200 of additional costs which arise from the County Council transferring services to the Town Council. It was also pointed out that the Council could consider reducing the increase by using some of its reserves. The Council Reserves at 31st March 2011 were almost £82,000. The outturns for 2011/12 indicate that we are likely to add up to £4.5k to the reserve making an estimated £86.5k. The Council's Minimum Reserve based upon the draft 2012/13 budget should be £54k and the maximum reserve £108k (4 & 8 times the gross monthly expenditure).

It was pointed out that based upon the 2011/12 tax base, a £15,000 increase in precept would add £5.43 to a Band D dwelling.

Councillors discussed whether or not to use a small amount of the reserve in 2012/13 to keep the precept increase down, but the majority felt that reserves should not be used for this purpose particularly as reserves may be needed as more assets are taken over from the county council.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Council sets a precept of £138,500 for 2012/13.

FP11/20. Council Investments

A report from the clerk outlined that the council could achieve more interest on its reserves, than it is getting at present. Councillors were keen to maximise interest and in the short-term were supportive of taking out a fixed rate bond with the council's current banker, giving time for other options to be explored.

RESOLVED: That the Clerk be given delegated authority in consultation with the Chairman of the Finance and Policy Committee to:

- a) close the two Business Saver Accounts and these balances together with a small amount from the community account be used to take out a Fixed Rate Bond (No 68) for the value of £50,000.**
- b) invest £15,000 in a Barclays Base Rate Reward account. This would pay current Bank of England Base Rate in any month, if no withdrawal is made in that month.**
- c) Consider and implement a better arrangement for the current account, if that exists**
- d) To look at other investment options after the maturity of the Fixed Rate Bond in October and report back to the Committee**

The meeting closed at 8.10pm