

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE – 11TH MARCH 2024

MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 11TH MARCH 2024 AT 6PM IN THE TOWN COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE ROOM LOCATED IN THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON

PRESENT: Councillors Marriott (Chair), Joyce (vice Chair), Alwahabi, Birch, Connolly, Hibbert, Holland-Delamere, Purser, Stevens and Tarasiewicz

OFFICERS PRESENT: Mr S Carter (Town Clerk), Mrs C Maclellan (Responsible Finance Officer) and Miss F Barford (Democratic Services Committee)

44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were submitted by Councillors Haque, Hallam and Russell.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were submitted.

46. TO AUTHORISE THE CHAIR TO SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 15TH JANUARY 2024 AND ASK QUESTIONS AS TO THE PROGRESS OF ANY ITEM

RESOLVED: The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15th January 2024 as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

47. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE ACCOUNTS SUB-COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR INFORMATION:

The Chair requested any questions or queries in relation to the following minutes.

- a) Minutes of the meeting held on 15th January 2024
- b) Minutes of the meeting held on 12th February 2024
- c) Minutes of the meeting held on 11th March 2024

No questions or queries were posed.

48. TO RECEIVE AND REVIEW THE MINUTES OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE MINUTES HELD ON 6TH MARCH 2024

The minutes of the Staffing Sub-Committee were tabled and reviewed for members information.

NOTED: The recruitment of a Events & Projects Officer (maternity cover) have been approved.

49. BUDGET 2023/24

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) highlighted some purchase orders had been posted however, it relates to events in the next financial year therefore, the balance would be carried forward. In response to a question, the RFO explained the Equipment budget code was generally used to purchase additional laptops and the associated hardware.

The Chair explained that Budget Working Group would meet quarterly to review the budget in more detail. He continued, the next meeting would take place the following evening on 12th March 2024. The Chair stated a Councillor had suggested that Committee Chairs be offered membership to the Accounts Sub-Committee next year.

NOTED

50. TO DISCUSS MEMBERSHIP OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (LGA), AND LOCALITY

The Town Clerk referred to the report outlined in the agenda. He explained, the Town Council could purchase an Associate Membership that would enable access to their services and resources. The Town Clerk continued, the LGA generally represents principal local authorities however, the Town Council could still benefit and would incur a slight discount due to being members of National Association of Local Council as a larger parish and considered a 'super council'.

In response to a question, the Town Clerk explained an LGA membership would benefit Councillors and Officers through the training and forums offered.

The Town Clerk continued that Locality focuses on engaging and strengthening local communities and believe it would be a great benefit to the Town Council's work. A Councillor stated the sheer size of Northampton Town Council means it straddles between the LGA and NCALC due to our size, she believes that Locality could bridge this gap and there are 80 other large parish councils who were members.

A Councillor raised that 'twin-hatter' Councillors were already members via their West Northamptonshire Council's roles whereas, those who were only members of the Town Council would gain access.

RESOLVED: The Town Council become members of the Local Government Association (LGA) and Locality.

51. CCLA DEPOSIT FUND UPDATE

The Town Clerk stated the sole investment of the Town Council was the CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund that had provided a very good return, with an average yield of 5.1% and was a low-risk investment due to the being spread across A or A+ or higher ratings which mitigates the risks.

The Town Clerk had received advice about the potential to expand into Stocks and Shares investments however, the independent advice he'd received explained this market was still very volatile and high-risk.

NOTED

52. REVIEW OF SYSTEMS OF INTERNAL CONTROL AND AUDIT

The Town Clerk explained as part of completing AGAR and audit the town council must demonstrate good practice and transparency via the processes of internal controls and regular review of the risk register. He continued the was done on a monthly basis via the Accounts Sub-Committee and through internal controls checklist completed by councillors quarterly.

In response to a question, it was explained that IT had a large associated risk due to the lack of I.T knowledge in house.

RESOLVED: That the Council has undertaken a thorough review of the risks and internal controls.

53. INTERNAL CONTROLS UPDATE

The RFO highlighted following the internal auditors note, we have introduced a new process this year and that Internal Control checks were diarised and completed quarterly. She continued to extend thanks to Councillors Birch, Hibbert, Marriott and Soan for contributing to the Internal Controls Check.

A Councillor commented the Internal Controls was beneficial and provided a great insight into the inner workings of the financial processes, provides scrutiny and keeps Councillors engaged.

54. TWO VOLUNTEERS TO CHECK THE BANK RECONCILIATION DOCUMENTS OF THE ACCOUNTS SUB-COMMITTEE

The RFO requested two volunteers to complete a check of the bank reconciliation documents.

RESOLVED: Councillors Holland-Delamere and Tarasiewicz were presented, reviewed and approved the bank reconciliation documents.

55. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW UPDATE

The Town Clerk spoke to the report enclosed with the agenda, he expanded on Moulton Parish Council's request that Moulton Leys become part of their parish boundary. He continued that the town council had completed a consultation and the data gained was utilised to formulate the Town Council's response. A Councillor commented the results of the consultation were important and demonstrate the desire to remain within Northampton Town Council area. A Councillor extended gratitude to the Town Clerk in formulating the consultation and data.

In response to a question, the Town Clerk explained any approved recommendations from the Community Governance Review would be implemented in-time for the local elections. The Town Clerk explained some members of the public have raised a desire to formulate a Weston Favell Village Parish Council and the threshold has been reached and would be considered as part of stage 2 of the CGR.

The Town Clerk explained further work was required in determining how many additional councillors may be requested for the Community Governance Review. A Councillor stated there was an in-depth analysis in the Boundary Commission Review where there was a high ratio of ward residents to councillors and those areas may require an additional councillor(s). In response to a question, the Town Clerk explained if the town council wished to gain additional councillors then a strategy and proposal would need to be formed and presented during stage three of the Community Governance Review.

ACTION: The Town Clerk to gain further information to be gained on what would occur in Stage 2 and the timings of the General Community Governance Review.

NOTED

56. REQUEST TO EARMARK UNSPENT ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES BUDGET

The Chair of the Environmental Services Committee (ESC) explained there was a discussion held during the previous Environmental Services Committee meeting on any unspent funds from the Climate Change Grant Scheme and Environmental Projects. He continued, it was recommended the remaining unspent funds be earmarked within reserves.

RESOLVED: Any remaining unspent funds from Environmental Grants and Environmental Projects be earmarked within reserves.

57. VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

The Town Clerk provided an update on the Volunteer Handbook as the town council wished to launch a volunteer scheme however, the guidance provided from Voluntary Impact Northampton had delayed the presentation of the handbook to this committee.

ACTION: Events and Projects Officer to provide a rough deadline on when the handbook would be completed.

58. ACCOMMODATION UPDATE

The Town Clerk provided a brief update on accommodation and the accommodation offered in County Hall.

59. BRANDING UPDATE

Councillor Birch raised an agreement was required on the Town Council's new branding since its been a long-winded process, and the pertinence to our identity and publicity for future events. The Chair added the Mayor's Emblem would be retained despite the public-facing council logo being amended however, the traditional logo would be maintained on official documents.

RESOLVED: The final-decision of branding be delegated to the Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk in consultation with the Branding Working Group and be resolved by the end of the month.

60. CHANGE OF MEETING DATE

RESOLVED: The next Policy & Finance Committee meeting be rescheduled to 13th May 2024 at 6pm

61. ANY ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION ON THE NEXT AGENDA

- Policy register
- Health and Safety Audit

MEETING CONCLUDED 7:35PM