

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE – 17TH JULY 2023

MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 17TH JULY 2023 AT 6PM
IN THE TOWN COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE ROOM LOCATED IN THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON

PRESENT: Councillors Marriott (Chair), Joyce (Vice Chair), Alwahabi, Birch, Connolly, Hallam, Haque, Hibbert, Kilbride, Purser, Russell and Tarasiewicz

OFFICERS PRESENT: Mr S Carter (Town Clerk) and Miss F Barford (Democratic Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were submitted by Councillor Holland-Delamere and the Finance Officer

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Hallam declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 11 as he was a cabinet member at WNC.

3. TO AUTHORISE THE CHAIR TO SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING 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 3rd May 2023 as a true and accurate record.

4. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE ACCOUNTS SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING FOR INFORMATION:

The Chair highlighted that the Finance Officer had been circulating the financial reports presented at the Account Sub-Committee to all Councillors for their information. He continued that if any questions arose from reviewing the financial reports then, please contact the Finance Officer who can resolve these.

The Chair provided an overview of the following Accounts Sub-Committee for members' information and requested members to pose questions.

(a) Minutes of the meeting held 10th May 2023 (p 31 – p 36)

(b) Minutes of the meeting held 15th June 2023 (p 37 – p 46)

(c) Minutes of the meeting held 10th July 2023 (p 47 – p 53)

5. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE STAFFING SUB-COMMITTEE HELD 17TH JULY 2023

The Chair stated the Staffing Sub-Committee had convened to discuss and finalise the job description of the new Community Engagement Officer posting. He continued to highlight the wording with the description was amended to include "provide support to Town Council Groups".

In response to a question posed by a Councillor, the Town Clerk explained that the Town Council was a parish council however, it was decided in the Shadow Council we would be branded as a Town Council.

6. BUDGET REPORT

The Town Clerk explained this report has been presented monthly to the Accounts Sub-Committee however, it was posed it would be beneficial to be presented here also. He continued to clarify to members that 'committed expenditure' relates to where a purchase order has been raised and therefore committed

however, an invoice or invoices has not been received to be paid and therefore the funds have not been spent.

A Councillor asked whether there were any items within the budgetary report that may run over budget. The Town Clerk explained in response that budget code '4130 Insurance' had exceeded the budget as the insurance premium had increased compared to last financial year. He continued that the insurance provider had provided a provisional premium as the Town Council was in its second year of operation and they now have a better understanding of the Council's workings and operation.

The Town Clerk added that budget code '4215 Civic Regalia' had exceeded the budget due to the purchase of new Councillor robes that was agreed previously at this Committee. He added that budget code '4128 Information Technology' could exceed the outlined budget dependent on what this Committee agreed in relation to items 8 and 9.

The Chair highlighted that budget code '1190 Interest Received' had exceeded the projected budget however, this was due to the increase in interest rates across the country currently.

The Chair explained that the Accounts Sub-Committee had been working to breakdown and itemize budgets further to enable greater monitoring and clarity, for example Oak Apple Day and Remembrance Day had been provided their own budget codes under the Community Services Budget Centre. The Town Clerk added that further work was occurring as some events do overlap with the Event and Project Officer and Mayoral Officer who work cooperatively to deliver these events the budget codes need to reflect this.

7. COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES

Councillor Hallam declared as a cabinet member for West Northamptonshire Council's Legal and Democratic Services he had a seat on the Independent Panel for Remuneration.

The Town Clerk referred to the report and explained that Councillors had raised for the allowances to be reviewed. He added from his understanding that any increases to Councillors' Allowances would need to be reviewed by the Independent Remuneration Panel however, it was agreed under the Shadow Council that allowances could increase inline with the NJC pay scale that there Officers pay was determined from in the same way too.

The Town Clerk advised that West Northamptonshire Council had increased their Councillors' Allowances by approximately 5% and could potentially be increased again later this financial year as the unions have proposed and have been in discussion to another pay rise for the NJC pay scale however, this was not agreed or the details entirely known yet. In response to a question, the Town Clerk explained that if this was agreed the increase to Councillors' Allowances would be backdated.

He added, that the principal authority had increased by 6% and stated it could increase here by agreement then would be backdated to last financial years pay rise and this years NJCC may rise again and back dated.

A Councillor stated from their recollection that under the Shadow Council it was advised that Councillors' Allowances could not be index linked to the NJC pay scale and requested that the Town Clerk check the minutes in relation to the agreement. The Town Clerk advised he would need to further clarification through review of the Shadow Council minutes. The Chair added that there had been mixed advice in relation to Councillor Allowances.

In response to a question, the Town Clerk explained the NJC pay scale received a £1,900 per rota flat rate and he sought advice from West Northamptonshire Council who advised they had recommended and approved an increase of 5% as that was the average.

RECOMMENDATION: That Councillors' Allowances be increased by 5% for financial year 2022/23 and be backdated as outlined in the report.

8. PROVISION OF COUNCILLOR LAPTOPS

The Town Clerk stated he was asked to obtain quotations for laptops or tablet devices for Councillors who were not twin-hatter as they had not been provided a Town Council I.T provision yet and this had been requested. A Councillor raised that the discussion of paperless agenda would assist in determining whether a provision of Councillors laptops was required.

DEFERRED: That the discussion of a provision for Councillor Laptops be deferred to a later meeting once further clarification had been sought by the Town Clerk regarding a paperless agenda system.

9. PAPERLESS AGENDAS

The Town Clerk explained he has been in discussion and reviewing paperless agenda systems. He added one in particular that seemed useful was Decisions provided by CloudyIT that interlinks with MS365 however, if this system was procured it would mean the Council's servers and systems would be transferred across from the current provider, Microshade. He added that if this Committee agreed to implement CloudyIT's services then Officers would require new laptops that meet the specifications for the system to be feasible therefore, he has received quotations from CloudyIT, Dell and Horizon. It was noted that the Council has been aiming to procure a new IT provider as the service currently received from Horizon since their merger has been poor.

The Chair suggested it may be beneficial to review whether there were any local IT support teams that could attend site at short notice if needed rather than a remote provider.

A Councillor raised concern regarding the compatibility of a paperless agenda system with the West Northamptonshire Council laptops provided to twin-hatters. The Town Clerk stated that Modern.Gov who also provided a quotation, utilises an app that can be logged in remotely without the need for an additional device.

A Councillor highlighted concerns that MS365 licenses would be required for twin-hatters in addition to Town Councillors and this could become costly.

The Town Clerk explained a paperless agenda system would create paper, printing, postage and efficiency savings if it was utilised by Councillors. A Councillor suggested that laptops should be procured for all Councillors to allow a differentiation between the two councils. A Councillor added a survey of all Councillors should be issued to gain a further understanding of their preferences.

A Councillor proposed that a Paperless Agenda Working Group could be formed to assist the Town Clerk in this endeavour.

AGREED: That a Paperless Agenda Working Group be formed consisting of Councillors Alwahabi, Marriott, Stevens and Soan.

DEFERRED: That the discussion of a Paperless Agenda system be deferred whilst further information is sought and once work is completed by the working group.

10. OFFICE DEFIBRILLATOR

The Town Clerk stated that Officers and some Councillors attended a first-aid training and it demonstrated the importance of a defibrillator on-site. He added that there were defibrillators located within the Guildhall's One Stop Shop and Security Office however access would rely on the Guildhall Staff who may not be available in event of an emergency. He added, the defibrillator he quoted within the report was small in size and therefore transportable to small events that do not warrant first-aiders on site however, it would be stored within the Town Council's offices for the majority of the time.

AGREED: That the Town Clerk be delegated responsibility to purchase a defibrillator for the Council.

11. CCLA UPDATE

The Town Clerk provided an update in relation to the Town Council's CCLA Cash Deposit fund, where the funds have been invested globally into AA and AA+ rated investments and so far, these investments had yielded a good return so far. The fund values and interests received has been displayed within the report outlined in the agenda. And the average yield rate and dividends are generally paid monthly and we have day access rather than monthly. He added that as outlined in the report included within the agenda shows where the investments have been made.

The Chair asked whether CCLA have an ethical investments policy. The Town Clerk responded that CCLA have been used by charitable and religious organisations to make investment however, he would contact them directly requesting copies of their ethical investment policies.

In response to a question, the Town Clerk stated the investments made were non-taxable. A Councillor asked whether funds would be placed and invested in more UK banks. The Town Clerk explained all banks the investments were made into AA rated banks and spread globally to minimise losses a result of economic shocks.

NOTED

12. ACCOMMODATION UPDATE

Councillor Hallam left the meeting due to a non-pecuniary interest as a West Northamptonshire Council cabinet member who may in future have to vote on any decisions in relation to the Town Council's accommodation.

The Town Clerk explained he has not had any further information from West Northamptonshire Council in relation to extension of the lease within the Guildhall therefore, he had contacted local estate agents to send any listing that may arise that fit the criteria he provided.

In response to a question, the Town Clerk explained the preference of the Council was to remain in the Guildhall and he would continue to keep the Committee up-to-date with any developments.

NOTED

13. Items for consideration on the next agenda

No discussion was held under this agenda item.

MEETING CONCLUDED 6:55PM