

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday, 24 January 2017, at Ashington Town Hall, Station Road, Ashington.

PRESENT:

Councillors:	Vicky Brown (Chair)	Louis Brown
	Victor Bridges	Marjorie Chambers
	Avril Chisholm	Glyn Davies
	Ely Turnbull	Mark Purvis
	Nicola Chambers	Lawrence Henderson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer
Sharon Parmley – Senior Admin Officer, minute taking
Members of the Public - 0

FGP 17/668 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Stephen Fenwick, Kris Lavery, Matthew Cuthbert, Liam Lavery, Bob Walkinshaw, Pauline Thompson and Lynne Grimshaw

FGP 17/669 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of personal and prejudicial interest.

FGP 17/670 3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 29 November 2016, were agreed and signed as a true record.

FGP 17/671 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

FGP16/659 Application for financial support - The Town Clerk reported that a letter had been received from Contact Mental Health thanking the Town Council for their generous donation of £1,500.

FGP 16/661 Casual Vacancy – The Town Clerk notified Members that the matter of a co-option to the vacancy in the Haydon Ward was to be an agenda item for consideration and discussion at the Full Council meeting scheduled for 7 February 2017.

The Town Clerk stated that, on behalf of the Council, he would contact the applicants with details of the meeting and request any formal written statements in support of applications. Members were advised that a formal invite to applicants to attend the meeting in person to address the Town Council would also be made.

FGP 16/643 Acquisition of litter bins - The Town Clerk informed the Committee that the aggregate amount of proposed funding from five Northumberland County Council (NCC) members of £8,000 had been received for the provision of new ground-mounted litter bins.

Members were advised that the first batch of the order was due to arrive on Tuesday 31 January. The Town Clerk informed members that a local contractor had been sourced to carry out the installation work which was expected to be fully completed by mid-April.

FGP 16/667 ASHINGTON 150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION (Closed agenda item discussed in previous meeting). The Town Clerk reported that further to full discussion with Ashington Cricket Club and proper consideration of all related risks, financial and otherwise, it was agreed not to proceed with a high-profile sporting event. Members were informed however that the Cricket Club was looking at other options for an event to coincide with Ashington's 150th anniversary and to also celebrate the Club's own 125th Anniversary in 2017.

FGP 17/672 5. APPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The Funding & Projects Officer explained that a preliminary discussion had taken place with the Friends of Ashington Community Woodlands (FOACWs) regarding a community tree planting event as part of Ashington's 150th anniversary celebrations. It was reported that the group expected approximately 100 children from Ashington's Scout and Guide groups to carry out the planting.

A funding application has been duly completed and the FOACW's had requested the sum of £240 to purchase the trees and materials.

Resolved:

That a grant of £240 be awarded to Friends of Ashington Community Woodlands for the purchase of trees and materials for a community event.

FGP 17/673 6. SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS.

The Town Clerk submitted a full schedule of payments and income receipts, for the financial period 24 November 2016 to 19 January 2017.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Payments for the period 24 November 2016 to 19 January 2017 be formally agreed and approved.

The full schedule of payments is attached to the minutes as schedule 1.

FGP 17/674 7. DRAFT BUDGET 2017/18.

The Town Clerk presented a draft budget for the financial year 2017/18 to Council Members for consideration and discussion. The Town Clerk advised the Council that the 2017/18 gross budget of £694,690 as presented showed an overall increase of £18,940 over 2016/17 but a standstill position for the Band D Council Tax as a result of the notified increase in the Council Tax Base for 2017/18.

Members were advised that the 2017/18 budget and precept level would need to be discussed and agreed at the Full Council meeting scheduled for 7 February 2017. The Town Clerk requested that full consideration be therefore given by all members to key matters including the contributions and annual subsidies to local organisations and also the financial support for the Neighbourhood Services Partnership and Environmental Enhancement Schemes.

FGP 17/675 8. PENSIONS REGULATOR AUTO ENROLMENT DUTIES – DECLARATION OF COMPLIANCE.

The Town Clerk informed members that official confirmation had now been received from The Pensions Regulator that Ashington Town Council had completed the declaration of compliance required under the Pensions Act 2008, fulfilling the statutory obligation. Members were informed that all staff were now formally enrolled into the Council's nominated pension scheme, the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and that the Council had ongoing responsibilities to:

- Continue to assess and put any future staff who met the requirements into the scheme,
- Pay contributions on behalf of the staff put into the LGPS, and to
- Keep full records.

Members were reminded that all work in relation to pensions was carried out by Northumberland County Council

Resolved

That it be duly noted that the Town Council had fulfilled its statutory obligation and had completed the declaration of compliance with The Pensions Regulator required under the Pensions Act 2008.

FGP 17/676 9. ENTRANCE FEATURE – ROTARY PARKWAY.

The Town Clerk presented a report detailed regarding a proposed new entrance feature at Rotary Parkway.

Members were reminded that this area has been chosen because of its proximity to the former Ashington Colliery site as well as the high number of pedestrians and motorists who would pass this location particularly along the A197, a major route into and through the town.

The Chair commented that the 150th Anniversary of Ashington and the associated historic links to the coal mining industry gave the project and site added poignancy and would complement events taking place.

Members were informed that in order to develop the project, permission needed to be obtained from Northumberland County Council given both the scale of the project and the location of the site next to the A197.

The Town Clerk reported that the project has been discussed with Northumberland County Council Neighbourhood Services team who had expressed their support not least as the proposed project would replace three poor quality flower tubs currently on the identified site and as part of the project there will be enhanced tree, shrub and bulb planting.

The Funding & Project Officer informed members that initial discussion has also taken place with Northumberland County Council's Planning Department advice was awaited on whether a formal planning application and other permissions would be required.

Members were shown a provisional concept plan of what the proposed project may look like and invited to comment. The Town Clerk stated that the proposal, if agreed, would form the basis of further discussion with County Council officers, possible funders, contractors, local historians and any other interested parties.

The Town Clerk requested that, following the full procurement, tender process and high quality development of the Ashington Memorial Garden, the services of Brambledown Landscape Services Ltd be retained. Members were informed that Brambledown had recently developed a similar project in County Durham to a very high standard and that an indicative sum of £23,000 for the project had been indicated.

The Project & Funding Officer reported that he would investigate any possible external funding although initial indications were that funding for such a scheme was limited without the development of a community based partnership project. Members agreed that, subject to any appropriate external permissions they would like to see the project completed in 2017 to a high standard.

Recommendations:

That:

- (i) The committee authorize the Town Clerk to enter into dialogue with Northumberland County Council regarding the proposed development of the 'Mining Wheel Project',**
- (ii) If appropriate, the Town Council develop a 'Mining Wheel Working Group' to oversee the full delivery of the project, the group to include representative from the Town Council, Northumberland County Council and any other recognised interested parties,**
- (iii) Financial Standing Orders be suspended to allow the appointment of Brambledown Landscape Services Ltd as the appointed contractor, based on the specialist nature of the project and the quality and price of the previous partnership contract,**
- (iv) That the sum of £25,000 be set aside from the general reserves of the Town Council to support the project; and that**
- (v) External funding opportunities be investigated.**

FGP 17/677 9. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no other items of urgent business.

FGP 17/678 10. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee was arranged for Tuesday 28 February at 6.00pm, in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Ashington.

The Meeting ended at 7.40pm