

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday
28 January 2020, at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road,
Ashington.**

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Mark Purvis (Chair)	Eleanor Armstrong
Victor Bridges	Marjorie Chambers
Nicola Chambers	Avril Chisholm
Matthew Cuthbert	Stephen Fenwick
Brian Gallacher	Lynne Grimshaw
Lawrence Henderson	Jim Lang
Liam Lavery	Ken Parry
Pauline Thompson	

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer
Sharon Parmley – Senior Administration Officer
Members of the Public – 1

C20/875 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Kris Lavery, Tom Wilson and Bob Walkinshaw.

C20/876 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS.

There were no disclosures of interest from members present.

C20/877 3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING.

The minutes of the last meeting held on the Tuesday 5 November 2019, were agreed and signed as a true record.

C20/878 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MINUTES.

There were no matters arising from the last minutes.

C20/879 5. CIVIC HEAD'S REPORT.

Cllr. L.Henderson reported on recent events he had attended as the Civic Head of Ashington, including:

- **10 November 2019** – Remembrance Sunday Services at Ashington Memorial Garden and St Andrews Church in Bothal, which were very well attended,
- **16 November 2019** – Sage, Gateshead - The 2nd Youth Entertainment Championship, brass band competition for children from the ages of nine years and up,
- **18 & 19 November 2019** – Christmas lighting feature competition presentations over two days, visiting 7 schools in the town, presenting prizes to the winners of the competition,
- **28 November 2019** – Ashington Christmas Lights Switch-On event,
- **11 December 2019** – An evening of music by the Sankta Lucia Choir and the Ashington Male Voice Choir at County Hall.

C20/880 6. LEADER’S REPORT.

Cllr M. Cuthbert thanked the Civic Head for attending all of the events and thanked staff and Councillors involved in arranging and attending the lighting feature competition and the Christmas Lights Switch-On event.

Cllr Cuthbert also thanked the budget working group for their work on drafting and presenting the budget for 2020/21.

Cllr Cuthbert also informed members that he would be arranging further training and asked Councillors to notify him of any specific training courses or conferences they wished to attend.

C20/881 7. BUDGET AND ANNUAL PRECEPT 2020/21.

The Town Clerk presented the 2020/21 budget and highlighted the major commitments and planned work programme carried out by the Council in 2019/20, together with policy decisions made impacting on the 2020/21 budget.

The Town Clerk took members through major changes and highlighted new services due to come into effect in 2020/21 requiring appropriate financial provision in the core budget.

The key areas discussed related to:

- The impact of the new Neighbourhood Services Contract for 2019-2024
- The Environmental Enforcement Service Level Agreement with Northumberland County Council (further to completion of the 2-year pilot programme 2018-20)

- The Environmental Enhancement and Improvement budget and the full responsibility for Floral Displays and Presentations in Ashington with effect from 2020/21 and
- The agreement to contribute to the ongoing maintenance of Hirst Park on completion of the major capital refurbishment.

The Town Clerk reported savings in relation to individual budget heads and also the reduction in provisions made for election expenses and service charges. The Town Clerk referred to the track record the Council had in recent years in securing external funding for projects that had positively impacted on keeping precept increases considerably well below the national averages for Parish and Town Councils.

The Town Clerk nevertheless, informed members that in particular the transfer of responsibility for floral presentations and displays, without appropriate funding from Northumberland County Council, had placed a major financial pressure on the core budget that needed to be reflected from 2020/21.

Cllr.Grimshaw reminded members that the draft budget and motion had been unanimously agreed by Finance and General Services Committee and recommended to Full Council for approval. Cllr.Grimshaw commended the budget to the Town Council and as Chair of Finance & General Services Committee, proposed the motion including the precept increase of 2% for 2020/21, the equivalent increase for a Band D property of £2.09 for the year.

Cllr.Grimshaw stated that the sound management of the Council finances and the commitment of members to improve the quality of services inevitably meant that in 2020/21 there was a need to increase the precept. Cllr.Grimshaw stated that the increase was necessary in order to properly fund the Council's work programme moving forward, much of which had been requested in the resident's survey.

Cllr.Fenwick proposed that the motion to increase the precept be withdrawn and that the budget increase be met from reserves. The proposal to amend the motion was not seconded. Cllr.Fenwick asked that it be minuted that he did not support any precept increase in 2020/21.

Resolved:
<p>That :-</p> <p>(i) The 2020/21 gross budget expenditure of £832,930 be agreed, inclusive of the specified use of £36,750 from the General Reserves balance,</p>

- (ii) Ashington Town Council's precept requirement from Northumberland County Council in respect of the Financial Year Ending 31 March 2021, be agreed at £796,180,
- (iii) The Precept (Council Tax) increase for 2020/21 be agreed at 2% for a Band D property in Ashington, equivalent to an annual increase of £2.09 and that;
- (iv) While recognising that in 2020/21 the Government proposes to continue with no referendum principles ("capping") for Town and Parish Council's, Ashington Town Council resolves to take all available steps to mitigate the future need for Council Tax increases, including:
- the responsible use of non-earmarked general reserves,
 - maximising all external funding opportunities; and
 - examining "invest to save" projects and options that will lower on-going costs.

C20/882 8. REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES.

Citizens Advice Northumberland

Cllr. E. Armstrong presented the Citizens Advice Northumberland report from July to September 2019, highlighting the following;

- A summary revealed, they had seen 968 Clients, dealt with 1,932 issues, took part in 2,768 activities and currently had 585 cases,
- In the quarter they had moved the face to face delivery from 89-91 Station Road to new premises, next to the Post office, with the minimum of disruption to services.

The grant provided by Ashington Town Council has enabled the organisation to support 68 residents in the quarter with 1,932 issues and to recruit a new supervisor to support the drop in and appointment sessions in Ashington. That post was completely new to Ashington and was having a positive effect already on the staff, volunteers and people of Ashington seeking support from Citizens Advice Northumberland.

The primary issues dealt with had included debt, welfare benefits, universal credit, housing, financial services and employment.

Members agreed it was a very detailed report and also agreed the figures came as no surprise considering the current introduction of

Universal Credit. Members confirmed that the decision for the Town Council to fund the Citizens Advice had certainly been worthwhile and the report demonstrated how the funding had supported the service.

C20/883 9. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING.

The next meeting of the Full Council was scheduled for 7:00pm, Tuesday 3 March 2020, in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington NE63 8RX.

The meeting closed at 7:00pm