

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

**HELD AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, GROVE HOUSE, HIGH STREET NORTH,
DUNSTABLE**

ON MONDAY 21 JANUARY 2019

Present: Councillors John Kane (Town Mayor), Nigel Warren (Deputy Town Mayor), Peter Hollick (Chairman); John Chatterley (Vice-Chairman), Sid Abbott, Terry Colbourne, Philip Crawley, Eugene Ghent, Gloria Martin, Mike Mullany, Gladys Sanders, Ann Sparrow and Pat Staples

In Attendance: Councillor Johnson Tamara, David Ashlee (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), and Rosemary O'Sullivan (Head of Finance and Support Services)

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Liz Jones, Claire Meakins and Patricia Russell

Public Attendance: None

17 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 19 November 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no specific declarations of interest.

19 BUDGET PROPOSALS AND TOWN COUNCIL PRECEPT 2019/20

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive presented a comprehensive report detailing budget proposals for 2019/20.

Members recalled that at the meeting of the Council in December 2018, consideration had been given to budget proposals which accounted for increased revenue expenditure and identified revenue savings and additional income, including income from an increase in the tax base of 147, which was considerably lower than last year's increase. The overall total had resulted in an anticipated deficit which would require an increase to the Band D council tax. Members had resolved that the 2019/20 revenue budget should be set at no more than a 2.3% increase to the council tax charge.

The Chairman reminded Members that the proposed fees and charges had also been considered by each of the Committees as part of the budget setting process. Councillor Sparrow raised her concerns regarding the quality of the croquet lawn in Priory Gardens and the proposed increase to the hire charges. The Chairman advised of the planned programme of maintenance to be undertaken during the closed season, which would be confirmed with other Croquet Club members at the annual pre-season meeting organised with the Head of Grounds and Environmental Services.

The Committee noted that the Community Services Committee had agreed that Sorted be offered free rent of Grove Corner to be reviewed on an annual basis under a Service Level Agreement.

Grounds and Environmental Services Committees had approved the draft budget with no amendments or recommendations.

The overall budget for Finance and Support Services, excluding staff costs, proposed an increase of £4,629 mainly attributable to loss of income from Grove House tenancies, offset by savings within Central Services and Democratic Management budgets.

The draft budget accounted for an annual pay award for all staff and additional employer's contribution to the pension scheme.

The report further detailed the Council's total debt and associated repayments, Council assets and income liabilities on the revenue budget which in terms of budget risk was the highest risk area. Members considered the annual loan repayments and whether there would be merit in settling some of the smaller loans to reduce expenditure in future years. It was therefore

RESOLVED: that full details of the Council's outstanding loans, including any premium for early settlement, be reported to the next meeting of this Committee for further consideration.

Action: Head of Finance and Support Services

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive provided a schedule of all current external contracts and associated contract values. The value of such contractual work was £366,818 per annum offset against the costs of delivering services, as detailed in the draft budget.

RECOMMENDED: i) that the proposed budget for 2019/20 be presented to Council for approval (as enclosed)

ii) that the Town Clerk and Chief Executive be authorised to incur the various items of expenditure detailed in the budget, subject to compliance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

iii) that the revised scale of charges, set out in the report, be approved with effect from 1st April 2019 or the start of the 2019/20 winter playing season, as appropriate

iv) that, in consequence of the foregoing recommendations, the Town Council issue a precept upon Central Bedfordshire Council in the sum of £2,297,506 resulting in a Dunstable Town Council Tax (Band D) at the rate of £179.32 per annum.

Action: Town Clerk and Chief Executive

20 ACCOUNTS SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee received the Minutes of the meetings of the Accounts Sub-Committee held 21 November and 19 December 2018.

21 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Finance and Support Services presented a revenue budgetary control report for the period from 1 April to 31 December 2018. The summary of net expenditure showed a potential for an overall net revenue saving at the end of the financial year. Any such saving would be allocated to the General Reserve. Members noted the movement in the General Reserve accounting for the in-year savings and previously agreed expenditure on specific projects to be met from it.

Members also noted the current balance of the Council's allocated reserves as at 31 December 2018 and the estimated end of year balances having taken account of agreed/known commitments to date.

The Chairman took the opportunity to note that the 2018/19 budget was the last that the present Head of Finance and Support Services would be reporting on. On behalf of the Committee he thanked Rosemary for her management of the budget over the years.

22 COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BID

Central Bedfordshire Council had received an application from a local community group to list the now closed Bird in Hand public house on High Street North as a Community Asset under a Community Right to Bid application and were consulting the Town Council accordingly.

After full consideration of the nomination by the Dunstable North Community Group, it was

RESOLVED: that Central Bedfordshire Council be advised of this Council's support for the nomination.

23 REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

In receiving reports from representatives on outside organisations, it was noted that representation should be corrected to show:

- a) CAB Management Committee – no update to report
- b) DITA – Councillor Hollick had attended the last meeting of DITA when it had been agreed that they would be producing a small leaflet to celebrate 50 years of the twinning association and he would also be writing something for the Talk of the Town. Twinning activities would only be successful if clubs, societies and organisations within the town took part in exchange visits. Queensbury School had arranged visits to Porz-am-Rhein but there had been no return visits.
- c) Hospice at Home Management Committee – Councillor Jones submitted a report advising that the organisation had been the recipient of the retiring collection from the pantomime at Grove Theatre and had also received donations from a local slimming club group following a range of activities during 2018, for which they were very grateful. This would help to provide training for new volunteers as well as refresher training for others. Volunteers had continued to visit patients in their homes through the Christmas period when, for some, this was the only contact they had with people for a number of days.

The Trustees continued to look for ways to bridge the gap in lost funding and Councillor Jones was organising the following fundraising events:

9 February at 12.30 pm – Soup n Sweet
27 March at 7.00 pm – meal at Coconut Garden.

- d) Ashton Schools Foundation – the minutes from the meeting held on 21 November 2018 were awaited. Councillor Martin advised that a new trustee had been appointed and following the resignation of the Right Revd Richard Andrews, Cynthia Gresham was acting as interim chairman.
- e) Ashton Almshouses – The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 23 January 2019
- f) Chews Foundation – Councillor Chatterley reported on the meeting held in December when the educational grant scheme was discussed. A leaflet was to be sent to schools to promote the scheme.
- g) Poors Land Charity – the next meeting would be held at the end of the following week when distribution of the Maundy money would be discussed.