

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 20 JANUARY 2020

Present: Councillor Sid Abbott (Town Mayor), Liz Jones (Deputy Town Mayor), Peter Hollick (Chairman), Philip Crawley (Vice-Chairman), Wendy Bater, Gloria Martin, Cameron Restall, Lee Roberts and Johnson Tamara

In Attendance: David Ashlee (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), Lucy Salim (Head of Finance and Support Services), Lisa Scheder (Finance & Procurement Manager) and Sharon Long (Democratic Services Manager)

Apologies for Absence: Matthew Brennan, John Gurney, Kenson Gurney

Public Attendance: None

21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 18 November 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no specific declarations of interest.

23 REFERENCE FROM COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk & Chief Executive introduced the report regarding the partial restructuring of the Community and Young Persons Services Team. Councillor Martin commented that current staff were aware of the proposals and had had an opportunity to comment on them. Aside from the Manager of the function, who had taken the decision to retire, no staff were to lose their jobs.

RESOLVED: that the partial restructuring of the Community and Young Persons Services Team be approved.

24 BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2020/21

The Head of Finance and Support Services presented the report detailing the Council's Budget proposals for 2020/21.

The Chairman confirmed that the tax base had increased as the number of houses in the area had. He also confirmed that the Council had a clear idea about its income liabilities. The only uncertainty was around the staff pay award, which had yet to be determined.

The licence of Creasey Park from Central Bedfordshire Council was discussed. The Town Clerk & Chief Executive indicated he had attempted to talk with the relevant officer at Central Bedfordshire Council about renewal of the lease, which is due to expire in 2022, but it was not yet on their horizon.

The Town Clerk & Chief Executive confirmed that he anticipated that the external contracts that terminated in 2020 would be renewed.

The Head of Finance and Support Services indicated that the budget allowed for the offices at Grove House to be vacant until September 2020.

The loans from the Public Works Loan Board were discussed. The Town Clerk & Chief Executive confirmed that investigation had shown that early repayment of the loans was unlikely to be in the Council's best interest.

A query regarding the water bill for Grove House arose. The Finance & Procurement Manager indicated that there had previously been a high estimated usage and that the account was currently in credit.

RECOMMENDED: i) that the proposed budget for 2020/21 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 fees and charges, set out in the report, be approved with effect from 1st April 2020 or the start of the 2020/21 winter playing season, as appropriate; and

iv) that, in consequence of the foregoing recommendations, the Town Council issue a precept upon Central Bedfordshire Council in the sum of £2,369,323, resulting in a Dunstable Town Council Tax (Band D) at the rate of £181.11 per annum.

25 DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2020 TO 2023

The Town Clerk & Chief Executive introduced the report and explained that the stated objectives are those that arose in two workshops previously held.

The issue of whether the Council should commit to being carbon neutral, and the timeframe for achieving this, was discussed at length. The Town Clerk & Chief Executive indicated that a new working party was soon to be established to look at the issue in more detail, and that this would be the subject of a report to the next Finance & General Purposes Committee in March. Councillor Abbott expressed the view that the objective should be sought to be achieved sooner than the ten years provided for in the draft Corporate Plan.

RECOMMENDED : that the draft Corporate Plan be recommended to Council for approval at the full Council meeting on 3 February.

26 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Finance and Support Services presented the financial monitoring report. She noted the underspend currently is nearly as reported at £32,771 but there will be more clarity on the figure as year end approaches. Councillor Martin asked if it was possible for the deep dive to take place immediately before the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings. The Head of Finance and Support Services indicated this could be

looked at for the next financial year but due to the manner in which month-end closes and the timings of the availability of previous month's actuals and the period it takes for managers to work on their forecasts it would most likely not be possible to report sooner.

It was noted that the internal auditor had come in last week and was very happy with his findings and issued no recommendations in the second interim report.

27 UPDATED FLEXIBLE WORKING REPORT

The Head of Finance and Support Services presented the report detailing the proposed update to the Council's Flexible Working Policy. She explained that the update was to ensure the Council's existing policy was in line with current guidance and working practice.

Councillor Jones stated she was pleased to see the policy being reviewed as flexible working brought many benefits to the individual and employer if properly managed. Councillor Crawley commented on its benefits for staff retention.

Councillor Martin raised the issue about the need to ensure telephones are answered. The Head of Finance and Support Services indicated that all the Council's landlines could be diverted to mobile phones, and those that needed a work mobile phone had been issued with one. She also explained that eligibility for home working was dependent on the role being undertaken.

RESOLVED: that the updated Flexible Working Policy and Procedure and updated Flexible Working Application Form be adopted.

28 REFERENCE FROM GROUNDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Members considered the report and approved the two recommendations made from Grounds and Environmental Services Committee on 13 January 2020.

RESOLVED: i) that Members release up to £95,425 of earmarked reserves as outlined in the appendix to the report to the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee; and

ii) that Members approve the creation of the new post of Parks and Green Space Development Officer as detailed in the report to the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee and further recommends the revenue budget allocation contained within the draft revenue budget papers.

29 ARRANGEMENTS FOR ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING 2020

Members considered the report, discussed a possible topic and agreed that a presentation was not necessary unless there was a significant public presence.

RESOLVED: that that a presentation was not necessary unless there was a significant public presence, in which case the Town Clerk & Chief Executive should present the Council's new Corporate Plan, assuming it is adopted at the full Council meeting on 3 February 2020.

30 **REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

- a) CAB Management Committee – Councillor Bater had nothing to report. It was noted that the CAB sign was still on display at Grove House and needed to be removed.

- b) DITA – Councillor Hollick reported that a meeting was due to take place on 22 January. DITA are arranging an event for the summer to mark 50 years of twinning under the auspices of DITA and would be publishing a brochure to mark the event.

- c) Hospice at Home Management Committee – Councillor Jones indicated there was nothing to report by way of update at present.

- d) Ashton Almshouses Charity – Councillor Hollick reported that there had been no meetings recently.