

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 23 JANUARY 2017

Present: Councillors Peter Hollick (Town Mayor), Gloria Martin (Deputy Town Mayor), Andy Whayman (Vice-Chairman), John Chatterley, Eugene Ghent, Liz Jones, Claire Meakins-Jell, Des Moffatt, Patricia Russell, Ann Sparrow, Pat Staples, William Tookey and Nigel Warren

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Sid Abbott, Terry Colbourne, John Kane (Chairman),

Public Attendance: One

24 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 21 November 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Interest	Agenda Item
Councillor Staples	Pecuniary interest – Dunstable Market	4

26 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2017/18 AND TOWN COUNCIL PRECEPT 2017/18

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive presented a comprehensive report detailing budget proposals for 2017/18.

Members recalled that at the meeting of full Council in December, it had been resolved that the Council adopt a working strategy of trying to establish the Band D council tax charge for 2017/18 at the existing rate of £175.21. At that meeting consideration had been given to a draft budget which accounted for increased revenue expenditure and identified revenue savings and additional income, including income from an increase in the tax base of 351 which provided additional income of £61,498, which enabled the Council to make a revenue contribution to the Corporate Plan Reserve.

The Committee noted that Community Services Committee had recommended an addition of a £5,000 contingency sum to be added to the Events Budget to be used for a light show finale at the Torchlight Procession and Christmas Tree Carols if funding was not forthcoming from Dunstable Joint Committee.

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

The overall budget for Finance and Support Services, excluding staffing costs, proposed a decrease of £5,499 which was mainly attributable to a saving on Grove House utilities, corporate insurance costs and a saving from the MTRF reserve contribution, offset by increases in the Grants SLA budget, new arrangements for IT improvements and support and a contribution to the Corporate Plan Reserve Fund.

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.

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 £352,418 per annum offset against the costs of delivering services, as detailed in the draft budget. It was noted that the cleansing contract for Eleanors Cross was undertaken by the Town Ranger and the Town Centre Janitors and the income was allocated to the relevant service area accordingly.

The draft budget accounted for an annual pay award for all staff not on the 'Living Wage' of 1% and a 2.5% pay award for all staff on the 'Living Wage' in accordance with the Living Wage Foundation. From 1 April 2017 the Living Wage Foundation rate would be £8.45 per hour.

In conclusion, it was noted that the Council had benefited over the past two years from larger than normal increases to Dunstable's tax base. For 2017/18 this had ensured that the Council was able to establish a new Corporate Plan reserve fund in addition to maintaining the Band D council tax charge at the 2016/17 level.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- i) that the proposed budget for 2017/18 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 2017 or the start of the 2017/18 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 £2,178,736, resulting in a Dunstable Town Council Tax (Band D) of £175.21.

Action: Town Clerk

27 CHILDCARE VOUCHER SCHEME

The Committee considered proposals for the introduction of a Childcare Voucher Scheme following requests from staff, as set out in the report of the Head of Finance and Support Services.

Members sought clarification on aspects of such a scheme and noted that this was a government initiative aimed at helping working parents. Childcare vouchers could be

used for childcare for children up to the age of 15. A salary sacrifice scheme would have no effect on employee's pensions.

The scheme would be made available to all employees and a preferred company had been identified that would provide a fully managed childcare voucher scheme, offering routine eligibility screening and undertaking the necessary administration for employee registration, voucher ordering and salary sacrifice agreements. They would provide a clear information booklet for employees which would incorporate all the scheme rules expected by HMRC so there would be no need to develop a separate policy document.

It was noted that provision for the introduction of a salary sacrifice childcare voucher scheme had been included in the draft budget previously considered, however savings on the employer's national insurance contributions would likely offset any initial costs, in which case the contingency sum would be applied to the Corporate Plan Reserve.

In conclusion, Members agreed that the scheme would be a positive example of the Council's commitment to its employees, in accordance with its aspiration to achieve silver standard for its Investors in People accreditation.

RESOLVED: i) that the Council introduce a salary sacrifice Childcare Voucher Scheme to commence from 1 April 2017

ii) that the scheme be administered by KiddiVouchers.

Action: Head of Finance and Support Services

28 REPLACEMENT VEHICLE (Minute 18/2017)

The Committee considered a recommendation from the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee that funds be released from the existing earmarked reserve funds to replace an existing grounds maintenance vehicle recently destroyed in an arson attack, the cost of which would be offset by an insurance settlement, the sum of which was not presently known.

RESOLVED: that the recommendation be adopted and the sum of up to £20,135 be released from the earmarked capital reserve for the purchase of a replacement vehicle for the Grounds and Environmental Services Team.

Action: Head of Grounds and Environmental Services

29 FUTURE USE OF LUTON ROAD BOWLING GREEN AND ASSOCIATED SPORTS PAVILION (Minute 23/2017)

The Committee considered a recommendation from the Grounds and Environmental Services regarding the lease of land at Luton Road Recreation Ground.

RESOLVED: i) that the recommendation be adopted and the lease of the land be agreed as set out in the report

ii) that the Town Clerk and Chief Executive be authorised to instruct the Council's solicitors to prepare a draft lease accordingly.

Action: Town Clerk and Chief Executive

30 ACCOUNTS SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee received the Minutes of the meetings of the Accounts Sub-Committee held on 23 November and 16 December 2016.

31 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 2016 with an indication of the anticipated outturn against budget which projected a net revenue saving at the end of the financial year. Any such saving would be allocated to the General Reserve.

Members also noted the current balance of the Council's allocated reserves as at 31 December 2016 and an estimated end of year balance having taken account of agreed/known commitments to date. Information would be provided to Councillor Sparrow regarding expenditure from the Dunstable Joint Committee Fund.

Funding claims for expenditure on MTRF projects were payable quarterly in arrears and the first such claim was in progress.

32 MARKET TOWN REGENERATION FUND PROJECTS

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive presented an update report on Market Town Regeneration Fund projects that related to this Committee.

a) Architectural Lighting Scheme

The first phase of this project had now been completed and lighting had been installed on Grove House, Priory House and the Dunstable Conference Centre. Phase two of the project would be commissioned shortly.

b) Quadrant Shopping Centre

No works had been commissioned. Further information was awaited from Central Bedfordshire Council but there was doubt as to whether this project would proceed.

c) New Town Centre Signage and Street Furniture

The bulk of this project would be carried out in conjunction with the de-trunking of the A5.

d) High Street Improvement Scheme

Officers were still working on this scheme with colleagues from CBC and three retail units were currently progressing to stage two of the application process with a number of other schemes going through stage one. The Town Clerk and Chief Executive would be pleased to give further information to members outside of the meeting.

33 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Members noted the arrangements for the Annual Town Meeting to be held on 3 April 2017 at Creasey Park Community Football Centre. It was agreed that the Town Clerk and Chief Executive would give a presentation on the MTRF projects. Members suggested that the Police be asked to attend to take questions from the electorate and

if agreed this would be included in the notices of the meeting. Due notice would be displayed on the ward noticeboards as well as being publicised through social media.

Action: Town Clerk and Chief Executive

34 ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING

Nominations for Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor

RESOLVED: that consideration of nominations for election to the office of Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor for the municipal year 2017/18 be deferred until the meeting of this Committee on 20 March 2017.

Venue

In agreeing the venue for the Annual Council Meeting, Members asked that courtesy cloths be provided for members' table seating.

RESOLVED: that the Annual Council Meeting be held at All Saints Academy.

Action: Head of Finance and Support Services

NB: Councillor Russell abstained from voting on this matter.

35 REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

- a) CAB Management Committee –Councillor Meakins-Jell advised that the next meeting would be held the following week.
- b) DITA –the next meeting would be held 21 January 2017.
- c) Hospice at Home – Councillor Jones advised that the next meeting would be held later in the week. She advised that the organisation were improving their social media and seeking funding opportunities. £600 had been raised from the recent fundraising with the Rotary Club which would be shared between the two organisations. A fundraising Indian meal would be held in March.
- d) Ashton Schools Foundation – Councillor Whayman would submit a report after the next meeting.
- e) Ashton Almshouses – Councillor Staples advised that one apartment was currently vacant and Councillor Russell advised that one person was being interviewed.
- f) Chews Foundation – Councillor Chatterley advised that a brief meeting was held on 6 December 2016 when the financial position and repairs to the front steps were considered.
- g) Poors Land Charity – Councillor Hollick advised that the next meeting would be held on 30 January 2017 when distribution of the Maundy money would be considered.