

**Minutes of a meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on
Monday 18 January 2021 at 7.30 pm. (Zoom meeting)**

Present

Councillors: Martin Colston (Chairperson); Jeff Beck; Jo Day; Sue Farrant; Jon Gage; Olivia Lewis; Gary Norman, Elizabeth O’Keeffe and Erik Pattenden.

In attendance

Hugh Peacocke, Chief Executive Officer.

46. Apologies for absence

None

47. Absent

Councillor Stephen Masters

48. Declarations of interest and dispensations

The Chief Executive Officer declared that Councillors Jeff Beck, Tony Vickers and Erik Pattenden are also Members of West Berkshire District Council, which is declared as a general interest on their behalf and a dispensation is in place to allow them to partake in discussions relating to West Berkshire Council (WBC) business.

The Chief Executive Officer declared that there is a dispensation for those Town Councillors who live in the Newbury Town Council area with respect to their discussion relating to the budget and setting the precept.

Councillor Tony Vickers declared that he was also a member of Greenham Parish Council.

49. Minutes

Proposed: Councillor Gary Norman

Seconded: Councillor Erik Pattenden

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on Monday 12 October be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

50. Questions and petitions from members of the public

There were none.

51. Members’ questions and petitions

There were none.

52. Review of the Council’s Strategy 2019-2024

Councillor Martin Colston, as Leader of the Council, presented the review of the Strategy, which he said was a continuation of existing policies and objectives, with some minor amendments.

In addition to the amendments in the draft already circulated to Members the Committee approved a further recommendation to carry out a review of street and footway lighting to assess where savings might be made and more energy-efficient lights introduced.

Proposed: Councillor Olivia Lewis

Seconded: Councillor Sue Farrant

Resolved: that the Committee recommends that the Council approves the draft Strategy as circulated, together with the amendment regarding street and footway lighting.

53. 2021/22 Budget

The Committee considered the draft budget, as circulated, which proposed a total expenditure of £1,964,260, funded as follows:

- Income from Council services: £ 162,288
- General reserves: £ 69,692
- Earmarked reserves: £ 155,160
- CIL: £ 128,330
- Section 106 (for Community café) £ 63,541
- Public Works loan for Community Café: £ 250,000
- Precept: £1,135,249

The Committee noted that the Council Tax Base for Newbury had increased over the past year by 0.25% and that the draft budget proposed a precept increase of 2.55%, equivalent to a bad D charge of £87.82 for 2021/22 (a 2.29% increase).

The Committee thanked the Chairman and the CEO for their work in producing the draft budget and Strategy.

Proposed: Councillor Erik Pattenden

Seconded: Councillor Tony Vickers

Resolved: That the Committee recommends that Full Council approves the draft budget as set out above and sets a precept of £1,135,249 for the financial year 2021/22.

54. Engagement and Consultation Policy

The Chief Executive Officer explained that the Policy collects together information on the Council's engagement and consultation processes and clarifies how they are delivered and implemented.

The following amendments were proposed:

- Where the Policy states: *We use our Facebook account to reach those who regularly use those communication tools* add *Twitter*
- *“ A separate notification of the results may be given to those surveyed ~~if the Town Council so chooses~~, at the discretion of the Town Council, either through a separate written notification or a notice on a nearby noticeboard for example.*
- The Committee asked that the Policy be numbered and annotated for easier reference.

After some discussion, the Committee agreed to retain the provision that the Council would not carry out consultations in connection with any action required to be carried out by the Council by law or *where the proposed project, action or activity is outside the power of the Parish Council to undertake.*

Proposed: Councillor Erik Pattenden

Seconded: Councillor Tony Vickers

Resolved: That subject to the above amendments, the Committee approves the Engagement and Consultation Policy.

(Councillors Gary Norman and Tony Vickers abstained)

55. List of Payments

The Committee noted the payments made during the period 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020.

56. Health and safety reports

The information was received and noted by the Committee.

The Chief Executive Officer and the Committee thanked the Community Services team for achieving such a satisfactory report in such challenging times.

57. Debts over £500 and more than three months old

The Committee noted that the debts arose due to the difficulties faced by the Town Hall tenants arising from the Lockdowns imposed under Coronavirus regulations. The Chief Executive Officer has been authorised to deal with these matters, after consulting the Chairman of the Committee.

58. Income and Expenditure Account 2020/21

The Committee Noted the Income and Expenditure Account for the period ended 31 December 2020.

59. Internal Audit Report

The Committee received the first interim internal audit report for the financial year 2020/21 from Auditing Solutions Ltd. The review was undertaken remotely, due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation and restrictions, in early January 2021. The report covered the first 9 months of the 2020-21 financial year, a period when the Council was suffering from staff losses and working through the pandemic.

The Chief Executive Officer pointed out that while the Council normally received quarterly reports, that due to staff bereavements and the pandemic our internal auditors had not met that target this year. In the circumstances, and given the issues faced by the Council, the Chief Executive Officer was pleased with the Report and he and the Committee recorded their thanks to the Council's accounts team, Margaret Gore and Angela Herrington for their work in achieving this outcome.

The Report raised 4 issues for action as follows:

1. Consideration should be given to aligning the Council's Standing Orders more closely to the NALC model document including appropriate and detailed reference to the Council's formal contracting arrangements.

Recommendation: This matter will be addressed at the annual review of Standing Orders.

2. Expenditure incurred should only be reallocated from one budget heading to another where a genuine miscoding has occurred in processing the original entry.

Recommendation: Where such overspends do arise, members will be made aware of the reasons for such overspends and approve them. Unless a genuine miscoding has occurred, the original posting should stand unamended.

At year end, Members may approve an appropriate virement of funds from an underspending budget heading if considered appropriate.

3. In accordance with the requirements of the Governance and Accountability Manual – The Practitioner's Guide – 2020 edition, only the cost of staff employed and paid through the Council's payroll should be charged against staff cost codes in the AGAR at Section 2 Box 4.

Recommendation: Only the cost of staff employed and paid through the Council's payroll will be charged against staff cost codes.

4. The Council should determine whether the percentage contribution for the one highlighted employee should be amended in future months with, potentially, reimbursement made for over-deducted contributions in earlier months of the year.

Recommendation: The matter will be referred to our Payroll consultants, DCK, for determination and any reimbursements due will be paid to the relevant employee.

Proposed: Councillor Gary Norman

Seconded: Councillor Sue Farrant

Resolved: That the Committee approve Report and the recommendations set out above.

60. Forward Work Programme for Policy and Resources Committee meetings 2020/21

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme for Policy and Resources Committee meetings 2020/21.

61. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Proposed: Councillor Tony Vickers

Seconded: Councillor Jeff Beck

Resolved: That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business because publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential personal business to be discussed.

62. Staff Sub Committee

The Committee noted the business transacted at the Staff Subcommittee meetings on 22 October, 17 November and 2 December.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.17 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairman

Date: _____