

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 22 JANUARY 2018

Present: Councillors Gloria Martin (Town Mayor), John Chatterley (Vice-Chairman) (in the Chair), Sid Abbott, Eugene Ghent, Peter Hollick, , Liz Jones, Claire Meakins, Patricia Russell, Ann Sparrow, Pat Staples, 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: Councillors John Kane (Deputy Town Mayor), Terry Colbourne and Anne Kennedy

Public Attendance: None

26 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: that Councillor Peter Hollick be appointed Chairman of this Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

(Councillor Hollick took the Chair at this juncture.)

27 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 2 November 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

28 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Interest	Agenda Item
Councillor Pat Staples	Pecuniary interest – Dunstable Market	As may arise

29 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2018/19 AND TOWN COUNCIL PRECEPT 2018/19

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive presented a comprehensive report detailing budget proposals for 2018/19.

Members recalled that at the meeting of full Council in December, 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 230 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, however, resolved that the 2018/19 revenue budget should be set at a nil percent increase to the council tax charge and as a result a further briefing on the draft budget had been arranged.

At that briefing meeting it was agreed that a number of expenditure items be deleted from the draft budget, as now submitted, which resulted in a council tax charge at the existing rate of £175.21.

The Committee noted that Community Services Committee had recommended that £5,000 from the Town Centre Management budget for 2018/19 be allocated to the Dunstable Joint Committee.

Grounds and Environmental Services Committee had recommended changes to the Council's staffing establishment for Creasey Park Community Football Centre and Bennett's Splash and Splashside Café.

The overall budget for Finance and Support Services, excluding staffing costs, proposed an increase of £3,049. The main increases were £10,000 contribution to the election reserve and £4,000 allocation for the WW1 Beacon event, offset by savings within the Central Services and Corporate Management budgets.

The draft budget accounted for an annual pay award for all staff not on the 'Living Wage' of 2%. Members had previously been made aware that full details of the pay award were still emerging. Further details had now become available and Members were provided with the full detail from the National Employers for Local Government which showed that the 2% only related to spinal column points (SCP) 20 and above. SCPs 6 to 19 had been increased by considerably more than 2%. It was also noted that these proposals had not yet been agreed by the Unions. The Council employ a number of staff on SCP 19 and below and the impact of this additional increase to the wage bill for the revenue budget 2018/19 was £9,626 which was currently not budgeted for. Having already identified considerable efficiency savings in order to establish a budget predicated on a nil increase in the council tax charge, finding this additional sum of money was not straightforward without compromising existing service provision. Members therefore considered how this additional finance could be funded.

RECOMMENDED: i) that the following provision be removed from the draft budget:

Allocation towards additional town centre toilet provision	£10,000
Funding a loan from the Public Works Loan Board	£10,500
Total	£20,500

ii) that in accordance with the above the Town Council does not take out a loan from the Public Works Loan Board and some of the proposed Corporate Plan capital programme previously agreed be suspended, with a revised programme being submitted to the next meeting of this Committee for consideration

iii) that the following provision be added/reinstated to the draft budget:

Additional provision for 2018/19 salaries	£9,626
Reinstate allocation to the Earmarked Reserves	£3,500
Reinstate balance of loss of income from CAB rent (one quarter)	£7,374
Total	£20,500

Members also noted that the information provided by the National Employers for Local Government included the pay offer for 2019/20 which as well as replicating the coming year's 2%, indicated that all SCPs from 28 and below would receive a greater than 2% pay award. As a result, staffing costs for 2019/20 were likely to increase more than for 2018/19. In addition, if the Council was unable to find a suitable tenant for the space currently occupied by the CAB, then this would result in a further reduction in income in 2019/20. It was also a possibility that the Dunstable tax base was likely to slow down over the next few years.

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 a future 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, as now updated, was £367,158 per annum offset against the costs of delivering services, as detailed in the draft budget.

Members were of the view that in acknowledging the Council's growth and success over the past few years, there should now be a period of consolidation.

RECOMMENDED: i) that the proposed budget for 2018/19 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 2018 or the start of the 2018/19 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 £2,219,034, resulting in a Dunstable Town Council Tax (Band D) at the existing rate of £175.21.

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 22 November and 20 December 2017.

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 2017. The summary of net expenditure showed a potential for an overall net revenue shortfall at the end of the financial year, attributable to the unbudgeted cost of forthcoming by-elections. The shortfall would have to be met from the General Reserve.

Members also noted the current balance of the Council's allocated reserves as at 31 December 2017 and an estimated end of year balance, having taken account of agreed/known commitments to date.

During consideration of this report, Councillor Sparrow raised her objections to the revised staffing establishment for Creasey Park Community Football Centre and Bennett's Splash and the Splashside Café. Considerable discussion ensued but as Councillor Ghent pointed out this was going back over the budget proposals which had already been agreed.

32 HERITAGE LOTTERY TOWNSCAPE FUND BID FOR PRIORY HOUSE

The Committee considered a recommendation from Community Services Committee that this Council agree to match funding to maximise the likelihood of a successful bid by Central Bedfordshire Council to the Heritage Lottery Townscape Fund.

RESOLVED: that the recommendation be adopted and £250,000 be provisionally allocated from the Building Maintenance Reserve as part funding for remedial and conservation work to Priory House, subject to the successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Townscape.

33 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 2018/19 be deferred until the meeting of this Committee on 19 March 2018.

Venue - Members considered options for the venue for the Annual Council Meeting to be held on 21 May 2018. It was also suggested that exhibition material could be displayed at this event, possibly covering the High Street Improvement Scheme and the Dunstable in Bloom successes. This would be further explored.

RESOLVED: that the Annual Council Meeting be held at the Incuba Centre and the facility booking be confirmed accordingly.

Action: Head of Finance and Support Services

34 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Members considered the venue and arrangements for the Annual Town Meeting to be held on 16 April 2018. Due notice would be displayed on ward noticeboards as well as being publicised through social media.

RESOLVED: i) that the 2018 Town Meeting be held at Grove House
ii) that no presentation be included in this year's meeting.

35 REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

- a) CAB Management Committee – Councillor Meakins advised that the next meeting would be held on 1 February.
- b) DITA –Councillors Warren and Hollick reported on possible arrangements for the Citizens visit from Porz-am-Rhein over the weekend of 18 May. The Town Mayor advised that she was was keeping her diary clear until final arrangements were agreed. The Chairman of DITA would be advised to discuss with the Town Mayor the possibility of using Grove House to host a gathering on the Saturday.
- c) Hospice at Home – Councillor Jones reported on a successful 2/3 months of fund raising including the proceeds from the retiring collection from the pantomime season at Grove Theatre.
- d) Ashton Schools Foundation – Councillor Sparrow confirmed the two remaining schools as Ashton St Peter and Manshead. There had been a successful open day in the former Ashton School and Councillor Hollick confirmed that proceeds from the sale were being used for educational purposes and Ashton St Peter had benefited with the building of a new classroom. No date had been set for the next meeting.
- e) Ashton Almshouses – nothing to report.
- f) Chews Foundation – Councillor Chatterley advised that the services of a restoration expert had been employed. Applications for assistance with school uniforms were being processed. The next meeting would be held in June.
- g) Poors Land Charity – Councillor Staples advised that next month’s meeting would consider the distribution of the Maundy money.

36 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: that, in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting.

37 PRIORY HOUSE STAFFING

Members were aware that at the last meeting of the Community Service Committee, consideration had been given to staffing options at Priory House following the resignation of the Priory House Assistant Manager and had agreed to submit a proposal for determination by this Committee.

RESOLVED: that the proposed staffing arrangements as set out in the report be approved and officers be authorised to implement the staffing changes accordingly.

38 STAFFNG MATTERS

The Committee considered proposals for acting-up and honorarium payments.

RESOLVED: that acting-up and honorarium payments be awarded as set out in the report.

39 **APPEALS AND APPOINTMENTS SUB COMMITTEE**

In view of the apparent lack of correct adherence to Council policy and procedure, the Committee advised the Appeals and Appointments Sub Committee to reconvene and reconsider the issue of the Senior Management Team pay and conditions. As a result the resolution of the Appeals and Appointments Sub-Committee on 15 November 2017 was rescinded.