

**WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE
POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT THE MUSEUM ON
MONDAY 17th OCTOBER 2022**

Meeting Commenced: 7:00 pm

Meeting Concluded: 9:15 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Peak (Chairman), Mark Canniford, Sarah Codling, Pete Crew (S), Dave Dash, Pete Fox, Robert Payne, Ian Porter, Tim Taylor and Helen Thornton.

IN ATTENDANCE: Malcolm Nicholson (Town Clerk), Sarah Pearse (Deputy Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer), Samantha Bishop (Committee Officer/Officer Manager) and Fay Powell (Assistant Town Clerk Operational Services).

160	To receive Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lisa Pilgrim who was substituted by Peter Crew.
161	To receive Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest received.
162	To approve the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on the 15TH August 2022 The minutes had been previously circulated. PROPOSED BY: Councillor Robert Payne SECONDED BY: Councillor Ian Porter A vote was taken and carried . Accordingly, it was: RESOLVED: That the minutes be approved and signed by the Chairman.
163	To receive the minutes of the Working Party to Review Expenditure & Governance held on 29th September 2022 (unapproved) The minutes had been previously circulated. A vote was taken and carried . Accordingly, it was: RESOLVED: That the minutes be received.
164	To receive the minutes and recommendations of the Climate Change Working Party Meetings held on the 29th September The minutes which included recommendations for approval had been previously circulated.

Item 11 – Tree Planting Fund recommended that £10,000 be allocated to tree planting from the environmental budget for current financial year.
That annual funding would be considered in line with the contribution from North Somerset Council within budget consideration up to £10,000.

To allow funds to be held by the council in an earmarked fund for tree planting.

The Chairman of the CCWP proposed the recommendations in the recognition of the importance of tree planting to reduce carbon emissions.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed that the NSC Tree Officer had confirmed that NSC could not guarantee planting for extra trees for following years. Members need to note that funds have been received and give approval to hold these funds in an EMR.

The Assistant Town Clerk – Operational Services reported that she was working with James McCarthy – Tree Officer NSC to identify locations for the tree planting, looking at replacing street trees and creating shade in the town center.

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Helen Thornton

SECONDED BY: Councillor Robert Payne

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED:

1. That £10,000 be allocated to tree planting from the environmental budget for current financial year.
2. That annual funding would be considered in line with the contribution from North Somerset Council within budget consideration up to £10,000.
3. To allow funds to be held by the council in an earmarked fund for tree planting.

165 To receive the minutes of the HQ Working Party Meetings held on the 23rd September 2022 To Approve the HQ Working Party Terms of Reference

The minutes and terms of reference had been previously circulated.

It was requested to replace Councillor Sonia Russe's place on the Working party with Roger Bailey, during her year as Mayor.

A member reported that he had attended a meeting where it was discussed that Weston College would be working with the Winter Gardens to staff their front of house from the spring. The college are looking to coordinate with the council on the possibility of staffing the VIC and recommended that the opportunity be explored.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the PWLB loan funds had not been received yet and that she was constantly chasing and trying to speak to somebody.

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Peter Crew

SECONDED BY: Councillor Ian Porter

	<p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the minutes be received. 2. That the terms of reference be approved and adopted.
<p>166</p>	<p>Monthly Financial Reports: July & August 2022</p> <p>a) For Approval Schedule of Unapproved Expenditure</p> <p>The Deputy Town Clerk reported that she may review the report names as the terminology was not reflective of the report.</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>.1 RESOLVED: That the Schedule of Unapproved Expenditure for July & August 2022 be approved.</p> <p>b) For Noting</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Bank Reconciliations ii. Budgetary Control Report iii. Bank Interest Report iv. Schedule of Receipted Income v. Bad debt report vi. Overspend report <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>.2 RESOLVED: That reports 5b i – vi be noted.</p>
<p>167</p>	<p>Internal Audit 2022/2023</p> <p>The first interim audit report had been previously circulated.</p> <p>It was noted that it had been a good start and clean audit.</p> <p>It was suggested if a local auditor could be used in the future. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the current year was the last year of a 5 year programme and that procurement would be reviewed for tender next year. She agreed that it would be good to use a local auditor and would be more proactive in finding one.</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Final Interim Audit Report for the year 2022-23 be received.</p>
<p>168</p>	<p>Payroll</p> <p>.1 Real Living Wage increase</p> <p>The report of the Deputy Town Clerk had been previously circulated.</p> <p>On 22nd September 2022 it was announced that the Real Living Wage (RLW) was to increase to £10.90 with immediate effect stating that employers were encouraged to</p>

implement this asap but before May 2023.

To implement this immediately would have impact on the council's staffing structure and would need to be considered carefully, as it affected eight members of staff on JG3.

As agreed by the Personnel Committee, a desk top job evaluation on currently employed positions at the council is under way and is envisaged will allow the council to consider job grading and any necessary changes to be included in the budget setting process for the year commencing April 2023.

It would be prudent for the council to adopt any RLW increases for implementation to take effect on the 1st April annually to allow for budgets to be set accordingly and furthermore to allow any effect to other staff structures to be considered within the annual staff review.

Members direction would be helpful on how to proceed.

Debate ensued. It was noted that the current staff pay increase 2022/2023 was still with the unions for consideration and was a 10.5% increase for the lowest paid.

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Helen Thornton

SECONDED BY: Councillor Peter Fox

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED:

1. To note the changes to the RLW and increase to £10.90 per hour and the need to allow the job evaluation exercise to take place ahead of any increase to casual workers currently being paid the RLW.
2. To approve the implementation of this and any future increases to the RLW to take effect annually on the 1st April to allow for budget provisions to be in place

.2 Review of Pay and Recruitment

The report of the Town Clerk had been previously circulated.

A report to the Personnel Committee by the Assistant Town Clerk (HR) on the 9th March and a follow up from the Town Clerk on 13th July 2022 had explained the worsening difficulties experienced by the council as an employer with recruitment, inflation, impacts of RLW and the cost of living crisis. Guidance was sought from members as to possible approaches ahead of the annual staff review in October 2022.

As suggested by the Personnel Committee and with the agreement of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, the Town Clerk had commissioned North Somerset Council to undertake a 'desktop' job evaluation (JE) exercise.

The cost of the JE exercise was estimated at £9,000 based on 30 different 'jobs' to evaluate although there could be some variation depending on circumstances (it was believed the council has 34).

The desktop JE exercise is based on job descriptions which all had to be reviewed for accuracy and older ones updated. It will give all town council jobs a 'score' which they will compare with similarly scored jobs at North Somerset Council. We will then be able to

identify what scale point and grade each job would be at NSC. The Personnel Committee will then recommend gradings based on this at its meeting on 9th November.

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Helen Thornton

SECONDED BY: Councillor Peter Fox

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED: To approve the report and the desktop job evaluation process as outlined within the report and to consider recommendations from the Personnel Committee the next Policy & Finance Committee meeting on 12th December 2022.

.3 National Pay Award for 2022/2023

The Town Clerk verbally reported that the staff pay inflation increase for 2022/2023 was still with the unions for consideration. This equated to around £1,925 per employee, pro rata. He felt it was likely to be approved once 2 out of the 3 Unions had agreed. Unison had already agreed but Unite and GMB were awaited.

RESOLVED: To note the verbal report of the Town Clerk.

169 Cemetery Wall repairs

The reports of the Deputy Town Clerk and Council's Surveyor had been previously circulated.

The wall running down from the Engine Shed towards the West boundary had been identified by the surveying team as in need of repair. This was not on a main circulation route and was in one of the older parts of the cemetery. Graves within the section of the cemetery can be accessed by using an alternative route without using the pathway alongside this wall (excluding the graves immediately below and adjacent to it). The wall is believed to form part of the original cemetery wall prior to expansion many years ago.

It was unknown how long the wall has been showing signs of deterioration as contained within the surveyor's report.

Officers had met with the surveying team on site to inspect the wall along with the council's arboriculture consultant as there were serious concerns with how the repair would affect significant trees within the area. Works to roots had already been undertaken and non-significant trees removed with the approval of the NSC tree officer in the hope that this will relieve some pressure on the cracks to the wall in question. The tree officer had previously said he would not wish to see significant trees felled and further meetings were being arranged for review of this.

There are a number of graves (approx. 12-20 but most are very old) in the immediate area below the wall in question. Officers had now identified these and were able to confirm that not all graves in the area are marked with a headstone. The surveying team had indicated that the memorial stones for those graves containing headstones will need to be removed to allow work to be undertaken, this was not something that could easily be done. In addition, access to the wall for repair would mean working across and over the graves in

this area. It was noted that some of the graves deeds in the area, showed some restrictive covenants that the council would need to consider. Should the council wish to proceed with works the council will need to work with the ICM on the process required to remove suggested headstones and indeed how the graves themselves would need to be protected, alongside communications with the grave owners.

The council has erected Heras fencing and signs to advise no entry to the area. This was done immediately following report of the condition of the wall. Grounds staff check the fencing remains secure as part of the daily/weekly monitoring of the cemetery.

The wall repair is highly likely to be in the excess of £60k and there is not currently budget for this to happen. A full procurement exercise would need to take place to ascertain a figure correctly. In addition, professional fees for the work would need to be taken into consideration along with the costs of any further tree works for tree removal which was outside of the current tree programme.

Members were requested to provide guidance on how they wished to proceed with works identified and the report indicated options that may be useful in deliberation.

In answer to a question it was advised that the wall could not be removed as it was a retaining and original boundary wall and that banking had also been considered.

In response to a question regarding the foundations, it was advised that this was explained with the Surveyors report.

It was noted that the report featured spelling errors and this should be communicated to the Surveyor for future reference.

The roots of the trees were advised to be holding the wall together and the trees were in good condition.

It was suggested to monitor the wall damage over the next 6 months, using monitoring measurements to see if there was movement and to explore strapping methods.

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Ian Porter
SECONDED BY: Councillor Sarah Codling

A vote was taken and **carried**, Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED: To monitor the cemetery wall for a period of 6 - 12 months and look for ways to measure the damage and try and support the wall, i.e. the possibility if strapping.

170 Audit 2021 / 2022

The Final Interim Audit Report for the year ending 31.03.22 had been previously circulated.

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Final Interim Audit Report for the year 2020-21 be received.

<p>171</p>	<p>Procurement – Water Play Park Pump room equipment The report of the Deputy Town Clerk had been previously circulated.</p> <p>The pump room equipment at the water park was now in urgent need of replacement. This had been reported to the councils Tourism and Leisure committee over the course of the year with a recent report from the Grounds Co-ordinator (October 2022) reporting that the pump room was now over 10 years old, with a mixture of new and old parts communicating with each other. Whilst this had been fine up to a point, this season really showed the need for a full review of the plant room and a potential full refurbishment.</p> <p>The pump room was that of a similar set up to a swimming pool and required specialist knowledge. Research had been carried out to find suitable companies who could provide a review of the equipment we currently have and what is needed moving forwards. They will be contacted and asked to attend the Waterpark and provide a proposal and costings for works needed.</p> <p>The location of the park was open to the elements. People using the splash pad have often previously been on the beach and in turn the sand from clothing and feet ends up on the pad and in the water system. This can add to the difficulties faced. The need for foot baths or outdoor showers had been identified and the feasibility/cost of this will be looked into as well.</p> <p>It had been agreed by the Tourism and Leisure committee that the replacement of the pump room equipment should be done in readiness or the next season (Spring 2023).</p> <p>The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that budget would be allocated from the councils EMRRP (Essential Maintenance, Repair and Replacement Programme) earmarked reserves.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor Peter Crew SECONDED BY: Councillor Sarah Codling</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To approve the use of financial regulation 11.1.1.3 to start the procurement and quotation process for the replacement of pump room equipment at the water park for installation ahead of the season 2023. 2. To note the need for any contractor to provide a full maintenance contract to support the new system in future years.
<p>172</p>	<p>Food Clubs – To agree allocation of EMR (Earmarked Reserve) funds for the Food Club Provisions in WSM</p> <p>The report of the Deputy Town Clerk had been previously circulated.</p> <p>North Somerset Council had transferred funds of £28,300, to the town council following the COVID Pandemic for use towards initiatives following the pandemic and subsequent needs to support the community with help in the area. The balance of the fund at the 1st October 2022 was approx. £24,000 with funds already used supporting the running costs of the community fridge.</p>

The council had supported the cost of two consultants to develop the Food Club project (£23,400) from the Environmental budget 2021/2022, and the development team at the council have been working on grant applications.

The original proposal was to have 3 clubs across Weston in Worle, Central ward and Southward – this was the original brief given to the consultants.

The monies held by the council are in place to support the Food Club projects and there are now two schemes that are ready to launch each asking for financial support in the first year from this fund:

Food Bank – Purple Sheep centre, Hope Church, Hughenden Road
The Food Shop @ The Stable, Weston super Mare

Details of both schemes were outlined within the report and members were requested to approve the use of the EMR funds they were holding for the food club projects.

Members recognised the necessity for these projects in the current cost of living crisis. It was noted that there were issues securing a premises in South Ward and efforts to find something there were being made. The two projects would be used as pilot schemes to secure in other areas.

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Helen Thornton

SECONDED BY: Councillor Peter Crew

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED: To approve the allocation of the EMR funds for the food club projects supplied by NSC as suggested below:

1. The Food Shop @The Stable – Allocate funds up to the value of £20,000 max as needed (recognising a successful grant could mean the full allocation is not required).
2. The Food Bank - @Purple Sheep Centre – Allocate the remaining available balance of £4k to the project, recognising that further grants have been applied for to help this project (£5k from Quartet) which if successful would boost this fund to £9k.
3. The Wellbeing and Development Officer continue to apply for any suitable grants to support both schemes as a priority.

173 Budget Considerations for 2023/2024

Members were requested to identify any budget considerations they would like considered in the budget for 2023/24.

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that budget preparation was under way. It was recognised that there would be severe challenges to consider such as the local election, Insurance cost, pay, utility cost increases as well as the cost of living crisis and RLW. Service area spending officer meetings had been undertaken with a focus how were services operated.

	<p>Discussion ensued and a member encouraged fellow members to be mindful of the small staff force when suggesting new projects.</p> <p>Suggestions such as reviewing assets, looking at the economical use of buildings running at losses, pursuing opportunities and ways to operate more effectively, engaging and working with agencies.</p> <p>It was suggested that the budget setting process itself needed reviewing and could be more effective by councillors engaging with department heads</p> <p>This idea was welcomed by officers as ideas from councillors within the process should be discussed with members to establish plausibility and viability before committee approval. This would avoid the current situation of some budgets or EMR not being able to be fully utilised as no officer time has been available to get the projects to fruition in some cases. This year, it was noted staff have had to be redeployed onto other projects which has taken them away from their core roles and there was also the factor of retention and recruitment challenges.</p> <p>The Deputy Town Clerk was happy to report that the Museum was in a good position at month 6 and council owned buildings were now in better condition due to service and maintenance work schedules. It was reported that the Medium Term Financial Plan was due for review at the next Expenditure & Governance Working Party meeting, for final approval by Policy & Finance in December, which is hoped will provide direction to both staff and members on budget consideration and external factors which undoubtedly affect the budget setting process.</p> <p>Cross party working was needed to develop a draft budget and it was suggested that a politically balanced budget setting working group be set up and members nominated – Group leaders were noted as being best placed to do this as in previous years they had done informally.</p> <p>The Deputy Town Clerk requested sufficient notice of any budget ideas from members.</p> <p>It was noted that the Town Council had achieved many great successes by way of services, initiatives and projects over the years and the council should be more proactive in vocalising this to the community.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To review the budget setting process in readiness for 2024/25. 2. To form a budget setting working group, to be determined by Group Leaders, to recommend a draft budget to the next meeting on 12th December for consideration.
	<p><i>It was resolved under the Public Bodies (Admissions of Meeting) Act 1960 to exclude the public and press for the following item by reasons of the confidential nature of the business.</i></p>
<p>174</p>	<p>To consider an urgent Staffing Matter</p> <p>The Town Clerk provided a further confidential red paper report to the committee for</p>

members to consider. The report provided an update on the situation since the previous meeting held 8th August 2022. The Town Clerk at the request of the chairman provided further detail and explanation around the options felt available to the council which the committee may now wish to consider. The key points raised by the Town Clerk were summarised as follows:

The staffing situation was still ongoing and the investigation was not able to be fully concluded due to the refusal to hold further interviews due to ongoing staff sickness by a staff member. In addition, talks with trade union representatives had so far not reached a satisfactory conclusion.

- Staff relationships were highly likely to prove irretrievable as all indication on discussions implied they had severely broken down in multiple areas.
- It was felt day to day business was now being affected alongside the council's reputation
- It was advised that previous discussion to conclude the issue which had been muted could now no longer proceed due to the inability to do so following confirmation from Avon Pension Fund and LGPS rules.
- The committee was urged to provide direction to allow the current situation to be resolved as soon as possible (the Town Clerk's report had provided options to do so for members to consider).

Lengthy discussion and debate ensued with varying strong opinions and views being muted by members. The discussions topics included:

- Members expressed concern that any financial settlement had even been discussed when the investigation was still not concluded. Members views were divided and strong in this area.
- The process of the investigation was discussed with strong opinions and frustrations expressed. Members advised there was ability to conclude this within employment law should the situation continue to be ongoing.
- It was acknowledged that the current situation was not acceptable to anyone and therefore needed to be resolved at the earliest convenience to avoid further impact to all staff involved. It was felt that the delays in conclusion were undoubtedly affecting the council's business in some areas.
- The latest suggestion by a staff member's union rep (redundancy) were dismissed by the committee as this was felt to be unacceptable to the council.
- Members were keen to see the investigation take its course as this could well aid and determine outcomes and conclusion to the situation one way or another.
- Financial considerations were debated with acknowledgment of the Town Clerks report. Strong opinions were voiced once again about the lack of conclusion to the investigation and its detail which was felt was prohibiting a considered option for members to consider when making formal decision on this situation.

PROPOSED: Councillor Peter Crew

SECONDED: Councillor Mark Canniford

A vote was taken and **carried** by 7 votes to 2, Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

1. Due to the inability under LGPS rules previously explored, it was agreed to pursue Option 3.5 of the Town Clerks report with the necessary staff member and representatives.
2. To keep the investigation ongoing and on the table in the event that Option 3.5 of the Town Clerks report is not accepted. Noting the investigation should still be completed either way at its earliest convenience and reported to the Personnel committee.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 9.15 pm

Signed.....Dated.....
Chairman of the Policy & Finance Committee