

SERVICE REVIEW SUB COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 19TH JUNE 2024

Notes of the meeting of the **SERVICE REVIEW SUB COMMITTEE**, held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY 19TH JUNE 2024** at 7.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillors Eddy Adam, Martin Ashcroft, Arun M Chandran, John Clark, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Carl Robinson and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr D. Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs T. Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Mrs J. Thexton (Head of Leisure and Events)
Mr C. Lawson (Golf Complex Administrator)
Mr L. Williams (Grounds Maintenance Service Coordinator)
Mrs V. Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

One member of the public.

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, seconded by Councillor Brian Haigh, that Councillor Arun M Chandran be appointed as Chairman of the Service Review Sub Committee for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Arun M Chandran be appointed as Chairman of the Service Review Sub Committee for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

Councillor Arun M Chandran took the Chair for the Meeting.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, seconded by Councillor John Woodward that Councillor Michael Stead be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Service Review Sub Committee for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

It was also proposed by Councillor Wendy Hillary, seconded by Councillor John Clark that Councillor Jed Hillary be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Service Review Sub Committee for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

A vote was held with the following results:-

Jed Hillary	4 votes
Councillor Michael Stead	6 Votes

RESOLVED – that Councillor Michael Stead be appointed Vice Chairman of the Service Review Sub Committee for the Municipal Year 2024/25.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been submitted by Councillor Joanne Jones.

4. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest, however Councillor Arun M Chandran advised that Councillor Carl Robinson was running late and if in attendance would need to declare an interest due to him being a member of the Oak Leaf Golf Club.

Councillor Carl Robinson subsequently declared an interest in Agenda Item 8 – Golf Complex Service Review Report, as a member of the Golf Club, upon arrival.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no questions from the public.

7. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and

RESOLVED – that the notes of the meeting of the Service Review Working Group held on the 11th March 2024, be received.

8. GOLF COMPLEX SERVICE REVIEW REPORT

The Town Clerk introduced the report to Members highlighting that this was an initial report intended to provide as much information as possible around services, staffing budgets, usage etc to allow Members to scope the service review and determine the aims, objectives and desired outcomes of the review. The ultimate intention of the service review is to help inform the update of the Medium-Term Financial Plan and finalisation of the Golf Complex Improvement and Investment Plan, with a view to identifying further savings, increasing usage and income and reducing the net cost to the taxpayer of operating the facility.

The Town Clerk drew attention to the main conclusions and recommendations of the report and suggested that members consider and agree each appendix in turn, before agreeing recommendations to be put forward to the Recreation Committee and Policy and Resources Committee.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft commended the team for the hard work that had clearly gone into the report.

Councillor Arun M Chandran asked Members to retain the documents provided for use in future meetings.

Councillor Jed Hillary commented that the review was long overdue highlighting that the cost to run the course for a relatively small number of Members is considerable. Due to the number of times the course is unplayable, he questioned whether it is viable to continue to run the golf course as an 18-hole facility.

Councillor Arun M Chandran agreed that the budget being spent to subsidise the golf course is considerable and there is a need to look at value for money. He highlighted that climate change also needs to be considered going forward and if the course will be closed more often due to bad weather then the Council needs to ask what the revenue cost will be and whether the golf complex is viable.

Councillor Eddy Adam agreed and suggested that the report needs to be explored fully and the options that are possible to improve financial performance.

The Town Clerk clarified that financial viability, usage and course closures were all part of the scope of the review and highlighted that a number of actions have been taken already to keep the course open more, including drainage improvement and footpaths, as well as the less risk averse opening policy, which hasn't yet incurred any significant damage to the course. He further highlighted that the aim of the Improvement and Investment Plan is to look at what further investments can be made with a good likelihood of generating a return on investment, to help keep the course open even more. Finally, it was highlighted that the driving range and golf shop are currently creating a return to the Council and running at no cost to the tax payer.

It was agreed to move to consideration of the individual appendices.

Appendix 1 – 2024/25 Golf Complex Service Plan

An inaugural Service Plan for the Golf Complex was presented for consideration and approval providing detailed information on the services provided, assessing risks, and setting aims, objectives and targets for the facility.

Councillor Eddy Adam raised concerns regarding the fact that female member numbers don't seem to be increasing and the need to focus on increasing the number of younger Members (35 and under).

The Head of Leisure and Events explained that as this was the first Service Plan and first meeting of the Service Review, officers did not want to set targets too high in the first year. It would be possible to add targets in subsequent years regarding youth and female inclusion if required.

The Golf Administrator highlighted that low number of junior memberships is a problem nationally and predominantly due to children's interests and lifestyle changing in recent years, and that ladies memberships are an average 10% of memberships, which we are under and therefore have work to do to increase this. The number of members under the age of 30 is another issue and a trialled reduced fee for 19- to 25-year-olds has helped this year.

Councillor Carl Robinson joined the meeting and recorded his declaration of interest as a member of the Golf Club.

Councillor Eddy Adam thanked officers for providing clarity and reassurance that the service is heading in the right direction.

Councillor Wendy Hillary asked if engagement with schools, especially secondary schools, could be undertaken.

The Town Clerk agreed it is possible, however current staffing structures and a lack of a dedicated golf manager make this difficult.

Councillor Carl Robinson argued that the oversight of the golf shop comes under the Head of Leisure and Events and golf course maintenance under greenkeeping staff via the Grounds Maintenance Service Co-ordinator, and the additional work should be manageable.

The Town Clerk clarified the staffing structure, staff roles, limits on staff capacity, and stressed the limitations of not having a dedicated manager as many other services do.

Councillor Arun M Chandran reiterated this point and advised that the Council is not over staffed and does not have the capacity to go out and promote youth memberships in schools.

Councillor Phil Hawkins advised that himself and Councillor Andy Hill deliver the local radio show and offered an open invitation to Officers to come and promote the Golf Complex on the show.

Councillor Jed Hillary suggested that the PEST analysis within the Service Plan should maybe include legal issues and environmental issues so maybe a PESTEL analysis is more appropriate.

Councillor Carl Robinson advised that young people are being targeted by other clubs and gave examples. The Town Clerk agreed that there is a huge role for Golf Clubs to play in junior development and driving up memberships, so would be looking to work with the Club on this issue going forward.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam and seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran that the Golf Complex Service Plan be agreed.

Appendix 2 – 2024/25 Golf Complex Revenue Budgets

Received.

Appendix 3 – 2024/25 Golf Complex Capital Budgets

Received.

Appendix 4 – 2023/24 Outturn and Previous Year Income and Expenditure

The Town Clerk drew Members attention to the trends and net running costs highlighting the move from close to break-even position for the golf course in 2024/15 to a net deficit of £118,000 in the previous year, and the reduction in the net running cost of the driving range and golf shop from a net deficit to surplus. The impact of the pandemic, climate change and cost of living etc have all impacted over the 10-year period.

Councillor Arun M Chandran highlighted that the projection for 2024/25 was for the net cost to reduce showing that we are now on the right trajectory.

Appendix 5 – Golf Complex Staffing Structure and Budget

The Town Clerk explained the staffing structure highlighting that the golf shop staffing is a very tight staffing structure, with minimal overlap and no scope for savings. The greenkeeping team is overseen by the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator. It was explained that ideally there would be more capacity for this team in the summer months, but generally the structure works well. It was also highlighted that the management of the golf complex is split across a number of officers which brings its difficulties.

Councillor Wendy Hillary mentioned that we did used to have a Golf Manager but it was an expensive luxury and the team we have are doing a good job maintaining the standard for less cost than under the previous arrangement.

Councillor Arun M Chandran added that with even one person absent from work there would be issues with maintaining the service which shows that the staffing structure is efficient.

Appendix 6 – Prior Year Capital Investment

Received.

Appendix 7 – Future Capital Investment

Received.

Appendix 8 – Memberships

The Town Clerk advised that memberships were currently up on the same period last year this appendix giving evidence to the impact of the improvements on the course and less risk averse opening policy. It was further highlighted that a high proportion of Members are in the older age categories so long-term highlights the importance of bringing in more younger golfers. There is currently a 30/70 split between Newton Aycliffe residents and Members residing outside of the Parish.

Councillor Jed Hillary asked if there is a breakdown of parish and non-parish green fees.

The Golf Administrator advised he does not have figures for the green fees due to the limited capacity of the golf shop staff but that this was one of the reasons for undertaking the survey of users and requesting their post code.

Appendix 9 – Income Analysis

Received

Appendix 10 – Improvement and Investment Plan

The Town Clerk advised that this plan had been updated since being reported to the Recreation Committee with costs and completed works etc as requested.

Officers were now requesting Members to consider if they require more work to be carried out or if they had any further questions.

It was stressed that the Plan was intended to be a guide for officers in planning priorities and budgets and that any proposed project would be reported to the relevant Council committee in the usual way, with no financial commitments having been made at this time.

Councillor Jed Hillary asked what the total cost would be for all of the works included within the plan.

The Finance Manager advised that not all costs have been sourced yet.

The Town Clerk reiterated that the intention of the plan was to provide a guide and to set priorities, and any costs would be fed into the financial planning process.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that as the Plan had been previously discussed at a Recreation Committee Meeting, and the clarification had been received that the plan was intended to be a guide rather than a financial plan, it be recommended that the Plan be agreed.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft thanked the staff involved for the improvements already implemented on the golf course (Grounds Maintenance Service Coordinator and greenkeeping team).

Councillor Carl Robinson also praised the work carried out in several areas and thanked the officers. He advised that the Golf Club will be writing a letter of thanks.

Appendix 11 – 2024/25 Golf Complex Fees and Charges

Received.

Appendix 12 – Customer Survey

A discussion was held around the survey and how to identify whether the surveys are completed by Parish residents or non-Parish residents.

The Head of Leisure and Events advised that a postcode had been requested in the draft survey.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran that the survey be agreed and launched at a time to be agreed by officers.

Appendix 13 – Rainfall Statistics

Councillor Arun M Chandran stated that he felt it was important to keep a record of the rainfall statistics to monitor trends and requested that a record be maintained moving forward.

Councillor Wendy Hillary thanked the officers for the comprehensive information they had brought to Members in this report.

Councillor Carl Robinson requested an update report at a future meeting to monitor the progress on the outlay made so far on drainage on both the golf course and driving range.

It was agreed that no further meetings of the Golf Service Review are required at this stage.

Councillor Arun M Chandran concluded by reminding Members that if they are unable to attend a meeting they are still able to send in questions by email prior to the meeting, and also requested that all Members retain the papers from today's meeting for future use.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam and agreed that:

- i) The report and appendices be received.
- ii) That the aim and desired outcome of the service review be a reduction in the net running cost of the golf complex over the long term.
- iii) No further meetings of the Golf Service Review are required at this time.
- iv) Officers carry out further research into increasing female and youth usage.
- v) Statistics be maintained on course opening and hole closures.
- vi) The success of the golf course and driving range drainage improvement schemes be reviewed and reported to the Recreation Committee.
- vii) The Golf Complex Service Plan be agreed and reported to the Recreation Committee, subject to targets around increasing the number of female members and young members being included in future updates of the plan.
- viii) The Golf Complex Improvement and Investment Plan be agreed, subject to the plan being recognised as a guide for officers to aid service and financial planning, and all individual proposals being subject to a full report to the relevant committee.
- ix) The Customer Survey be agreed and issued at an appropriate time to be agreed by officers.

CHAIRMAN