

## FULL COUNCIL

**WEDNESDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2024 – 7.00 p.m.**

Minutes of the proceedings of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the **COUNCIL** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2024 at 7.00 p.m.**

### PRESENT

#### **Councillor John Clark (Chairman)**

Councillors Eddy Adam, Martin Ashcroft, Jim Atkinson, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Ian Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Simon Hocking, Sandra Kirby, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

### OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)  
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)  
Mr. Andy Clark (Oak Leaf Sports Complex Manager)  
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

### IN ATTENDANCE

Two members of the public.

#### **76. NOTICE OF MEETING**

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

#### **77. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Tony Armstrong, Lindsey Aston, Peter Bergg, Sandra Haigh, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, Brian McAnaney and John Moore.

#### **78. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS**

There had been no requests for dispensations under disclosable or non-disclosable interests.

#### **79. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Eddy Adam, Jim Atkinson and Ken Robson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 10 regarding the Winter Maintenance Service Level Agreement as they are Councillors at Durham County Council.

Councillors Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill and John Clark declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 15 regarding the Community Recognition Scheme Nomination as they are associated with the charity.

Councillor Carl Robinson declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 15 as a trustee of the charity in question.

## 80. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public read out a statement in support of Agenda Item 16 regarding safety arrangements at Council Meetings.

The Chairman thanked the member of the public for their consideration of this and advised that her comments would be taken on board as part of the consideration of this agenda item.

## 81. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and;

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 82. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor provided a list of appointments for the period from the 12<sup>th</sup> September to 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2024.

The Town Clerk announced that the Newton Aycliffe Neighbourhood Policing Team had requested the use of the Council depot yard from which to launch and fly drones and requested that the Council authorise him to agree the request and draw up an appropriate licence agreement.

Councillor Jed Hillary queried if the request complies with the Town Councils' drone policy. The Town Clerk confirmed that this was the case.

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the Mayor's announcements be received.
- ii) That the request from the Newton Aycliffe Neighbourhood Policing Team to use the depot yard to launch and fly drones be agreed and the Town Clerk be authorised to draw up a licence for the use of the land.

## 83. COMMITTEE MINUTES

### (a) Recreation Committee

Councillor George Gray commented on Minute 49 regarding the public petition to install a bench at West Park expressing his disappointment at the decision to refuse the request.

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024 be received; and
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(b) Environment Committee**

It was proposed by Councillor Ian Gray, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024 be received; and
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(c) Policy and Resources Committee**

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2024 be received; and
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**84. COMMUNITY HUB OUTSIDE BODY REPRESENTATIVE**

Members were asked to consider appointing an outside body representative to the Community Hub following the resignation of Councillor Neville Jones.

As there were no nominees for this, it was agreed that position remain vacant.

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the Community Hub outside body representative position remains vacant.

**85. WINTER MAINTENANCE SERVICE LEVEL ARRANGEMENTS**

The Town Clerk presented a report for members to consider an update of the Service Level Agreement for Winter Maintenance by Durham County Council.

Members were requested to consider and agree the revised agreement.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor John Clark; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the original purpose of the Service Level Agreement entered into, be noted.
- iii) That the Council continue the Winter Maintenance Agreement with Durham County Council and that officers sign the updated Service Level Agreement.
- iv) That if additional expenditure on winter maintenance equipment is required in the future, a report be brought to the relevant committee for members' consideration.

## 86. EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S 2023/24 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN

Members received a report from the Finance Manager setting out the external auditor's report and certificate in respect of the Council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the 2023/24 financial year.

Members discussed the 'minor scope for improvement recommendation' from the external auditor that 'gov.uk' email addresses be issued to all Councillors.

Councillor Arun Chandran suggested that if this is not a statutory requirement then the Council should be writing to the M.P. and the Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to ask them to intervene.

Councillor Eddy Adam asked for further information as to what other authorities do and what the risks are to the Council.

The Town Clerk advised that the damage to the Council from not implementing the auditor's recommendation would be largely reputational as a qualified annual return suggests to the general public that the Council is not managing its governance and finances properly. However the reality of the situation is that gov.uk email addresses are not mandatory and only considered best practice.

Councillor Eddy Adam proposed that the Town Clerk contact County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) initially for their advice on what other Councils are doing and then fall back on Councillor Chandran's proposal to contact the M.P. and Minister of State if not satisfied with the outcome.

This was seconded by Councillor Simon Hocking.

### **RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the external auditor's Audit Completion Letter, External Audit Report and Certificate in respect of the 2023/24 Annual Governance and Accountability Return be received.
- ii) That the Finance Manager to publish public notice of the completion of the audit and the audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return on the Council website.
- iii) That the unqualified external audit opinion highlighting that *"the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislative and regulatory requirements have not been met"*; be noted.
- iv) That the external auditor's recommendation of a minor scope for improvement that the Council issues gov.uk email addresses to all Councillors next year be noted, and that the Town Clerk contact CDALC to source advice as to what other councils are doing in light of this recommendation, and bring a further report back to the Council.

## 87. OUTSIDE BODIES

Members received verbal reports from representatives on the following Outside Bodies:

- a) **County Durham Association of Local Councils**  
Councillor Ken Robson gave a verbal update.
- b) **Aycliffe Village Community Association**  
Councillor Carl Robinson gave a verbal update.
- c) **Woodham Village Community Association**  
There had been no meeting.
- d) **Great Aycliffe and Middridge Local Councils' Committee**  
There had been no meeting.
- e) **Larger Local Councils' Forum**  
There had been no meeting.
- f) **Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society**  
Councillor Ian Gray gave a verbal update.
- g) **Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**  
There was nothing to report back.
- h) **Western Area Partnership**  
Councillor Ken Robson gave a verbal update.
- i) **Cornforth Partnership**  
There had been no meeting.
- j) **Community Hub Development Group**  
No representative present.

## 88. EXEMPT BUSINESS

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft; and

**RESOLVED** – that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it was, in the opinion of the Council, advisable that the public and press be excluded from the meeting.

## 89. LEISURE MANAGEMENT BOOKING SYSTEM

Members considered a report to request consideration of the upgrade of the Leisure Management Till and Booking System used at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex and Golf Complex.

Councillor Jed Hillary questioned why only one provider had been approached for a quote.

The Town Clerk clarified that the Standing Orders Exemption Form attached with the report explained the reasons for working with one provider.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft thanked the officers for well written and detailed report and proposed that the recommendations of the report be agreed. This was seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and unanimously agreed.

### **RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report and appendices be received;
- ii) That the Standing Order Exemption Form, allowing the Council to work with the current supplier to upgrade the Leisure Management System be approved.
- iii) That the upgrade of the Leisure Management System as set out in the report and Appendix 1 be approved in principle.
- iv) That the upgraded Leisure Management System be hosted by the current supplier via the cloud.
- v) That the additional revenue budget requirement of £7,657 is offset via additional income on the Sports Complex Revenue Budget, via the fees and charges increases due to be reported to a Special Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee in November.

*Councillor Carl Robinson left the chamber for the discussion of the next agenda item.*

## 90. COMMUNITY RECOGNITION AND AWARDS SCHEME NOMINATION

Members considered and discussed a nomination received under the Council's Community Recognition and Awards Scheme.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson, and seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson; and

### **RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the nominee identified within the report be invited to receive a Local Hero Medal and Community Recognition Scheme Certificate at a future meeting.

*Councillor Carl Robinson returned to the meeting.*

## 91. COUNCIL MEETING SAFETY ARRANGEMENTS

The Town Clerk presented a Near Miss Report drafted following a public disorder incident at a recent Sub-Committee Meeting highlighting the actions taken and proposed remedial actions to mitigate against the risk of a reoccurrence and to improve and enhance meeting safety arrangements.

Members' consideration and feedback on the Council's meeting safety arrangements was requested.

Councillors praised the Town Clerk for his actions on the evening highlighting that the incident had been handled perfectly. Members thanked the Town Clerk for the report and action plan.

Councillor Eddy Adam asked about the budget for installation of CCTV cameras at the offices. The Town Clerk advised that budget was in place via the VAT windfall resources.

Councillor Michael Stead recommended that the member of the public concerned should be excluded from attending Council Meetings under the Council's Exclusion Policy. This was seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran.

Councillor Jed Hillary proposed that a ban of the maximum length permissible of 24 months should be issued with no need to bring this back for members approval. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Hill.

Councillor Michael Stead agreed the amendment and withdrew his original proposal.

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the Near Miss report be received.
- ii) That the remedial action plan be implemented by the Town Clerk.
- iii) That the member of the public noted in the Near Miss Report receive a 24-month exclusion to Council meetings as per the Councils' Exclusion Policy.

## 92. RE-ADMISSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson; and

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

**CHAIRMAN**