

SPECIAL POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 13th NOVEMBER 2024

Minutes of the Special meeting of the **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe on Wednesday 13th November 2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Arun M. Chandran (Chairman)

Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jim Atkinson, John Clark, George Gray, Ian Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary (Vice Chairman), Wendy Hillary, Brian McAnaney, John Moore, Sandra Kirby, Carl Robinson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mr. Andrew Clark (Sports Complex Manager)
Mr. Chris Lawson (Golf Administrator)
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Mrs. Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Two members of the public.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran welcomed Councillor John Moore back after his short absence from attending meetings.

54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Neil Collinson, Sandra Haigh and Ken Robson.

55. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS

No dispensation requests had been received.

56. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Jed Hillary declared a pecuniary interest in the allotment rents section of Agenda Item 6, as an allotment tenant.

Councillor Carl Robinson declared a pecuniary interest in the golf fees section of Agenda Item 6, as a member of the Oak Leaf Golf Club.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran reminded members that if they have a pecuniary interest in an item, they are required to leave the meeting for the discussion of the item.

57. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no questions from the members of the public.

58. EMPLOYERS' NATIONAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTION INCREASE

Members were asked to consider a briefing note from the Finance Manager, highlighting the financial implications for the Council arising from the recently announced increase in employers' national insurance contributions in the Government Budget.

The Finance Manager read the briefing out for reference and presented the options for addressing the additional costs including reducing the contingency sum, increasing fees and charges, identifying efficiency and savings and budget cuts and increasing the precept and therefore Town Council Tax by more than previously agreed.

It was highlighted that if members agree the fees and charges increases as proposed in the Fees and Charges Report, this will help to keep any additional council tax increase down.

The Finance Manager asked Members to consider the information provided and provide some initial guidance to officers on their preferred option in order to inform the setting of the final 2025/26 Revenue Budget in January.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran explained he had discussed this issue with the Finance Manager prior to the meeting and proposed that the Council agrees to reduce the contingency sum to £10,000, which, taken alongside the better-than-expected Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Grant settlement, and working on the assumption that most of the recommendations on fees and charges increases would be agreed, this would bring the required Council Tax increase next year to just under 5%.

It was agreed that the officers be requested to prepare the final 2025/26 Revenue Budget on this basis.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- Officers be requested to prepare the final 2025/26 Revenue Budget on the basis of a maximum council tax increase of 5%.

59. COUNCIL FEES AND CHARGES FOR 2025/26

Members considered a report from the Finance Manager, outlining the recommended changes to the fees and charges for each of the Council's services for 2025/26.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran that Members move straight to the recommendations of the report and consider each set of recommendations in turn, and this was agreed.

Cemeteries

A proposed 10% increase in cemeteries fees for 2025/26 was considered.

Councillor Lindsay Aston thanked officers for providing a detailed, easy to read report.

She commented on the high level of subsidy from taxpayers for the cemeteries service of 63% and highlighted the information included in the report's appendix highlighting that the fee for a standard purchase and burial would need to be increased to £2,060 for the service to break even, taking into account the reduced charges for half plots, cremations etc.

She further referenced the lower figure quoted in the report of £1,567 for a purchase fee and burial fee, equating to a 44% increase, which would help move the cemeteries service closer to a break-even position.

Councillor Aston proposed that cemeteries fees be increased by 44%, highlighting that while this is a significant increase, fees would still be significantly less than those charged by Durham County Council. Councillor Michael Stead seconded this proposal.

A named vote was held with the following results:

For (11): Councillors Tony Armstrong, Lindsey Aston, Arun M. Chandran, Brian Haigh, Sandra Kirby, Brian McAnaney, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

Against (9): Councillors Eddy Adam, Martin Ashcroft, Jim Atkinson, John Clark, George Gray, Ian Gray, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Wendy Hillary

Councillor Jed Hillary asked if this increase would help to reduce the council tax increase, which the Finance Manager confirmed it would.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- a) Cemeteries fees be increased by 44% for 2025/26.
- b) The second and subsequent burial fee is removed from 2025/26.

Football Pitches

A number of options in relating to adult and junior football pitch fees were considered ranging from 3% increase to a 7% increase.

In relation to adult football pitch fees, Councillor Lindsay Aston highlighted the high level of subsidy from the local tax payer and the low cost per game per player and proposed a 25% increase in fees. This was seconded by Councillor Michael Stead.

The Finance Manager and Town Clerk advised that when the options had been considered there had been a lengthy discussion with the Works and Environment Manager who had highlighted that concerns had been raised by existing teams regarding their future viability and ability to afford the fees and that if fees were increased it could potentially stop them playing and result in a loss of income. The Sports Complex Manager added that football as a sporting activity is also decreasing within the Sports Complex and nationally.

The Town Clerk highlighted the success of the junior football club using School Aycliffe football pitches and requested that any consideration of significant increases to junior fees be carefully considered so as not to run the risk of losing some of those teams.

Councillor John Clark agreed with the officers that some pub teams may not be able to afford a significant increase in fees.

Councillor Eddy Adam agreed and reminded members that the football pitches are not maintained to the highest standard, only to the highest standard that the Council can afford, and the Council has also previously rejected funding applications to improve Simpasture pitches and the pavilion, so it would be unfair to raise the fees too much. On this basis he proposed that a 3% increase be implemented.

Councillor Tony Armstrong advised that he sees both sides of the argument, but that the Council has subsidised football teams since Covid and there is a need to reduce the subsidy; highlighting that an increase of 7% would be manageable.

Councillor Jim Atkinson reminded members that the facilities are maintained for public use as well, so the fees are paying towards children regularly playing on the pitches on the town.

Councillor Carl Robinson added that one of the key aims of the objectives and the precept, is to offer leisure facilities to assist with physical activity and mental health, for residents of the town. An increase of 25% may result in users not being able to take part and worsen physical and mental health.

Councillor Lindsay Aston said whilst she fully understood that officers are the experts and that we encourage sports and leisure etc, it isn't the majority who use the facilities, it's the minority and felt it was unfair to ask council tax payers to subsidise a service by so much.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran outlined that some Council facilities will simply not produce a profit and it's about the value of what is being offered. He proposed an amendment to the original proposal that adult football pitch fees are increased by 7%, to slowly close the gap in subsidy. This was seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson.

A vote was held on the amendment with the following results:

For	11
Against	8

The amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

A vote was held on the substantive motion with 15 voting for and 1 against.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

c) Adult football pitches fees for 2025/26 are increased by 7%.

With regard to junior football pitch fees it was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill that fees are increased by 3%. This was agreed by majority vote.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

d) Junior football pitch fees for 2025/26 are increased by 3%.

e) The fee for the casual hire of the pitches, e.g. one-off matches, is fixed at the non-member rate for a game of five a side football at the sports complex, which is currently £47.50, with a proposed increase to £50.00 for 2025/26.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

f) The proposed 35p increase in pre-school charges for 2025/26 was agreed.

Allotments

Councillor Jed Hillary left the meeting due to being an allotment tenant.

Members considered increases to the allotment rents for the 2026 year.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft proposed that the recommended 2026 allotment rent charging bands be increased by 10%, rounded up or down to the nearest 50p; as follows:-

£30.50 for Band A

£43.50 for Band B

£46.50 for Band C

£54.50 for Band D

£61.50 for Band E

This was seconded by Councillor Andy Hill.

Councillor Lindsay Aston proposed an increase of 25%, also rounded to the nearest 50p. Councillor Michael Stead highlighted that there is a waiting list and therefore demand, so a higher increase would be possible.

The Town Clerk clarified that allotments rent increases are strictly controlled by the Allotments Law and the Council is not permitted to increase rents by an unreasonable amount. In the officer's professional opinion, an increase of 10% would be the maximum increase that could be implemented without risking a challenge under allotments law. A 10% increase is in line with increases in running costs and also in line with the other fees and charges increases.

Councillor Carl Robinson asked if Councillor Martin Ashcroft would also like to include other allotments fees for poultry, pigeon, beekeeping and raised beds to be rounded to the nearest 50p which was agreed.

Councillor Wendy Hillary asked to clarify that 2025 allotments rents had been set at last year's meeting.

The Finance Manager confirmed that this was the case and that the Council is setting the rents for 2026 at this meeting as allotment law requires the Council to do so a year in advance.

Councillor Eddy Adam suggested the Town Council should be looking at other pieces of land to see where we can add more allotments.

Councillor Eddy Adam proposed amendment for a 3% increase in allotment rents in line with inflation for 2026. Councillor Jim Atkinson seconded this.

A vote was held on the amendment with 3 in favour and 12 against.

A vote was held on the original proposal for a 10% increase rounded to the nearest 50p, with 12 in favour, 1 against, and 1 abstention.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- g) Allotments rent charging bands for 2026 are increased by 10%.
- h) Pigeon site rents for 2025/26 are increased by 10%.
- i) Poultry site rents for 2026 are increased by 10%.
- j) Beekeeping plots rents for 2026 are increased by 10%.
- k) The rents for raised plots for 2026 are increased by 10%.
- l) All charges be rounded to the nearest 50p.

Councillor Eddy Adam asked if officers had spoken to the Great Aycliffe Garden Guild regarding the rent that would be due at the end of their first year of operation.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran advised that he had encouraged the Garden Guild to apply for a donation from the Council.

The Town Clerk clarified that that a licence had been agreed with the Garden Guild which included provision for a charge with effect from the second year in line with the Town Council's highest allotment band. He and the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator were due to have a meeting with the Garden Guild soon, to see how the first year had gone.

The proposed increase was agreed, subject to officers having a discussion with the Garden Guild. Councillor Andy Hill said he had spoken to them recently and they said they had had a good year.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- m) The rent band for a large allotment is implemented for use of the land at Clarence Chare Allotments as a Garden Guild from 2025/26, increasing by 10% in 2026/27, subject to liaising with the Garden Guild regarding the 2026/27 increase.

Councillor Jed Hillary returned to the meeting.

Sports Complex

Members considered the various fees and charges for the sports complex.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun. M. Chandran and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- n) The annual membership fee be increased from £26.50 to £28.00 for adults and from £18.50 to £20.50 for senior citizens for 2025/26.
- o) The annual membership for juniors be reduced from £17.50 to £10.00 for 2025/26.
- p) The group membership fee be frozen at £40 for 2025/26.
- q) The following increases in indoor bowls fees are agreed:
 - **Members**
Adult and Senior Citizens from £3.40 to £3.70 for 2025/26
 - **Non-Members**
Adult and Senior Citizens from £4.50 to £4.90 for 2025/26
 - **Junior Members** – From £2.00 to £2.30 for 2025/26
 - **Junior Non-Members** – From £3.00 to £3.30 for 2025/26
- r) The following changes to sporting activities prices are agreed:

Members:

Activity	Category	Member 2024/25 Rate	Member 2025/26 Rate
Badminton	Adult /Senior	£6.50	£6.90
	Junior (reduction)	£3.60	£3.50
Squash	Adult /Senior	£6.50	£6.90
	Junior (reduction)	£3.60	£3.50
Table Tennis	Adult /Senior	£6.50	£6.90
	Junior (reduction)	£3.60	£3.50
Pickleball	Adult /Senior	£6.50	£6.90
	Junior	£3.60	£3.50
Dartboard	All	£1.00	£1.00
Five a Side Football	Adult /Senior	£39.00	£41.50
	Junior	£23.50	£26.00

Non-Members:

Activity	Category	Non-Member 2024/25 Rate	Non-Member 2025/26 Rate
Badminton	Adult /Senior	£8.20	£8.70
	Junior (freeze)	£5.20	£4.50
Squash	Adult /Senior	£8.20	£8.70
	Junior (freeze)	£5.20	£4.50
Table Tennis	Adult /Senior	£8.20	£8.70
	Junior (freeze)	£5.20	£4.50
Pickleball	Adult /Senior	£8.20	£8.70
	Junior	£5.20	£4.50
Dartboard	All	£2.00	£2.00
Five a Side Football	Adult /Senior	£47.50	£50.00
	Junior	£29.50	£32.00

Councillor Martin Ashcroft asked if the fees could be decimalised to the nearest 50p, bearing in mind the recent I.T. issues at the Sports Complex.

The Sports Complex Manager raised concerns that a charge of £7 or £9 sounds more than £6.90 or £8.70 and may put customers off.

- s) The suspension of the £5.00 deposit for hire of equipment and facilities, and the increase in equipment hire charges from £1.30 to £1.50 per hour for 2025/26 be agreed.
- t) The proposed increase in bowls locker hire from £7.50 to £7.75 per annum for 2025/26 be agreed.
- u) The proposed freeze in the shower fee at £1.50 per use be agreed.
- v) The proposed implementation of the following fees for hire of the entertainment system be agreed:

Activity	2025/26 Rate
Hire	£50.00
General Message – two screens	£2.00
Sponsorship – 1 month	£10.00
Sponsorship – 2 months	£15.00
Sponsorship – 1 year	£50.00

- w) The simplification of the function room hire at one rate regardless of whether a buffet is included or not; deleting the option 'with buffet' be agreed.
- x) The following increases in the hourly function room hire be agreed for 2025/26:
 - Members Function Room hire from £10.00 to £10.50 per hour
 - Non-Members Function Room hire from £13.00 to £13.50 per hour

Golf Complex

Councillor Carl Robinson left the meeting due to being a member of the Oak Leaf Golf Club.

Members considered the various fees and charges for the golf complex.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun. M. Chandran and seconded by Councillor Wendy Hillary and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- y) Option 3 (£47 increase) be the preferred option for the increase in membership prices for adults and over 60's for 2025/26, and the following fees be agreed:

Membership Category	2025/26 Price
7 Day Adult	£494.00
5 Day Adult	£449.00
7 Day Over 60	£449.00
5 Day Over 60	£399.00

- z) The upper age limit on the 19 to 25 membership category be extended to age 30.
- aa) Option 3 (£23 increase) be the preferred option for the increase in the membership price for the 19 to 30 category in 2025/26, as follows:

Membership Category	2025/26 Price
19 – 25 (30)	£175.00

- ab) Option 3 (£7 and £3 increases) be the preferred option for the increase in the membership price for the Junior 15 to 18 and Under 14 categories in 2025/26, and the following fees be agreed:

Membership Category	2025/26 Price
Junior 15 to 18	£59.00
Junior 14 and under	£25.00

- ac) The proposed freeze in the replacement membership card charge be agreed.
- ad) The proposed continuation of 14 month for the price of 12 months membership special offer from 1st February 2024 for new members be agreed.
- ae) Option 3 (an increase of between 10% and 19%) be the preferred option for the increase in green fees in 2025/26, and the following fees be agreed:

Green Fee Category	2025/26 Fees
Weekday	£21.00
Weekend/Bank Holiday	£25.00
Winter	£12.50

- af) Option 3 (an increase of 7%) be the preferred option for the increase in the County Card rate for 2025/26, as follows:

Green Fee Category	2025/26 Rate
County Card	£15.00

- ag) Option 3 (an increase of 7%) be the preferred option for the increase in visiting party green fees for 2025/26, as follows:

Green Fee Category	2025/26 Rate
Visiting Parties	£17.10

- ah) The Golf Administrator, in consultation with the Town Clerk and Finance Manager, continues to be authorised to offer special promotions during the year in response to customer demand and usage, and to react to pricing changes by competitors e.g. by reducing rates at quiet times of the day, week year.
- ai) Both member and non-member golf buggy hire fee are frozen in 2025/26.
- aj) Golf trolley hire fees are increased by 25p in 2025/26.

Councillor Jed Hillary asked why golf trolley hire fees are being increased when buggy hire fees were being frozen. The Finance Manager explained that this was because less people are hiring the buggies and income is falling.

- ak) The following increases in driving range baskets fees for 2025/25 be agreed:

	2024/25 Rate	2025/26 Rate
Small Basket	£4.00	£4.25
Large Basket	£7.25	£7.75

- al) The driving range card price be increased to £62.
- am) The custom fit charge be frozen at £20 for 2025/26.

Councillor Carl Robinson returned to the meeting.

Caravan and Camping Site

It was proposed by Councillor Arun. M. Chandran and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- an) The following increases for the use of the caravan site for 2025/26 be agreed:
 - £0.50 increase for casual use per night
 - £0.50 increase for rallies per night (up to 10 vans)
 - The introduction of a non-refundable deposit for casual users equivalent to the first night booking fee
 - The introduction of a non-refundable deposit for rally bookings of £25 per booking.

Waiving of Standing Orders

It was proposed by Councillor Arun. M. Chandran and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- ao) Standing Orders be waived with regard to the increases in fees and charges in relation to:
 - Allotments
 - Poultry Sites
 - Pigeon Lofts
 - Bee Plots, and
 - Raised Beds

This is to enable the increases in these charges to be reported to the Allotment Annual General Meeting which is being held on 19th November 2024 and to ensure that allotment law is followed.