

## FULL COUNCIL

**WEDNESDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 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 11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2024** at **7.00 p.m.**

### **PRESENT**

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

Councillors Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jim Atkinson, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Ian Gray, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Sandra Kirby, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, Brian McAnaney, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead and John Woodward.

### **OFFICERS**

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)

Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

### **IN ATTENDANCE**

One member of the public.

Prior to commencement of the meeting, the presentation of a certificate and medal was made to Mrs. Jaqueline McFadden; the recipient of a Community Recognition Scheme Award, by the Mayor.

### **93. NOTICE OF MEETING**

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

### **94. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Peter Bergg, Brian Haigh, Sandra Haigh, Simon Hocking, and Anne Woodward.

### **95. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS**

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

### **96. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **97. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

## 98. 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 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 99. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor gave a list of appointments for the period from the 24<sup>th</sup> October to 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024. He added that the arrangements are now complete for the Annual Civic Dinner in February and that invitations are in the process of being sent out.

Councillors also wished to pass on their condolences to the Finance Manager following a recent bereavement.

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the Mayor's announcements be received.

## 100. COMMITTEE MINUTES

### (a) Special Policy and Resources Committee

The Chairman of the Policy Resources Committee in consultation with the Town Clerk and the Finance Manager requested that the Council gave further consideration to the amount of the increase proposed for the cemeteries fees in the recommendations of the Special Policy and Resources Committee Meeting.

He explained that he and the officers had concerns over the 44% increase proposed in one year in relation to cemeteries fees which was much higher than the increases being made in other fees and charges.

He highlighted that the approach to balancing the final 2025/26 Revenue Budget had been agreed at the same meeting and did not require the cemeteries fees being increased by such a degree.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that the officer's original recommendation of a 10% increase should instead be agreed. This was seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary.

A discussion then followed.

Councillor Eddy Adam proposed an amendment that the decision with regard to the cemeteries fees, along with the football pitch fees and allotments rents should be referred back to the Policy and Resources Committee for further consideration. This was seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson.

The Town Clerk clarified that the allotments fees cannot be altered as allotments law requires that notification of the increase is given a year in advance and that the notification of the increase had already been sent out.

Councillor Eddy Adam agreed to change his amendment to remove reconsideration of the allotments rents.

Councillor Michael Stead said that it was disappointing that the fees and charges increases were being reconsidered as the results had been agreed by a majority at the Special Policy and Resources Committee Meeting, highlighting that council tax payers are facing an above inflation increase at a time when the Council is putting more money into reserves.

Councillor Arun Chandran agreed to withdraw his proposal with a view to discussing the cemeteries and football pitches fee increases again at the January Policy and Resources meeting.

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Special Policy and Resources Committee held on the 13<sup>th</sup> November 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted subject to reconsideration of the cemeteries and football pitch fees at the January meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee.

**(b) Recreation Committee**

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(c) Environment Committee**

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor Phillip Hawkins; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(d) 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 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

## 101. ROYAL GARDEN PARTY 2025 NOMINATION

A note was circulated from the County Durham Association of Local Councils seeking nominations for the 2025 Royal Garden Party.

Councillor Joanne Jones nominated Councillor Wendy Hillary citing her excellent work as a town councillor and as Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

This was seconded by Councillor Michael Stead.

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) Councillor Wendy Hillary (plus one guest) be nominated to attend the 2025 Royal Garden Party.

## 102. ENABLING REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING AT COUNCIL MEETINGS - CONSULTATION

The Town Clerk submitted correspondence received from the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) regarding a Government consultation on enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at Council meetings.

Members held a lengthy discussion on the topic and it was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam that a corporate response to this consultation on behalf of the Council should be made, along the lines of the briefing note prepared by the Town Clerk.

Councillors were encouraged to respond to the petition individually.

Questions were raised regarding costs of the technical improvements that will be needed and how they will be resourced along with training needs and upskilling.

The Town Clerk confirmed that he had sought some initial advice and costs around the information technology requirements with the intention of bringing a report forward if and when the legislation is changed.

Councillor Eddy Adam requested that the corporate response includes a request that the Government considers putting funding in place to assist councils with the costs of putting the information technology in place to facilitate effective online meetings.

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the consultation information be received.
- ii) That the Town Clerk sends a corporate response on behalf of the Town Council to include a request that the Government considers putting funding in place to assist councils with the costs of putting the information technology in place to facilitate effective online meetings.

### 103. TERRORISM (PROTECTION OF PREMISES) BILL – MARTYN’S LAW

Members received a report from the Town Clerk with information in relation to the forthcoming Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill, commonly known as Martyn’s Law, which is currently going through the Parliamentary process with a view to becoming law and highlighting the potential implications for the Council.

The Chairman thanked the Town Clerk for the report.

Councillor Eddy Adam highlighted that officers would need to check that third parties such as events providers have the supporting knowledge and training required to comply with this law and that this would need to be built into licences for future events.

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report be received and the early actions being taken by officers ahead of Martyn’s Law coming into effect be noted.

### 104. OUTSIDE BODIES

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

**a) County Durham Association of Local Councils**

Councillor Jed Hillary gave a verbal update highlighting that the meeting had discussed the Durham County Council budget situation and the lobbying of the government for funding for town and parish councils towards the costs of the national insurance increase.

**b) Aycliffe Village Community Association**

Councillor Carl Robinson gave a verbal update.

**c) Woodham Village Community Association**

Councillor Michael Stead reiterated previous concerns that he had not received invitation to the meetings. Members requested that the Town Clerk write to the members of the Woodham Village Community Association once again to request that notification of meetings is sent.

**d) Great Aycliffe and Middridge Local Councils’ Committee**

There had been no meeting.

**e) Larger Local Councils’ Forum**

Councillor Jed Hillary gave a verbal update highlighting that the meeting had discussed a number of issues including gov.uk email addresses for councillors, bus services, adult safeguarding and investment accounts.

**f) Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society**

Councillor Ian Gray gave a verbal update.

**g) Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**

Councillor Jim Atkinson gave a verbal update.

**h) Western Area Partnership**

There had been no meeting.

**i) Cornforth Partnership**

There had been no meeting.

**j) Community Hub Development Group**

Councillors Tony Armstrong and Dorothy Bowman both expressed an interest to take on the vacant outside body representative position on the Community Hub Development Group.

A vote took place with the following results:

Councillor Dorothy Bowman – 10 votes

Councillor Tony Armstrong – 4 votes

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) that the reports from the Outside Bodies representatives be received.
- ii) That Councillor Dorothy Bowman be appointed as a representative on the Community Hub Development Group.

**CHAIRMAN**