

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD VIA ZOOM ON 25 JANUARY 2021

Present: Councillor A Varley (in the Chair)

Councillors S Ahmed, Mrs C Caisley, L Darwin, R Dodd, Mrs C Greenwell, A Hall, Mrs S Johnson, Mrs K Overbury and Mrs K Woodrow.

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There had been no apologies received.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

58. PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL RESERVES

A report by the Clerk had been circulated for consideration.

The report set out the current level of reserves held by the Town Council for general purposes, and those set aside for asset replacement, Cemetery reserves and tree replacement.

Councillors were further reminded that in January 2019, they had agreed to revise the figure they should hold in general reserves (minimum of 6 months operating expenses) to £165,000.

At the end of this financial year, a report would be presented to the Council listing any necessary transfers and unexpended amounts and it would be recommended that any available funds that weren't already earmarked for other purposes should be transferred to the General Reserves.

There were also some items that had been mentioned as possible additions to the budget for 2021-22 including an additional sum for the staffing budget (if required) and additional funds for the subscriptions and courses budget heading for training. These additional items could be met from any carry forward figures or from reserves.

The issue of land for planting trees was raised. The Town Council had received several offers of trees recently and she stated that the Town Council had very little land available for planting of trees other than the Park which already had hundreds of trees planted on the site. Continued maintenance of the trees was another issue to consider.

RESOLVED –

- (i) The Council noted the information relating to reserves.

58. PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL RESERVES (Continued)

(ii) It was agreed to examine the situation at year-end when there may be non-earmarked funds that could be transferred to the general reserve.

(iii) It was agreed to transfer appropriate funds to the Cemetery and tree reserve funds in April 2021.

59. BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2021-22

The Town Council had carried out an initial review of the budget for 2021-22 on 18th January and a draft copy of the budget from that meeting was submitted for approval.

As reported at that meeting, NCC had given prior notification of the indicative tax base figure for Ponteland for 2021-22 which was 5808.80. This represented an increase of 95.82 from the current year.

At the budget meeting, two options were presented for consideration. Option one which represented a zero increase on a band D property and option 2 which entailed leaving the precept the same as the current year which would lead to a small reduction in the band D tax rate.

Members decided at the meeting to proceed with option 1 and levy a precept of £429,096 on Northumberland County Council. This represented a zero percentage increase on a band D property which would remain at £73.87.

The Council also needed to consider the situation regarding fees and charges. In relation to the allotments, previous practice has been to increase the rents by £1 across the board. This would mean the new fees for the allotments in 2021-22 would be £39, £44 and £49.

In relation to the Cemetery fees, it was reported that the Cemetery Committee had not met in the current year and the fees had not changed since 2019. If the Council wanted to increase the Cemetery charges for 2021-22, the Clerk would prepare a report with suggested increases and a meeting of the Cemetery Committee would be arranged. This would likely be at the end of the current financial year.

It was noted that the fees had no impact on the budget however, the recommendations of the Cemetery Committee would need to be presented to the Council for formal approval.

RESOLVED –

(i) The draft budget for 2021-22 as presented be approved and the Council agree to levy a precept request of £429,096 on Northumberland County Council.

(ii) The Council agreed to increase allotment rents by £1 across the board resulting in fees of £39, £44 and £49 respectively.

59. BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2021-22 (Continued)

(iii) It was agreed to await the recommendations of the Cemetery Committee in relation to any increase in fees for 2021-22.

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CHAIRMAN

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DATE