

## HORWICH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held in the Council Chamber, Public Hall, Lee Lane, Horwich on Monday 16 January 2023 commencing at 7.15 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: D. Grant (in the Chair) I. Aldcroft, M. Baines, J. Bostocksmith, M. Brady, S. Chadwick, C. Rotheram, G. Stone, S. Williamson, P. Wright.  
Councillor M. Cox, Leader Bolton Council  
Sue Johnson, Chief Executive Officer Bolton Council  
C. Hutchinson, Town Clerk.  
4 members of the public

CHAIR TO OUTLINE FIRE SAFETY EVACUATION PROCEDURE:

FG 7501 Councillor Grant outlined the procedure from the information provided.

TO ACCEPT APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

FG 7502 Apologies were accepted from Councillors Burke, Denton and Rock. An apology for lateness was accepted from Councillor Stone.

TO REMIND MEMBERS TO MAKE A DECLARATION CONCERNING ANY MATTERS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE MEETING OF WHICH THEY HAVE AN INTEREST:

FG 7503 None.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PRESENT MAY PUT QUESTIONS OR MAKE OBSERVATIONS REGARDING MATTERS IN RELATION TO WHICH THE TOWN COUNCIL HAS POWERS OR DUTIES OR WHICH AFFECT THE PARISH. MAXIMUM PERIOD 15 MINUTES:

FG 7504 Resolved to move out of Committee to allow a member of the public to speak.

Information was provided about a new support group for veterans starting on 1 February 2023, supported by local and national charities.

Resolved to move back into Committee.

TO WELCOME SUE JOHNSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE BOLTON COUNCIL TO RECEIVE A PRESENTATION ON BOLTON COUNCIL'S BUDGET FOR 2023 -2024 AND DISCUSS HOW GOING FORWARD HORWICH TOWN COUNCIL AND BOLTON COUNCIL CAN WORK BETTER IN PARTNERSHIP FOR THE BENEFIT OF RESIDENTS, FOLLOWED BY QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS:

FG 7505 Councillor Grant welcomed Councillor Martyn Cox, Leader of Bolton Council and Sue Johnson, new Chief Executive Officer and former Treasurer of Bolton Council to the meeting and reminded Members that questions would be taken on the budget proposals only and that any questions on other matters should be emailed to the Town Clerk who would forward them to the Chief Executive. A copy of Bolton Council's budget proposals for 2023/24 had been circulated to all Members and a brief overview of the Cabinet's proposals was provided:

- There were additional costs due to higher-than-expected staff pay award, price inflation, increased energy costs along with overall additional pressures of £11.5m in 2022/23

- The budget for 2023/24 would have to take into account continued financial pressures, the initial 2023/24 shortfall was estimated 12 months ago, a pay award expected above 2%, inflation increasing although at a slower rate than the current year, along with ongoing demand pressures, particularly in social care
- On the plus side, the employer rate for staff pension contributions remained the same, corporate borrowing savings, better than expected business rates and council tax predictions and more government money for social care
- The expected savings target for 2023/24 is circa £15m and the proposal is to identify savings across directorates of £4.3m, use a one-off contribution from the NHS of £0.9m to dovetail with Council services and to use reserves to cash flow the balance (£10m) until 2024/25 while noting that the use of one-off funds such as reserves is not a sustainable way to balance the Council's budget
- There is a proposed council tax increase of 3.99% overall (2% Adult Social Care precept and 1.99% general council tax
- Action has to be taken as Council is required to set a balanced budget, the scale of the gap can increase or decrease and transformational activity has a key role to play. Savings need to be delivered at pace over a one-year programme, due to so much uncertainty over costs and the amount of government funding available.
- Mitigations include Cost of Living support with a range of information available from Bolton Council. This includes the Household Support Fund which provides support to vulnerable and disadvantaged households with further funding to be announced from March 2023 with the amount to be confirmed. Budget proposals include no change to the Council Tax Support Scheme and the Council continues to prioritise its most vulnerable residents
- Consultation on the proposals ended on 9 January 2023 with responses currently being analysed and the budget report will be published in February, taking consultation feedback into account
- Budget proposals will go to Cabinet on 6 February 2023 and Council will set the budget and council tax for 2023/24 on 15 February 2023

Councillor Grant thanked Ms Johnson on behalf of Members for the presentation and invited her back for a more informal discussion at a later date and hoped that this was the start of a more positive relationship between Bolton Council and the three Town Councils. Members then raised a variety of questions to be noted and which would be duly responded to, after consultation with other officers at Bolton Council:

- As planning is a major issue in Horwich, it would be helpful to have a Planning Officer present at meetings when there are large or contentious applications
- Concern that consultations such as Horwich Leisure Centre appear to be little more than tick box exercises and that the Town Council is viewed as an inconvenience

- Good example of the Town Council “stepping up” was the installation of the safety fence on Green Lane after several years and in spite of a lack of communication from Bolton Council
- In response to a query, it was confirmed that the Greater Manchester component of the council tax rate for 2023/24 was unknown at the present time
- It was important that pressure should be put on central government regarding funding to local government
- Concern that pay awards were not keeping up with inflation and acknowledged that the Council is dependent on the goodwill of its staff and their public sector ethos
- Query regarding the figure for yield from housebuilding in Horwich compared to the rest of the borough, as thought to be in excess of 25%
- Concern that the council tax support system is not robust enough in response to the cost-of-living crisis
- In response to a query about procurement procedure regarding the suppliers who had demonstrated tax avoidance, advised that Council would send a strong signal of disapproval while showing caution, as this tax avoidance unlike tax evasion was not actually illegal
- Reference made to Bolton Council’s previous 25-point agreement, little movement on devolution of some services to town councils and which would result in costs savings to Bolton.

**Action: Town Clerk to liaise with Chief Executive’s Department to arrange a date for an informal meeting with the Chief Executive and Members of the Town Council. Members to email additional queries/comments to the Town Clerk for forwarding to the Chief Executive prior to the meeting.**

TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 5 DECEMBER 2022:

FG 7506 Resolved to approve the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 5 December 2022.

TO REVIEW AND RESPOND TO THE CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE BOROUGH SOLICITOR PROVIDING AN UPDATE ON THE DISPOSAL OF TELFORD STREET AND THAT THE COUNCIL REQUESTS THE TELFORD STREET STEERING GROUP TO UNDERTAKE PREPARATION OF A BUSINESS CASE FOR A COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER IN SOME FORM SUCH AS A COMMUNITY RIGHT TO MANAGE ON A LONG LEASE:

FG 7507 An email from the Borough Solicitor had confirmed that land at Telford Street had been removed from the SAMP list and would not be disposed of at this time, following acknowledgement that it is considered to be a valuable open space and opposition from the Council’s Greenspace Team who are responsible for managing parks and open spaces. The Town Council had been informed that the land was not available for sale at this time. Members expressed great concern at this response.

Resolved that Council requests the Telford Street Steering Group undertakes preparation of a business case for a community asset transfer of the land at

Telford Street to Horwich Town Council in some form such as a community right to manage on a long lease.

**Action: Telford Street Steering Group to meet and undertake preparation of a business case for a community asset transfer of land at Telford Street to Horwich Town Council in some form such as a community right to manage on a long lease.**

TO CONSIDER AN APPLICATION FROM HORWICH COMMUNITY CENTRE FOR GRANT FUNDING OF £1,000 FROM THE SPORT, SOCIAL AND CULTURE BUDGET FOR 2022 – 23 FOR PROVISION OF CHAIR-BASED EXERCISE SESSIONS FOR THE ELDERLY AND PEOPLE UNDERGOING REHABILITATION AFTER ILLNESS:

FG 7508 Members were informed that this was being proposed as a weekly afternoon activity for members of the Tuesday Lunch Club at Horwich Community Centre as well as being promoted in and open to the whole community. In response to a query the Town Clerk confirmed that there were sufficient funds remaining in the relevant budget heading for the current financial year to be able to support this initiative.

Resolved to approve the application from Horwich Community Centre for grant funding of £1,000 from the Sport, Social and Culture budget for 2022 -23 for the provision of chair-based exercise sessions for the elderly and people undergoing rehabilitation after illness.

TO APPROVE ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT – SCHEDULE ATTACHED:

FG 7509 Resolved to approve the accounts for payment amounting to £14,010.39.

Pixelcreated (Website updates to 31.12.22)	£30.00
C. Hutchinson (Re-imburement for purchase of anti-virus software)	£49.99
Bolton Council (Signage on Green Lane fencing)	£228.00
Leach Briely Accountants (payroll, auto enrolment services to 30.11.22)	£246.00
Nationwide Franking Sense (Quarterly rental Xerox C450 copier)	£187.36
(Quarterly rental Ricoh copier)	£351.00
Groundwork UK (Repayment of unspent Neighbourhood Plan grant)	£2,432.00
HM Revenue and Customs (PAYE tax month 9)	£4,236.04
Transfer to Town Mayor's Charity Account	£1,250.00
Transfer to Salaries and Wages Account	£5,000.00

Payments to Pixelcreated and C. Hutchinson were made in accordance with LGA 1972 s142 and to Groundwork UK with Localism Act 2011 s9. Transfer to Salaries and Wages was authorised out of Committee.

TOWN CLERKS REPORT (EMAILED TO MEMBERS) – FOR INFORMATION ONLY:

- FG 7510
- a. Record of outstanding motions
  - b. Bolton Council: notice of partially successful nomination from Bolton Wanderers Supporters Society Ltd for the listing of the University of Bolton Stadium as an Asset of Community Value
  - c. Horwich RMI Harriers: feedback/monitoring form for funding of £1,094 for road closure costs for Pike Race September 2021.
  - d. Chris Green MP: letter in response to correspondence from Horwich Town Council regarding delivery of M61 Junction 7.
  - e. NALC: open letter to all local councils from the Chair
  - f. Phil Mason BWFC: response regarding matchday parking.

The Town Clerk's report was noted.

REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES – FOR INFORMATION ONLY:

- FG 7511
- a. Town Mayor of Horwich  
Following events attended:
    - Fundraising concert for Muscular Dystrophy
    - Lighting of the Civic Christmas Tree with winners of the Design a Christmas Card competition

Following events attended by Deputy Town Mayor:

    - Lighting of Blackrod Civic Christmas Tree
    - Wright Place Lunch Club Christmas meal
    - Mayor of Adlington's Christmas fundraising concert
  - b. Horwich Ward Councillors  
Councillor Brady:
    - All salt bins due to be refilled by the end of the week
    - Work on Old Station Park delayed by a couple of weeks due to bad weather, contractors to stay on site to prepare foundations for new play equipment

Councillor Grant:

    - A lease had been made available for the football club for the use of Hilton playing fields
    - Faced with the prospect of a high rent for the use of Hilton Community Centre, the Table Tennis Club had opened up the facility to other users as a community building
  - c. Representatives on Outside Bodies  
Councillor Stone informed Members that the Montcliffe Quarry extension appeal had been turned down.

TO APPROVE THE DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE AS 13 FEBRUARY 2023:

FG 7501            Resolved to confirm the date of the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee as 13 February 2023.

The meeting closed at 8.08 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....