

NORTHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 19 January 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Birch (Chair); Councillor Marriott (Deputy Chair); Councillors Lane, B Markham, McCutcheon and Russell

In attendance: Councillors Ashraf, Hallam, Hibbert and Stone with Mr R Walden (Acting Town Clerk), Ms M Goodman and Mr L Gould (Borough Council) and Dr L Sambrook-Smith (Northants CALC)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5th January 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

4. TRANSFER OF PROPERTY AND SERVICES

The Acting Town Clerk recalled that over a period of time a wide range of properties and services had been suggested for possible transfer from the Borough Council to the new Town Council. These fell into three general categories: those which had already been agreed; those which the Borough had agreed to transfer in principle subject to further reports; and those in respect of which the Town Council had requested further information on the financial and staffing implications of transfer before considering further.

a) Transfers already agreed

The Statutory Order creating the Town Council had transferred the following allotment sites on 1st April 2021: Billing Road East, Broadmead Avenue, Glebeland Road, Graspin Lane, Harlestone Road, Parklands, Rothersthorpe Road and Southfields.

The Order had also transferred the Mayoralty and accordingly the full current budget for mayoral support services is being included in the draft budget. A long list of other civic items including regalia, robes, muniments and other artefacts was being compiled and would be reported in due course.

Following the creation of the Town Council the Borough Council's previous responsibility for maintaining closed churchyards also passed automatically to the Town Council. I have not yet been advised the precise areas of land involved or the maintenance costs for them.

b) Transfers agreed in principle by the Borough Council

At its meeting on 2nd November the Borough Council had agreed in principle to transfer the following property and services subject to further reports to the Cross Party Working Group and full Council: Markets, Events and Entertainments, Festive Lighting, Street Furniture, Hanging baskets and Planting Displays, Town Twinning, Community Grants, and Town Centre Management Activities.

The Borough Council at its meeting on 18th January had agreed that the Town Council be offered, subject to the concurrence of the Shadow West Northants Council, a long lease of the historic part of the Guildhall on an internal repairing basis only. At the last meeting of this Committee it had been noted that the principal council would retain the freehold and responsibility for structural repairs including the roof and the external statues. As the Guildhall was currently managed and serviced as a single unit with the modern office extension and could not be readily be divided it was likely that the landlord would continue to be responsible for heating, lighting and other services, cleaning, security and other overheads such as insurance and business rates. The Town Council would then be required to pay a service charge for its proportion of those costs.

The Committee had agreed at its last meeting that the Town Council was willing to continue to explore a long lease of the historic part of the Guildhall as indicated, subject to the receipt of further details of all income and expenditure related to this part of the premises. No further details were available at this meeting, but officers undertook to endeavour to present more details of income and expenditure at the Council meeting.

c) Property and Services for which the Committee has requested more information

In addition to the services set out in sections a) and b) above, he recalled that the Committee had asked the Borough Council for advice as to the financial and staffing implications of further potentially local services being transferred to it. These were: Local Open Spaces and Play Ares (but excluding premier parks and land held under the Housing Revenue Account), Community Centres, War Memorial and statues, Council representatives on outside bodies and charities, Neighbourhood Wardens, Park Rangers.

It was accepted that Councillors would require further information on all the above property and services in due course to enable them to consider which services the Council wished to continue to explore. However, as many services are currently managed as part of much wider contracts or in a “package” with other services, he advised that disaggregating the precise income and expenditure details which Councillors would expect to see as part of usual budget preparation was complex and would take some time to achieve, final figures may not be available in time for the Council meeting on 27th January.

Given the circumstances set out in the above advice, the Committee considered the best courses of action including potential discussions with West Northants Council which had already included provision in its own draft budget for many of the services which might potentially be transferred.

Recommended:

- 1. To agree in principle, subject to the concurrence of the Shadow West Northants Council, to the transfer on 1st April of those properties and services set out in paragraph (b) of the report of the Acting Town Clerk (including a long lease of the historic part of the Guildhall) and, subject to the approval of the draft budget for 2021/22, further reports on the financial and staffing implications of these transfers be presented to the Executive Committee;**
- 2. To explore with the Shadow West Northants Council a possible funded transfer of the further services set out in paragraph (c) of the report on 1st April 2021; and**
- 3. That, in the event of the Borough/ West Northants Councils agreeing to the transfer of property and services outlined above but it not proving possible to conclude the formalities of any of those transfers by 1st April, 2021, the Town Clerk be authorised to conclude a Service Level Agreement to enable those services to be continued to be delivered under existing arrangements until such time in 2021 when the formalities of transfer can be completed.**

5. BUDGET 2021/22

The Acting Town Clerk advised that the Meeting of the Council on 27th January 2021 was the final occasion at which the Council could agree its budget for the coming financial year and agree a precept upon West Northants Council. He further advised that, for the reasons explained in the previous item, it had not been possible to provide the degree of itemised estimated income and expenditure for all budget heads which Councillors might usually expect to have before them as a number of key component decisions, not least relating to services to be transferred, were yet to be finalised. The draft budget was therefore very much a contingency budget to meet the deadline for setting a precept and at the same time provide adequate financial flexibility to enable the Town Council after the May elections to determine its own priorities. Although the Government had not applied referendum principles to town and parish council precepts for 2021/22, it had urged restraint and had advised that it could consider introducing such measures (which are more likely for the largest town councils) for future years.

The Borough Council had suggested a draft base budget for the Town Council, but it was this Council which had to make the final decision.

The net contingency budget of £1,775,500, based upon 36,401 equivalent Band D properties would result in a Council tax of £48.78 at Band D or £32.52 (62p per week) at Band A (a typical town centre property).

This level of proposed council tax compared with other town and parish councils as follows:

Council	Band D £
Northampton Town Council	48.78
All parish councils in England (average)	75.00
Parishes in Northants (average)	71.00
Far Cotton and Delapre draft Budget	48.40
Kingsthorpe draft budget	32.11
Largest 20 Town Councils (average)	110.00

Recommended:

- 1. To approve the draft budget in the sum of £1,775,500 as set out in the Appendix to these minutes and to agree a precept on West Northamptonshire Council for 2021/22 in that sum;**
- 2. That, as a matter of priority, the new Town Clerk undertakes detailed reviews of all services which are transferred to enable the Council to consider any possible modifications and enhancements to those services.**
- 3. That, subject to the inclusion of appropriate provision in the finally adopted budget, the Town Clerk be authorised to recruit and appoint the following support staff to commence duties on 1st April 2021:**
 - Administration Officer (full time)**
 - Administration Assistant (part time)**
 - Finance Officer (part time); and**
- 4. That no expenditure be committed on the items in the budget marked with an * until the relevant committee has approved full details of how these contingency sums will be expended.**

Appendix
Northampton Town Council Draft Contingency Budget 2021/22

	NBC Recommended budget 2021/22	Recommended Revised Budget
Staffing costs (including Town Clerk, and one full time two part time admin staff), relocation costs, recruitment advertising, travel costs, etc	221,000	221,000
Contingency for additional staff recruited during 2021/22 including Community Engagement Officer and two Administrative Apprenticeships		60,000
Professional services/subscriptions (audit, insurance, legal fees, etc)	40,000	60,000
Running costs (including payroll/finance system costs, postage, office supplies, telephones, etc)	40,000	50,000
Mayoral and Member costs	130,000	130,000
Election costs	70,000	70,000
Accommodation costs	180,000	180,000
Other miscellaneous running costs and contingency	30,000	50,000
Amounts to develop future services in 2021/22 and/or transfer to reserves	400,000	
First contribution to reserves		200,000
Contingency for new services and service enhancements		200,000
Councillor Community Funding 25 x £3,000		75,000
Community Grants		50,000
Services (estimates based up current NBC direct service costs, excluding management costs)		
Allotments (excluding staff costs)		26,000
Markets		44,000
Planting, hanging baskets etc		66,500
Events and Entertainments		104,000*
Festive Lighting, Christmas etc		145,000*
Town Centre Management		44,000
Closed Churchyards		Not yet available
Total	1,111,000	1,775,500

6. FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED: That the following meetings which are due to consider the key decisions indicated be noted:

Full Council, Wednesday 27th January 2021 at 6:00pm

- Recommendations re: Town Clerk and Precept

Executive Committee, Thursday 18th February 2021 at 6:00pm

- Confirm committee structure
- FOI Publication Scheme
- IT, Telephones, Specialist software
- Payroll provider
- Professional Support
- Councillors Allowances
- Mayoral Allowance
- Chaplain and prayers at meetings

Full Council, Monday 1st March 2021 at 6:00pm

Executive Committee, Monday 15th March 2021 at 6:00pm

Executive Committee, Monday 12th April 2021 at 6:00pm

The meeting concluded at 7:55 pm