

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council Finance Committee held on Tuesday 22nd November 2022 at 11:00am via Zoom.

Present: Councillors A Doig, V Ashfield, D Freeman and R Hanson.

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley and Councillors R Ormerod, C Lattin, E Scott, G Holland and E Ashby.

Cllr A Doig in the **Chair**

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr L Brown.

2. To receive any declarations of interest from members

None received.

3. To receive and approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting on 21st June 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2022 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. To receive any public participation comments on the following agenda items.

None received.

5. Report on current financial position of the Council 2022-23

The Clerk provided the following report on the current financial position of the Council.

After a total expenditure of £198,951 during financial year 2021/22, the Parish Council started the current financial year with £82,920.16, this includes the Parish Council's reserves which remain at £45,000 – an appropriate level of reserves based on national guidance.

In January 2022, Full Council agreed an ambitious programme of work for this financial year, with expenditure thereof totalling £183,100 with a contingency fund – in addition to reserves - of £15,000 for unforeseen expenditure during the year. As we've seen in all years of the Parish Councils existence, this is an important provision for the Parish Council.

In addition to this budget, the Council also agreed to freeze the precept once more and – taking into account an increase in our tax base as a parish – this generated a precept of £156,737.17.

The Parish Council's expenditure to date totals £109,817 and based on our current projected cash flow, we are expected to finish this financial year with around £60,000 in the bank. This is important to remember given that expenditure has averaged £180,000 each year the Council has been active and the underspend from the first year of the Council has been used to keep the precept frozen.

In all but a few projects identified in this year's budget, I can see us spending all of the allocated funding.

Virements

There is currently no further projected expenditure for the *Shhh...11pm to 7am* campaign – could we have the £1,300 towards David Miller's Heritage Trail map for this financial year

The Heritage Information boards fund of £3,000 will not be spent – suggest a virement to move to fund the EVCP

The Parish Council has delivered a number of key events to the City – this would not have been possible without County Councillors financial support and hopeful that support will be possible again for Coronation.

Income

Received a total of £8,000 towards the Platinum Jubilee from our County Councillors.

The £4,101.36 paid to the Parish Council in May was the refund from the Section 106 Ruth First mural project.

The £100 banked on 15th June was a cash payment made to me in person by Allan Cooke for the hiring of the Jubilee beacon.

The £75 compensation was paid to us following the bank card going to the wrong address.

In September, the Parish Council underwent an external audit for financial year 2021/22. This followed an earlier internal audit. Both of which highlighted no issues and the Parish Council was once again commended for excellent governance and management.

The Committee thanked the Clerk for this detailed update and **agreed** the proposed virements as set out in the report.

6. DCC consultation on budget proposals for 2023/24

The Committee **agreed** the following response to DCC's consultation on budget proposals for 2023/24:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Durham County Council's consultation on its budget proposals for 2023/24. The Parish Council considered all of the documentation included as part of this consultation and wishes to make the following comments.

The financial context and changes to Government funding

Firstly, this is clearly an extremely difficult consultation to have to undertake and the Parish Council accepts that the factors which have led to this consultation are beyond the control of the County Council – increasing demand pressures in social care, crippling cuts to local Government funding from Central Government, significant increases in inflation and interest rates and energy costs.

For a Local Authority to make savings of £37.4million is an incredibly difficult exercise and it is clear from this consultation that every avenue to achieve this without impacting so heavily on frontline services has been explored.

The loss of around 3,000 staff to the Authority since 2010 is a damning indictment of the Government's changes to funding for local authorities and it is a credit to all staff at the County Council who have managed to maintain services since 2010 against this backdrop. It is deeply worrying to hear that further staff reductions are being proposed as part of an £11.8million savings exercise and residents must be assured that this will not impact on services to the most vulnerable in our County.

Changes to central Government funding have had a particularly acute adverse impact on County Durham. In the financial year 2019/20 a total of £7,429,000 was lost in Council tax revenue in Durham due to Class M and Class N (student) exemptions. The figure for 2020/21 has increased by £1,368,335 to £8,797,335. In addition to which £41,174 was also lost due to 'Student Disregards'. Prior to changes which commenced in 2010, central Government funding formula would have filled this gap in funding. This funding has now been removed entirely and this can only have a significant impact on services at the County Council.

The fact that DCC spends over 60% of its total expenditure on caring for our most vulnerable residents simply serves to highlight the life and death demands which Council officers are charged with each day.

Incoming raising proposals

The Parish Council very much welcomes most of the income raising proposals set out at this consultation, particularly taking advantage of selling renewable energy back to the grid. However, the aspect relating to increased demand for planning application services is concerning – does this mean that there will be greater pressure for the County Council to sell its assets for house building outside the scope of the local development plan for the area?

Review of Area Action Partnerships

The Parish Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on DCC's Area Action Partnerships created in 2009 to bridge the (perceived) gap between local communities and the new Unitary authority.

Durham residents have had the chance to see and hear from public service representatives via Board meetings and also vote for community priorities. The Task and Finish groups encourage community involvement but, even in the compact city, numbers need boosting despite the efforts of the excellent AAP team. Time and venues for meetings can also be a practical difficulty so if the number of AAP's was reduced public engagement could be even lower.

As a way of disbursing public funds the application forms and the system need refining. However, abolishing or cutting the number of AAP's would make the grants process more remote but not necessarily more efficient.

The opportunity for contact between the public and the police, health, fire service, councillors, voluntary groups and other organisations on a regular basis is valued and should remain. There may be a useful role for Parish Councils to be more active in working across the space between the local community and the County Council.

Council tax reduction scheme

Finally, the County Council has shown itself to be a compassionate Local Authority and must be commended for being one of only a few Councils which still retain a Council Tax Reduction scheme for the most vulnerable residents.

We look forward to seeing the results of this consultation in due course.

End of response

7. Executive summary of resident feedback to Parish Council consultation

The Committee noted the below executive summary of resident feedback to the Parish Council consultation:

A summary of the responses received to each question is below:

How would you rate the City of Durham Parish Council's performance since it was founded in 2018? Please provide details

From the 91 responses received to this consultation:

40 rated the performance of the Parish Council since 2018 as being either excellent or very good. Positive feedback in particular was received in relation to the Council acting on behalf of residents' concerns in relation to the County HQ building, the Council's work in planning and in improving the local environment.

27 respondents rated the performance of the Parish Council as being either good or OK. 10 respondents rated the performance of the Parish Council as being either 'not good or poor'.

In both cases where the response on the performance of the Parish Council has been either 'good to OK' or 'not good to poor', respondents have highlighted that their main concerns appear to be beyond the powers of the Parish Council to directly act on or general statements about issues such as studentification, the perceived state of the City centre, etc. have been included.

14 of the 91 responses did not answer this specific question.

What would you most like to see the City of Durham Parish Council prioritise over the next year?

The main issues highlighted through this consultation were as follows (in order of priority):

- Addressing the studentification of the parish area
- Making the community safer and addressing anti-social behaviour such as noise and late-night anti-social behaviour.
- Improving the cleanliness and appearance of the parish area.
- Improving the condition of footpaths within the parish area.
- Improving publicity for events in the City centre and promoting tourism.
- Tackling car parking issues and the lack of car parking spaces for residents.
- Attracting more independent retailers in the City centre.

What do you feel are the additional issues in the City of Durham Parish area and would you be prepared to pay a small increase in the Parish Council's precept to fund solutions?

Additional issues highlighted through this consultation were as follows:

- Reducing traffic in and around the City centre (traffic along the A167 at school pick-up and drop-off times was specifically highlighted).
- Need for a greater police presence (both day time and night time) and for night time Neighbourhood Wardens.
- Improving the air quality of the City centre.
- Addressing the anti-social behaviour and street scene appearance of North Road.
- More events for families in the City centre.
- More community art space in the City.
- All new homes should be carbon neutral with solar panels, etc.

From the 91 responses received to this consultation:

40 said that they would be willing to pay an increase in the precept.

19 said that they would not be willing to pay an increase in the precept.

32 of the 91 responses did not answer this specific question about an increase in the precept.

What are the best ways for the Parish Council to keep residents updated on its work in the community? (For example, public meetings, website, newsletters...)

A mixed response was received to this particular question, with most respondents highlighting that use of electrical communications such as Facebook, the website and emails are low cost and efficient ways of communicating with residents.

Others preferred more public meetings, a Parish Council newsletter and more advertising in the local press.

Some respondents highlighted the need for responses to emails from elected Members.

Other matters

11 responses were received from residents outside of the parish area and are therefore not included for consideration as part of this report.

8. Consideration of draft budgets from Committees to date

The Committee noted the following draft budgets from Committees to date and **agreed** to consider final budget proposals at the meeting in January:

Planning and Licensing Committee

Item of potential expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Representing the parish on planning matters	
Professional support in responding to planning applications	4,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Improving the licensed economy	
Enhanced drug searching scheme with Durham Police	600.00
PRIORITY 3: Hosting (separate) planning and licensing training events with the community	
Hosting a licensing training event	1,000.00
Hosting a planning training event	250.00
PRIORITY 4: Review of HMO licensing arrangements	
Production of a report into HMO licensing options	5,000.00

TOTAL PROVISION IN 2023-24 AGAINST PRIORITIES	10,850.00
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Environment Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Additional policing and safety for the parish area	
Enhanced SLA with Durham Police for late night policing	50,000.00
Safety of Women at Night hub	10,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Noise abatement	
Building on the Shhh campaign	2,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Clean Air, Clean and Green City	
Durham in Bloom	10,000.00
Clean air and active travel (2 x EVCPs)	6,000.00
Tackling illegal car parking	0
PRIORITY 4: Appearance of the City	
Neighbourhood Warden SLA with DCC	10,000.00
PRIORITY 5: Recycling	
Continuation of Terracycle scheme	2,000.00
Green Award for Businesses in the parish	1,000.00
PRIORITY 6: Enhancing the River Wear	
Supporting the work of the Wear Rivers Trust	3,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2023-24 AGAINST PRIORITIES	99,000.00

Business Committee

Item of potential expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Supporting Independent businesses	
Professional support for independent businesses in Durham	10,800.00
PRIORITY 2: Increasing footfall through events	
Hosting events in Durham City (Remembrance Sunday, Christmas events, Coronation 2023, miscellaneous).	25,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Christmas frontages awards	
Running a best Business frontage awards scheme	1,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2023-24 AGAINST PRIORITIES	36,800.00

Full Council

Item of Expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Administration of Parish Council (rent, room hire, audit, insurance, printing and postage, newsletters, website, other expenditure)	17,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Training budget	2,000.00
PRIORITY 3: grants for local community and voluntary organisations	15,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Staffing costs – including salary, National Insurance contributions and workplace pension	60,516.56
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2022-23 AGAINST PRIORITIES	94,516.56

Committee	Cost (£)
Planning and Licensing Committee	10,850.00
Environment Committee	99,000.00
Business Committee	36,800.00
Full Council	94,516.56
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2023-2024 AGAINST PRIORITIES	241,166.56

General Reserves	£45,000.00
Contingencies	£15,000.00
TOTAL	£60,000.00

9. Dates of future meetings

It was **agreed** that the next meeting of the Parish Council's Finance Committee should take place on 12th January 2023.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting.

Signed,



**Chair of the Parish Council Finance Committee
(12th January 2023)**