

Penistone Town Council

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance, Assets & HR Committee held in the Resource Centre, St John's Community Centre on Monday 20 January 2025 at 7.00pm

PRESENT

Cllr. Jon Palmer (Chair) Cllr. Jonathan Cutts, Cllr. James Kitching, Cllr. Mandy Lowe-Flello (Town Mayor *ex-officio*), Cllr. Matthew Nicholson, Cllr. Frances Nixon, Cllr. Nick Perkins (**N.B.** called away at 7.30pm), Cllr. David Walker

Nigel Bailey – Town Clerk
Alison Fleetwood – Finance Officer
Brian Barnsley, Technical Manager, Paramount Cinema
Elaine Miller – Asst. Town Clerk

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Cllr. Wayne Chadburn, Cllr. Jonathan Cutts, Cllr. David Greenhough, Cllr. Anita Kimberley, Cllr. James Kitching (Vice-Chair), Cllr. Hannah Kitching, Cllr. Mandy Lowe-Flello (Town Mayor – *ex officio*), Cllr. Frances Nixon, Cllr. Jon Palmer (Chair), Cllr. Nick Perkins, Cllr. David Walker

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were three members of the public in attendance, all from the Penistone Allotment Society. The Chair Cllr. Palmer invited them to speak in the ten minutes public participation before the meeting. Mr Russell Ogden (Chair of the Allotment Society), spoke on behalf of the Society restating comments he had made in a document sent to the Council and circulated to the Committee in advance of the meeting. The comments reiterated various complaints raised by the Allotment Society relating to the municipal year 2024/2025 and the charges raised by the Council. Further to Mr Ogden's statement the Chair suggested that the meeting should address Item 7.1 first, being the only item on the agenda relating to allotments. This was unanimously **AGREED**.

FAHR 2024/33 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies from Cllrs. Wayne Chadburn and Anita Kimberley were **NOTED**. Reasons for absence were unanimously **APPROVED**.

FAHR 2024/34 2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL OR PREJUDICIAL INTEREST FROM COUNCILLORS

2.1 In accordance with Section 31 of the Localism Act 2011 members to declare any disposable pecuniary interests in items on this agenda.

It was **NOTED** and **RECORDED** that there were no declarations of interest.

2.2 The Town Clerk to report any written dispensations in respect of items on this agenda.

The Town Clerk reported that there were none.

FAHR 2024/35 3. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC – PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSIONS TO MEETINGS ACT 1960)

Meetings shall be open to the public unless their presence is prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for the other special reasons. The public's exclusion from part or all of a meeting shall be by a resolution which shall give reasons for the public's exclusion in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings Act) 1960.

The Town Clerk reported that there were no matters prejudicial to the public interest on the agenda.

FAHR 2024/36 4. TO APPROVE (SUBJECT TO CONSIDERATION) THE REVISION OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE FINANCE, ASSETS & HR COMMITTEE.

The Terms of Reference were revised further to advice from Yorkshire Local Councils Association Law & Governance Bulletin (July 2024). The revised Terms of Reference have been reviewed and approved by Cllr Anita Kimberley, a Human Resources professional.

Further to discussion it was Moved, Seconded and **RESOLVED** to recommend the Terms of Reference to full Council at their next meeting.

FAHR 2024/37 6. TO CONSIDER A SMALL GRANT APPLICATION FROM PENISTONE FILM WEEK; WITH RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

Further to discussion the Committee requested further information regarding the applicant's banking arrangements and company registration; as well as details of the commercial arrangement with the Paramount Cinema. For representation at the Committee's next meeting in March 2025.

FAHR 2024/38 7. TO FINALISE THE BUDGET AND PRECEPT FURTHER TO THE ITEMS BELOW: AND RECOMMEND THE SAME TO FULL COUNCIL.

- 7.1** To consider and approve changes to the following PTC charges from 01/04/2025 : allotment fees. (Hire charges at St John's Community Centre to be reviewed later in 2025 after the re-opening of the Centre. Hanging basket sponsorship and public toilet usage fees to remain unchanged - see FAHR 2024/30/7.3).

Cllr. Jon Palmer, the Chair of the Committee, addressed the meeting in response to the statement made by Mr Russell Ogden (referred to herein under "Public Participation"). He stated that, in common with most councils, the legal status of at least some of the allotments in Penistone is obscure. However the Council prefers to acknowledge the 12 months' notice period for changes to tenancy agreements and charges relating to statutory allotment land (which applies to the Berrywell Avenue site but not the Wilson Avenue site) for both sites. Hence Cllr. Palmer suggested that no changes be made for the year commencing 01/04/2025 but the Council will put in place a policy for annual increases to allotment tenancy fees which will be applied from 01/04/2026. Cllr. Palmer proposed that an annual percentage increase should be made in line with inflation; and an administrative charge then applied as a percentage to the whole. It was suggested that in 2026 the administrative charge should be doubled in recognition of the fact that the annual fee would not increase in 2025.

Discussion took place; which included Cllr. Palmer's confirmation that the 44% increase levied in 2024 was not based on any other authority but was simply the result of the Council's deliberations in balancing the budget. Then as now, the Council took note of the fact that until 2024 there had been only one 2% increase in ten years, which cost more in administration than it raised. In addition, the 2024 increase, although 44%, was raised on fees which were very low so the annual cost to the tenants could not reasonably be regarded as excessive. The Council (in effect, the Council Tax payers of Penistone) will always be subsidising the allotments.

Further discussion took place regarding possible changes to the tenancy agreements (subject to 12 months' notice as stated above). Some Councillors felt it would be fairer to limit the term of the tenancy agreements which would give more people access to the allotments; and some form of means testing was also suggested. Another issue which arose was the advice given to the Town Clerk by the National Allotment Society that Councils should avoid the use of piped water onto allotment sites and tenants should instead be encouraged to conserve rainwater using collection systems. The Councillors were mindful that these matters would need to be discussed in later meetings and that any decision to be implemented in 2026 would need to be notified before 01/04/2025.

It was Moved, Seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the Committee should recommend the following to full Council:-

- No increase to the annual allotment fees in 2025 (for inclusion into the budget).
- The Committee to create a policy of annual fee increases indexed to the base rate of inflation; with a 10% administration fee then charged on the whole annual fee (in 2026 the first year of application the administration fee to be 20%). 12 months notice to be given.
- The Committee to discuss changes to the tenancy agreement.

7.2 Verbal update on potential expansion of the hanging basket sponsorship scheme.

The The Asst. Clerk gave a verbal update on the sponsored hanging basket project, there is little interest in Mortimer Road as a location so in 2025 there will be no additional sites. The fee will not be increased in 2025 (see Minute no. FAHR 2024/30/7.3). The overall profit in 2025 will be c. £2,000 after maintenance and installation fees.

7.3 Verbal update on the provision of storage facilities for regular hire clients in St John's Community Centre; and the associated purchase/installation costs of such facilities.

The Asst. Clerk reported that there are 10 large cupboards already available to be used as storage, although some may require a smaller space. The Councillors suggested that a survey be carried out of the clients' requirements before their next meeting on 10th March. The communication will make it clear that there will be a charge for storage space.

7.4 To consider and approve the revenue budget from the Paramount Cinema (supplied by Mr. Brian Barnsley); to include the reinstatement of booking fees (see Minute no. FAHR 2024/30/7.5).

Mr Barnsley had submitted some adjusted figures just before the meeting and the Chair Cllr. Palmer requested clarification on how the figures (both original and adjusted) had been calculated; as the original figures had seemed unduly pessimistic. Mr Barnsley spoke at length on the following matters, with interjections from the Councillors:

- It is notoriously difficult to predict film revenue. There are no significant film releases scheduled in the first few months of 2025. It is difficult to quantify the effect of local marketing and advertising as the big releases are already heavily publicised by the distributors. It might be possible to implement a more agile approach to scheduling whereby low-revenue films could be replaced by live events.
- Other cinemas have found that having a good quality food offering in-house has a positive effect on both ticket sales and overall income. This is something which will be seriously considered going forward.
- December 2024 was the most profitable month ever at the Paramount in terms of film revenue. Surprisingly the concession stands selling ice cream and popcorn did better than alcohol sales.
- Booking fees added to sales are more profitable than ticket price increases – a significant percentage of the ticket price has to be shared with artists or film distributors; whereas the booking fee (less tax) is kept by the venue. They also incur negligible administration costs and can be easily implemented. Although unpopular with some clients booking fees are standard in the industry. A tiered approach to booking fees could be adopted. The Councillors will consider this matter in later meetings.

It was Moved, Seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the Committee would approve the budget figures submitted for the Paramount.

7.5 To consider and approve the Paramount subsidy for the financial year 2025/2026.

Further to discussion it was Moved, Seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the Committee would approve the Paramount subsidy for 2025/2026.

7.6 To consider and approve the budget for small grants 2025/2026.

Further to discussion it was Moved, Seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the small grants budget will remain unchanged at £3,425 in 2025/2026.

7.7 To approve a budget figure for Penistone Town Council and Penistone Round Table events combined for 2025/2026.

Discussion took place regarding the above. The Councillors reiterated that all events sponsored or supported by the Council must, as a condition of payment, clearly and significantly acknowledge this in all their publicity and marketing materials. The Councillors may choose to impose an additional condition that payment will take place after the event to ensure compliance. With reference to the Penistone Gala, one option would be to sponsor arena attractions rather than give money to the event overall.

It was Moved, Seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the budget for Penistone Town Council and Penistone Round Table events combined will be £8,750 in 2025/2026.

7.8 To approve the Mayor's allowance for 2025/2026.

Further to discussion it was Moved, Seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the Mayor's allowance will remain unchanged at £3,000 in 2025/2026.

7.9 To consider and approve funds (contingency - to be estimated) to provide a central power source for Penistone Christmas lights.

The Committee discussed the fact that the current piecemeal arrangements with regard to power for the Christmas lights is unsatisfactory and unsustainable in the long run; especially given the fact that the annual lights switch-on is the most significant annual event organised by the Council.

It was Moved, Seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** to include a contingency sum of £10,000 in the budget.

7.10 To consider and approve the budget for Council and staff training in 2025/2026.

Further to discussion it was Moved, Seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the budget for Council and staff training will remain unchanged at £2,400 in 2025/2026.

7.11 To consider and confirm the budget and precept for the municipal year 2025/2026; for recommendation to full Council at the Ordinary Town Council meeting on 27th January 2025.

Further to discussion it was Moved, Seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** that the Committee will recommend that the precept be increased by 5.72% in 2025/2026. (At this rate the precept will be set at £244,639, resulting in an annual increase of £3.05 to payers of Council Tax (Band D).)

FAHR/39 8. TO NOTE THE LATEST MONTHLY BUDGET REPORTS (DECEMBER 2024)

The Finance Officer presented the budget reports for : Penistone Town Council, St John's Community Centre and the Paramount Cinema.

The budget reports were **NOTED** by the Committee.

FAHR/40 9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was **AGREED** that the next Finance, Assets & HR Committee meeting will be held at 7pm on **10th March 2025**.

Signed by.....Chair, 27th January 2025