

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 7:00pm on Tuesday, 3 November 2015, at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Station Road, Ashington.

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Ely Turnbull (Chair)
Louis Brown
Keith Chambers
Avril Chisholm
Stephen Fenwick
Kris Lavery
Mark Purvis
Bob Walkinshaw

Victor Bridges
Vicky Brown
Marjorie Chambers
Glyn Davies
Lawrence Henderson
Liam Lavery
Pauline Thompson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer
Sue Coulthard – Senior Administration Officer
Members of the Public – 0

C15/580 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Les Alderson, Maggie Lang and Wyn Stewart.

C15/581 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures made of personal and prejudicial interest with regard to any item on the agenda.

C15/582 3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair informed members that he had attended the following Mayoral events since the last meeting:-

- Preview of the "Weeping Window" exhibit at Woodhorn Museum
- Event to promote the work of Wansbeck Valley Food Bank
- RAF Boulmer (75th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain Reception)
- Ashington Library – presentation of awards to youngsters

- RAF Boulmer (Church Commemoration Service – 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain)
- YMCA – Community Digital Arts group
- Alligator Klub –social event
- Woodhorn Park Care Home – Installation of the “Pit Wheel”
- NCC Civic Head Charity Event at Woodhorn Museum
- Ashington District Star Exhibition Preview at Woodhorn Museum
- Launch of Poppy Appeal at Royal British Legion HQ
- 70th Wedding Anniversary celebration of a couple living in Ashington

C15/583 4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes from the meeting held on 8 September 2015 were agreed as a true record.

C15/584 5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

C15/572 Proposed Housing Development at North Seaton (Application No. 14/037/OUT): The Town Clerk reminded members that the consultants acting on behalf of the applicant for this proposal had made several presentations to the Town Council over the last 12 months. Following the last presentation, the Town Clerk had written to the consultants advising that the Town Council would prefer the piece of land to remain green, but in the event that were not the case then the preference would be for housing, rather than further economic development.

Cllr. L Brown informed the meeting that he had been contacted by the consultants on two occasions requesting him to attend the County Council Planning Meeting and support their application. Cllr. Brown had refused the request, felt the requests were wholly inappropriate and had duly informed the Town Clerk.

C15/564 Ashington Workers’ Memorial Garden: Cllr. Chisholm reported that she was meeting with Steven Leightley (Neighbourhood Services Team Leader) to discuss arrangements for work being carried out on the garden.

C15/576 Leader’s Report (Great North Run): Members were reminded that sponsorship money had been collected in memory of the late NCC Cllr. Jimmy Sawyer for the charity “Action for Pulmonary

Fibrosis. A formal letter had now been received from Mrs Sawyer and her family thanking those who had made donations to the charity.

C15/576 Leader's Report (Ashington Neighbourhood Services Partnership) : The Town Clerk reported that the new arrangement whereby the Steven Leightley (Neighbourhood Services Team Leader) would attend at the Town Hall one afternoon each week to discuss neighbourhoods services work was due to start on 4 November 2015.

C15/576 Leader's Report (Remembrance Sunday) : The Town Clerk stated that it had been necessary to arrange the Re-dedication of the War Memorial prior to the parade and service on Remembrance Sunday. Members were informed that approximately 75 people had been invited to attend the service and reception including funders, town and county councillors, members of the project working group and family members Sgt Hugh Cairns DSM VC who were visiting from Canada for the event.

C15/585 6. LEADER'S REPORT

The Leader reported on the following issues:-

- **Town and Parish Councils Conference:** The Leader reported that he and Cllr. Chisholm had attended the second Town and Parish Councils Conference which had been held on 28th September 2015.
- **National Association of Local Councils:** The Leader reported that he and Cllr. Chisholm had attended the NALC Annual General Meeting, at which David Francis had officially announced his retirement as secretary.
- **Ashington Memorial Garden Project:** The Leader thanked the officers of the Town Council for the work they were doing in order to arrange the forthcoming events in the Memorial Garden; namely the Re-dedication Service on 6 November and the Remembrance Parade and Service on 8 November.
- **Workers' Memorial Garden:** The Leader thanked Cllr. Chisholm for the work she had undertaken in masking the arrangements for the planting and landscaping of the Workers' Memorial garden.

C15/586 7. FINAL ACCOUNTS 2014/2015

The Town Clerk reported that the Auditor's Report on the 2014/15 Accounting Statements and Annual Governance return had now been received.

Members were informed that, on the basis of the External Auditors review, the information in the annual return was in accordance with proper practices and no matters had come to attention giving cause for concern that the relevant legislation and regulatory requirements had not been met.

Resolved:

That External Auditors' report on the Final Accounts for 2014/2015 be formally received and accepted.

C15/587 8. 2016/2017 DRAFT BUDGET

The Leader reported that, in order to begin the preparation of a draft budget for 2016/2017, he wished to propose that a Budget Working Group be set up consisting of himself, the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Council and Committee Chairs. The proposal was agreed.

The Town Clerk reported that the Budget Working Group would be looking at the options and proposals for the 2016/17 budget including issues relating Neighbourhood Services, subsidies and grants to local organisations and any members' proposals.

In response to members' comments, the Town Clerk stated that the Budget Working Group would not have delegated decision-making powers, would be "time limited" and would report recommendations to Finance and General Purposes Committee for discussion.

Resolved:

(i) That the Town Council establishes a small Budget Working Group to prepare a 2016/17 draft budget, with appraised options, for the consideration of Finance and General Purposes Committee; and that

(ii) The Budget Working Group membership consist of:

**The Leader and Deputy-Leader of the Council,
Chair or Vice-Chair of the Council, Chairs & Vice-
Chairs of Finance & General Purposes Committee,
Environment & Amenities Committee and Planning
& Regeneration Committee.**

C15/588 9. NORTHUMBERLAND LOCAL PLAN CORE STRATEGY

The Town Clerk presented a report through the Leader of the Council which stated that the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy had now reached the pre-submission stage – the last stage for comment before the County Council submitted the plan to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for independent examination by an Inspector.

The Town Clerk reminded members that there had been four previous stages during which views had been formed and evidence gathered to make sure that the plan was based on factual information. The document had now reached the formal statutory consultation stage and any further responses must be based on the Government's "tests of soundness" i.e. that the document was:

Positively prepared, the Core Strategy must be:

- Prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements; and
- Consistent with achieving sustainable development.

Justified, the Core Strategy must be:

- Founded on a robust and credible evidence base; and
- The most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives.

Effective, the Core Strategy must:

- Be able to be delivered;
- Have flexibility;
- Reflect co-operation across boundaries on strategic priorities;
- Be able to be monitored.

Consistent with national policy, the Core Strategy must:

- Accord with the National Planning Policy Framework and other national planning policies.

The Town Clerk stated that, together with other statutory organisations and stakeholders, the Town Council was now being given the opportunity to formally comment and respond on the basis of the above criteria – any responses to be submitted by the deadline on 25 November 2015.

Resolved:

That:-

- (i) The a small Working Group be established, with full delegated powers, to consider the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy and to draft a response, if appropriate, on behalf of the Town Council; and that**
- (ii) The Working Group consist of the Leader of the Council and 4 Council members.**

C15/589 10. NORTH EAST DEVOLUTION AGREEMENT – NORTHUMBERLAND CONSULTATION

The Town Clerk circulated copies of a briefing note from the Leadership of Northumberland County Council following the signing by the members of the North East combined Authority and the Government of a Devolution Agreement.

The Town Clerk stated that, although the agreement had been signed, a comprehensive assessment was required and commitment from all local councils. Members were informed that Durham County Council had subsequently indicated that they were considering a referendum on the matter.

The Town Clerk suggested that the Town Council respond to the briefing note welcoming the fact that Northumberland County Council was proposing to enter into a full consultation process with its residents and other consultees, including the Town Council itself, before any final decision was made regarding any North East devolution.

The Leader informed members that, contrary to general belief, the agreement was far from a “done deal” and there was much detail to

be considered, not least of which was the level of funding available and the role of any proposed Regional Mayor.

Following a discussion, it was agreed that a small group be set up to represent the Town Council during the forthcoming consultation process. The Town Clerk informed members that he understood an initial briefing session was to be arranged by Northumberland County Council at Woodhorn Museum specifically for Local Council representatives to outline the key issues for consideration and consultation.

Resolved:

That:-

- (i) The Town Clerk be asked to respond to the Northumberland County Council Briefing Note, indicating that Ashington Town Council formally welcomed the consultation and would send representatives to attend consultation events.**
- (ii) The Town Council be represented at Consultation Events by Cllr. A Chisholm, Cllr. M Chambers, Cllr. S Fenwick, Cllr. R Walkinshaw, Cllr. L Brown and Cllr. L Henderson.**

C15/590 11. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

- (i) Cllr. L Brown proposed that, in response to a request for financial assistance from Northumbria Police, an amount of £200 be set aside for the purchase of 'purse bells' following an increase in thefts from handbags in the town centre. It was agreed that this be approved.
- (ii) The Town Clerk stated that a 'Thank You' letter had been received from 7th Ashington Brownies for the grant made by the Town Council.
- (iii) The Town Clerk stated that an invitation had been received for the Town Council to send a representative to the National Association of Councillors Conference arranged for 27/29 November.
- (iv) The Town Clerk stated that a letter regarding 'persistent absence' had been received from Cllr. Liam Lavery. Cllr. Lavery left the room at this point.

The Town Clerk reminded members that the Statutory Regulations of the Local Government Act 1972 refer to cases

of 'Persistent Absence' as unacceptable. Members were informed that the Law did 'not look kindly' on individuals who put themselves forward for election and subsequently did not attend meetings for a prolonged period without establishing due reason.

The Town Clerk informed members that the Local Government Act 1972 gave examples of acceptable reasons for persistent absence included military service or grave illness. In response to questions from members, the Town Clerk informed members that if a particular member had been persistently absent for a period of six months (including attendance at meetings and representation on outside bodies) it was necessary for him/her to give the reason to the Full Council in advance in writing. If the member did not formally notify the Council with an acceptable reason for the absence, then by law, he or she should no longer be a member of the Council.

The Town Clerk then read out a letter from Cllr. Liam Lavery which set out the personal reasons for his absence from Council meetings, including his employer's reluctance to allow him time off work for that specific purpose. The Town Clerk reported that under the Employment Rights Act employees were eligible to take time off work for public duties, provided that it did not impinge on the employer's business. Cllr.Lavery had also advised the Full Council that he circumstances would be changing in the near future and that he would be able to attend meetings of the Council and play a full and active role.

The Town Clerk recommended that the Town Council accept Cllr. Lavery's letter in good faith.

It was agreed that the reasons for persistent absence given in Cllr. Lavery's letter be accepted and that the Town Clerk be asked to liaise with Cllr. Lavery in the future should this situation reoccur.

C15/591 12. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Full Council was yet to be arranged.

The meeting ended at 8.20pm.