

Seaton Valley Council

A Community Council

Minutes of a Meeting held on Wednesday 25 January 2017 at 7.00 p.m. at New Hartley Memorial Hall.

The meeting started at 7.02 p.m.

PRESENT:

Councillors: K Collier (Vice Chair) D Mullen (Chair) B Nixon S Stanners (Vice Chair)
 B. Swinhoe A Stanners S Dungworth L Bowman and S Hartland

IN ATTENDANCE:

S Potts – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer
Cllr B Pidcock – Northumberland County Council
4 Members of the public.

CO001/17 1. Apologies for absence

All members were present and consequently there were no apologies for absence.

CO002/17 2. Disclosure of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

CO003/17 3. Chair's Welcome and Civic Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone and said that he had a number of announcements to make:

- Firstly he informed Council that a representative from the Local Neighbourhood Police would be available before each Full Council Meeting for a period of 15 minutes to allow members of the public/Councillors to raise issues with them. In this respect he specifically welcomed and thanked PC Steve Charlton for his attendance at tonight's meeting.
- Secondly he referred to the Chair of the Seghill Community Association, Mr Rob Grimmer who is quite poorly at the moment. The Chair and the whole Council wanted to pass on their best wishes to Rob, and his family, for a speedy recovery.
- Thirdly, he reminded Council that an exhibition of all the work produced as part of the Art Stop Project is taking place at new Hartley Memorial Hall on Friday 27 January between 6pm and 9pm, and
- Lastly he reminded Council that the official opening of the refurbished Mitford Avenue Play Park takes place on Saturday 28 January at 10.00am.

CO004/17 4. Public Question Time

There were no questions from residents, however County Councillor Pidcock, referred to a large tree stump near to the west entrance to Astley Park and wondered if Seaton Valley Council might consider transforming the stump into a piece of public art. The Chair agreed to look into the matter.

There being no further question public question time closed at 7.10pm

CO005/17 5. County Councillor Update

Cllr Pidcock addressed the meeting, and said that he only wanted to touch on one issue at tonight's meeting which was the County Council's current financial position. He said that NCC is finding it increasingly difficult to identify areas of savings that don't directly affect residents. NCC has made significant savings in recent years, but is required to make further savings of £36M in 2017/18. He indicated that this figure would have been £10M more had it not been for NCC being able to increase its Council Tax Base and its Development Company 'Arch' beginning to make a revenue contribution to its budget.

Cllr Pidcock did not enlarge on the detailed outlook for NCC's Medium Term Financial Plan other than to say that significant levels of savings would be required in future years too. He referred to the current government's policy of reducing revenue support to local authorities and laid the blame for cuts to local government services, clearly at its door.

CO006/17 6. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of Seaton Valley Council's Meeting held on 30 November 2016 were agreed as being a correct record and were duly signed and dated by the Chair.

CO007/17 7. Minutes of Other Committee Meetings

The minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 14 December 2016 were presented and received for information.

The minutes of the Planning Committees held on 12 January 2017 were presented and received for information.

CO008/17 8. Services and Partnership Update

The Clerk presented the Services Officer's report for information and referred in particular to a number of items:

- An additional Police Officer will be joining the Seaton Valley Team and PSCO Andy Wells will be returning to the team as cover.
- The Council held a successful Allotment Open Day on Saturday 14 January, but still has vacant plots at its former Seaton Terrace Site. Such plots will be advertised for immediate occupation in the Council's next Newsletter.
- The Partnerships winter works programme is being delivered in accordance with agreed schedules
- Subject to tonight's budget report the Council hopes to be able to make an early start on upgrading the visual appearance of Fountain Head Bank Roundabout
- Dog Fouling Patrols have continued since the Council's last meeting and officers have noticed an increase in the number of residents approaching them to report dog fouling matters.
- Works to refurbish the Mitford Avenue Play Park are just about complete – official opening day is Saturday 28 January
- The Council has submitted a formal planning application for a new play park at Deneside, Seghill. If all goes well an installation date of June/July is anticipated.
- The Council's 2017 Gardening Competition is now open for applications
- 2 new bus shelters have been installed at Seaton Sluice, another one is to follow in Seghill within the next few weeks, and
- Litter picks are scheduled to take place at Holywell on 18 February and at Seaton Sluice on 11 March.

CO009/17 9. Services provided by Active Northumberland.

The Clerk spoke about the Engagement and Development Officers report and highlighted the excellent work carried out by Active Northumberland on behalf of the Council. The report concentrated on discussing other potential activities that might be able to be provided in Seghill, New Hartley and Holywell, if additional funding could be made available. In the ensuing debate it was clear that members didn't feel as though they had enough detailed information available to them to make a decision at tonight's meeting and as a result, asked the Clerk to liaise with Active Northumberland to gather further information.

CO010/17 10. Moving Towards Establishing a Youth Council

The Clerk presented the Engagement and Development Officer's report which provided details of a proposal from NCC's South East Area Youth Development Worker, Emma Rudd regarding the creation of a project that could help move the Council towards establishing a Youth Council. The report also identified that £3,000 of external funding could be attracted to substitute the Council's own core funding to Youth Development Work, releasing this sum to support the proposed Youth Council project.

Members were broadly supportive of the proposal, but felt that the project needed to concentrate on attracting and encouraging young people in Seaton Valley to begin actively engaging in the political and democratic processes, rather than following the 'Creative Manifesto' route described in Emma's proposal. Consequently it was:

RESOLVED; to use the £3,000 released funding referred to in Appendix 6 to create a working budget to support the creation of a Youth Council for Seaton Valley and to nominate Cllrs S Stanners and S Dungworth to work with the Council's own officers and NCC to develop an early project aimed at attracting and encouraging young people in Seaton Valley to begin actively engaging with the democratic and political processes in Seaton Valley.

CO011/17 11. Annual Investment Strategy

The Clerk presented his own report which set out a strategy for investing the Council's day to day cash balances. In essence the strategy recognised that as return levels are abnormally low all investments for the foreseeable future will be made over the very short term and that should a decision be made to invest for periods of over six months then a separate report will be submitted to Council prior to such an investment being authorised.

RESOLVED: to approve the 2017/18 Investment Strategy attached at Appendix 7A.

CO012/17 12. Bank Reconciliation as at 31 December 2016

Council agreed to receive the report, and noted that the Council's bank accounts had been successfully reconciled to its financial records.

CO013/17 13. Budgetary Control Update

In presenting his report the Clerk said that the line by line analysis shown at Appendix 9A presented a similar position to that shown in previous reports. A number of issues were highlighted in his report, but all had been raised in previous budgetary control updates.

Updated income and expenditure projections suggest that the Council's budget is likely to be underspent by circa. £20,000 at the end of the financial with a significant proportion of the underspend relating to less demand than expected on both the Council's Community Fund and Bus Shelter Maintenance budgets.

RESOLVED: to note the budgetary control position presented in the Clerks' report.

CO014/17 14. 2017/18 Budget Proposals

The Chair presented the Labour Group's 2017/18 Budget Proposals which had been circulated to all members as Appendices 10, 10A, 10B and 10C.

In presenting the Labour Groups proposals he referred to the rigorous process that is gone through to arrive at the re priced base budget which becomes the starting point for the following year's budget discussions. He also referred to the process that is used to confirm the level of the Council's reserves and the reliance placed on the Clerk to recommend the minimum level of reserves the Council should hold.

Turning to the detail of his report the Chair said that he was very pleased to be able to propose a budget on behalf of the Labour Group that Council has been able to identify additional savings to allow further investment in key services, whilst at the same time keeping Council Tax increases to a minimum. Referring to new investment areas he specifically drew attention to the following items:

- Provision has been made in the budget to support the continuation of the Dog Warden Patrol Service that the Council has been trialling over the last few months. Public support for this embryonic service appears to be high and early reports suggest that the mere visual presence of dog patrol wardens has a beneficial effect on reducing incidences of dog mess not being picked up.
- Top up funding has been provided to allow a part time post of Allotment and Maintenance Assistant to be created. The post holder will be responsible for carrying out a significant proportion of allotment maintenance work which is currently outsourced, and will complete other maintenance related activities that are currently provided by external bodies. Providing such services in house is expected to achieve better value for money, and will allow a greater degree of control over when and where such works are carried out.
- The group's proposals embed support into the base budget for keeping Public Conveniences open during the winter period.
- Funding has been provided in both the current year and in the base budget to allow the Seaton Valley Community Partnership to buy in Capacity Building Support from Community and Voluntary Action Blyth Valley.
- A significant sum has been allocated to upgrade the appearance of Fountain Head Bank roundabout. Additionally, Northumberland County Council has agreed to match the Council's own contribution to this project,
- Budgetary provision has been provided to fund up to 200 hours of professional support to the Council's Neighbourhood Planning process, and
- The group propose to extend the current level of subsidy payable to Arriva for continuing to provide an evening service for the 57A bus. The Council's existing agreement will now expire in September 2017 and will be aligned to a date when timetable changes are normally made by Arriva.

In concluding his presentation the Chair referred to the proposed precept which would lead to a 1.5% increase in Council Tax at Band D – an annual increase of £1.69 at Band D and £1.12 at Band A.

Cllr Nixon said that he broadly supported the proposals of the Labour Group, but would like to have seen a smaller percentage increase in Council Tax.

Cllr Hartland said that he supported Cllr Nixon's comments.

In response Cllr Dungworth said that she felt that the Labour Group had done an excellent job in recent years in establishing the Council as an excellent service provider whilst at the same time keeping Council Tax increases to a minimum. She said that the proposals were very sensible and would consolidate the progress made by the Council – she went on to say that the proposals were very responsible given the very difficult circumstances in which local government as a whole is operating at the present time.

At the end of the debate a vote was taken on the Labour Groups 2017/18 budget proposals. 7 Councillors voted in favour of the proposals; 1 against and 1 abstained. Therefore, Council:

RESOLVED TO:

- a) **Approve the build-up of the 2017/18 Budgets as shown at Appendix 14A of the Clerk's report,**
- b) **Agree to set a Council Tax Precept of £531,450,**
- c) **Note that in agreeing to set a Council Tax Precept of £531,450, Seaton Valley Council's element of the Council Tax will increase by 1.50% from £112.43 per annum to £114.12 per annum (Band D Equivalents),**
- d) **Note that Seaton Valley Council's Band 'D' Equivalent Council Tax base has increased from 4,528.01 to 4,657.17,**
- e) **Further note that in setting a Council Tax precept of £531,450 the amounts of annual Council Tax payable in respect of Seaton Valley Council will be approximately:**

• Band A £76.07	Band E £139.48
• Band B £88.76	Band F £164.84
• Band C £101.44	Band G £190.20
• Band D £114.12	Band H £228.23
- f) **Approve the Allotment Rent levels identified in the table at paragraph 12 of the Clerk's report (Appendix 14),**
- g) **Agree to continue to subscribe to the North East Regional Employers Association and the Society of Local Council Clerks and in addition to subscribe to the Northumberland branch of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) , and**
- h) **Agree to maintain current rent levels for the two flats it owns.**

CO017/17 17. Dates of Future Meetings

In noting the dates of future meetings Council agreed to move the Full Council meeting scheduled to take place on Wednesday 22nd March 2017 to Monday 20th March 2017

2017	Committee/Council	Time	Venue
Thursday 9 February	Planning	6pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Wednesday 1 March	F&GP (inc. Staffing)	6pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Thursday 9 March	Planning	6pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Monday 20 March	Full Council	7pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Thursday 6 April	Planning	6pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices

The meeting closed at 8.10 p.m.

Signed by the Chair:

Dated: