

# Seaton Valley Council

A Community Council

**Minutes of a Meeting held on Wednesday 21 March 2018 at 7.00 pm. at the Council's Offices, Seaton Delaval.**

The meeting started at 7.02 p.m.

## **PRESENT:**

Councillors: S Stanners (Chair), B Burt, S Dungworth, L Bowman, E Coulson, K. Collier, D. Nesbitt, A Stanners and S Hartland

## **IN ATTENDANCE:**

S Potts – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

B Pidcock – County Councillor

E Rudd – NCC Youth Services

Members of the public - 3

### **CO017/18 1. Apologies for absence**

All Members were present

### **CO018/18 2. Disclosure of interests**

There were no declarations of interest

### **CO019/18 3. Chair's Welcome and Civic Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the Clerk to thank the Partnership Team and NCC's Highways Division for their excellent work during the recent spell of bad weather.

### **CO020/18 4. Public Question Time**

A Holywell resident asked two questions. The first related to the Former Holywell Dene Care Home - the resident asked if the Council was aware of how it was going to be used in the future. In response the Chair said that he was aware that a letting agent was advertising 'bedsits' in the property for rent and that the Clerk had referred the matter to both NCC's Planning Enforcement and Housing teams for further investigation.

The resident then went on to say that in his view the County Council had been slow to fully clear the Holywell to Earsdon Road during the recent spell of bad weather. In response Cllr Dungworth said that she was happy that NCC had cleared the road as soon as it was able to given that other major roads had had to take priority over the A192. She went on to add her own words of thanks to the Partnership and Highways teams for their outstanding efforts in keeping the roads and paths clear during the recent wintery spell.

There being no further questions Public Question Time closed at 7.11pm.

### **CO021/18 5. County Councillor Update**

County Councillor Pidcock also referred to the recent bad weather and said that the County Council itself had written to Highways and Neighbourhood Services employees throughout the County to thank them for their efforts in gritting and clearing the County's roads in extremely difficult conditions.

He also mentioned that the County Council had recently signed off on the deal to create a

Combined Authority for Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside which would lead to a Directly Elected Mayor being appointed for the North of Tyne Combined Authority in due course.

**CO022/18 6. Minutes of the Council's last Meeting**

The minutes of Seaton Valley Council's Meeting held on 24 January 2018 were agreed as being a correct record and were duly signed and dated by the Chair.

**CO023/18 7. Minutes of Other Committee Meetings**

The minutes of the Planning Committees' held on 7 February and 8 March 2018 was received for information.

**CO024/18 8. Youth Council Update**

Emma Rudd (South East Area Youth worker – Northumberland County Council) was in attendance and she provided a summary of the work she is managing aimed at developing a format for a Youth Council to operate in Seaton Valley. Her initial work has concentrated on creating interest and has involved asking young people what they like and don't like about Seaton Valley – the next step is for the participants to present the output from the Young Voices project in the form of an animated film.

Following this she hopes to recruit a number of young people from the project to become involved in a formal Youth Council arrangement.

At the end of Emma's presentation Cllr Dungworth asked if efforts could be made to involve students from the three Student Councils that already operate within Astley High, Seaton Sluice Middle and Whytrig Middle Schools. In reply Emma said that she will be happy to sit down with Cllr Dungworth and school representatives to facilitate this.

Cllr Stanners took the opportunity to ask if arrangements had been made to continue providing a Youth Club in Seghill. Emma said that she had been able to secure the use of the Scout Hut next to the Rugby Club for Wednesday evenings and that the Seaton Valley Community Partnership had agreed to apply for grants to support the Youth Club on her behalf – she said she was hopeful that the new premises would prove to be a new start and a springboard to further success for the Seghill Youth Club.

Cllr Dungworth then asked about the Seaton Sluice Youth Club and Emma confirmed that due to reducing numbers she had had to make the difficult decision not to run the Youth Club for the time being. She went on to say that the situation will be monitored and that as and when further interest was shown, serious consideration will be given to restarting the service.

The Chair thanked Emma for her attendance and she left the meeting at 7.30pm

**CO025/18 9. Services and Partnership Update**

In receiving the Services Officer's detailed report the Members made reference to the following:

- The Chair thanked everyone involved in organising and taking part in a Pink Poo Day which took place on Friday 9 March. The event was a big success in raising awareness of the issue and generating 'whistleblowing' information. More than 350 items were sprayed on the day!
- The litter pick scheduled to take place in Seaton Sluice on Friday 16 March had had to be cancelled again due to both the weather and a number of participants having commitments elsewhere.

**CO026/18 10. Proposal to host a Dog Fouling Enforcement Officer in Seaton Valley**

The Clerks report outlined the problems he is having in securing the proposed service from NCC's Public Protection Unit. Initially it had been agreed to fund a post for one day per week, however, despite initially saying that it would be able to absorb this request NCC then said that it no longer had the spare resource to be able to do so.

A number of further conversations took place which ended in NCC saying that it wouldn't be able to recruit a new member of staff on anything less than 18.5hrs per week.

Given that dealing with dog fouling matters is such a high priority in Seaton Valley and that a report later on tonight's agenda identified an additional underspend of circa. £15,000 in 2016/17; the Clerk suggested that it may be appropriate to fund an 18.5hr post for a period of 12 months with a view to maximising enforcement action over this period.

After a short debate during which a number of members expressed their dissatisfaction with NCC's approach to this matter it was **RESOLVED: to ask NCC to reconsider its position and agree to provide a Dog Fouling Enforcement Officer to be located in Seaton Valley for a period of up to 18.5 hrs per week at a maximum cost of £20,000. The additional cost (over and above that provided in the 2018/19 budget) of £12,000 to be funded from the larger than expected general underspend in 2017/18.**

**CO027/18 11. Food Bank Outreach Service**

The Clerk introduced his own report which outlined how the Council's Food Bank Outreach Service would be implemented. The Clerk said that he hoped to be able to begin the service during April 2018 and that essentially the Council would act as both a collection agent and distributor for Blyth Food Bank.

Clients will be able to collect food parcels from Astley Park Pavilion on a Friday afternoon. However, he stressed that parcels will only be given out to clients who have been referred by registered agencies (CAB, NETS, Social Services, and GP Surgeries etc.)

There are a number of sites within Seaton Valley that already take donations on behalf of Blyth Food Bank. Officers will try to encourage more organisations to do so (schools for example) and will collect donations on a weekly basis on behalf of the food bank.

In the early stages of the project the Council will receive support from an experienced Blyth Food Bank volunteer and will rely on a small number of its own volunteers to take the project forward after this initial period.

All members welcomed the report and looked forward to seeing the food parcel distribution point in operation.

**CO028/18 12. Supported Evening Bus Services – 57A**

The Chair presented this item and he began by giving members a little background to discussions leading up to the public meeting held on 19 February 2018 to discuss the proposed reductions in service and to subsequent discussions between officers from the Council, Arriva and Northumberland County Council.

He said that officers had been able to come up with a package that maintained existing supported journeys at only a small additional cost to each organisation and that he had agreed to accept the package on behalf of the Council.

Again members welcomed the new developments and thanked residents for the reasoned arguments they had put forward at the public meeting. **In RESOLVING to receive the Clerks report, Council noted that its share of the subsidy payable to finance supported**

journeys on the 57A will be £2,800 in 2018/19 and that funding for this will be provided from the Council's Community Fund.

**CO029/18 13. 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 2018/19 Investment Strategy attached at Appendix 9A**

**CO030/18 14. Updated Asset Register**

The Clerk presented the Council's latest Asset Register which identified all assets in Council ownership. Members asked a number of questions about specific assets and then:

**RESOLVED TO: approve the makeup of the Council's Asset Register attached as Appendix 10A to the Clerk's report.**

**CO031/18 15. Updated Risk Register**

The Clerk presented his report which highlighted the main risks facing the Council analysed across a number of categories. The report assessed the likelihood and potential impact of such risks and described the control actions that are in place to mitigate the identified risks. After considering the risks identified Council:

**RESOLVED TO receive and approve the Risk Register attached as Appendix 11A to the Clerk's report and to encourage all members to take an active role in the Council's risk management processes.**

**CO032/18 16. Bank Reconciliation as at 28 February 2018**

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

**CO033/18 17. Budgetary Control Update – 2017/18 Projected Outturn**

In presenting his report the Clerk said that the line by line analysis shown at Appendix 13A showed a larger projected underspend than had been anticipated throughout the year – the current projected underspend is now £40,000 (after adjusting for carry forwards and contributions to earmarked reserves) compared to a figure of £25,000 that has been reported previously.

The Clerk's report gave a brief summary of the reasons for the change and a further summary of the build-up of the total underspend.

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

**CO034/18 18. Dates of Future Meetings**

2018	Committee/Council	Time	Venue
Thursday 5 April	Planning	6.30pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Wednesday 25 April	Full Council	7.00pm	St Mary's Church, Holywell
Thursday 10 May	Planning	6.30pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Wednesday 23 May	Annual Meeting and Annual Parish Meeting	6.30pm	New Hartley Memorial Hall
Thursday 7 June	Planning	6.30pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices

A number of members questioned the proposed date for the Council's Annual Meeting – the Clerk agreed to investigate and confirm the actual date in due course.

### **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved:** That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting during consideration of items 15 on the Agenda as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act relating to personal staff affairs and/or commercial matters.

## **CO035/18 19. Post Office Update**

The Clerk presented his report which provided the latest update on his discussions/negotiations with Post Office Services Plc on maintaining post office services in Seaton Sluice and New Hartley.

In respect of Seaton Sluice the Clerk said that the Council, Seaton Sluice Community Association and Post Office Services Plc had been in discussions for some time to plan for an outreach service to be delivered from the Community Centre once the main post office closed down. In the event the main post office closed down on Friday 9 March and the new outreach service (Tuesday afternoons and Wednesday mornings) began the following week.

Early reports suggest that there were some early teething troubles, however, these have now been resolved and the service is being well supported.

The Clerk mentioned that the Community Association had needed to offer its premises free of charge to Post Office Plc in order to secure agreement for the early provision of the outreach service and that the Association was likely to be losing out on a considerable amount of annual income.

In response to this Cllr Dungworth proposed that the Council should make an annual contribution of £1,000 to the Community Association in recognition of this lost income.

Cllr Stephens seconded Cllr Dungworth's proposal which was subsequently supported by all members. Consequently, it was **RESOLVED TO make an annual contribution of £1,000 to Seaton Sluice Community Association in recognition of the Association providing its premises free of charge to Post Office Services Plc and that said annual contributions be financed from the Council's Community Fund.**

Moving on to New Hartley; the Clerk gave a brief history of discussions and negotiations to date and outlined the total funding that had been secured so far (£13,000) to fund the project. A further grant application to the Big Lottery Fund (Awards for All) is on hold but it is hoped that a further contribution of £8,000 will be secured from this source.

The Clerk said that all efforts to find a business partner to share the premises with had failed and as a consequence the new Not for Profit Trading Company (New Hartley Community Services Ltd) was looking to run a small café alongside the post office to bridge the anticipated income shortfall. At this stage the Clerk said that he estimated that the annual shortfall should be no more than £3,000 (post office contractual income less employee costs and running costs) and that any café sales would reduce this figure. His early calculations suggest that the net income from the sale of 50 cups of coffee per week would just about cover such a deficit and sales in excess of this would generate a positive contribution to Community Association funds.

The Clerk said that negotiations were progressing, but that there were still some outstanding items to formally agree/negotiate before a formal deal can be agreed – these items were listed in the Clerk’s report.

Post Office Plc has now asked New Hartley Community Services Ltd to formally engage in its pre contract business planning process and as a consequence the Clerk is now liaising with the company’s two other directors to facilitate this.

Whilst at this stage the Council and New Hartley Community Services Ltd are not contractually committed to anything the Clerk asked the Council to give a commitment to underwrite losses of up to £3,000 per annum in each of New Hartley Community Services Limited’s first two year’s trading as a means of boosting the organisations credit status in the Post Office Pre Contract Business Planning Process.

In closing his presentation the Clerk said that he would report back to Council as negotiations progress and in any event before any contractual commitments are entered into.

Members debated the report and were generally happy with the way negotiations are progressing and all felt that if successful, the project could be regarded as the way forward for other villages/towns threatened with post office closures. At the end of the debate Council **RESOLVED TO: provide an undertaking to Post Office Services Plc that the Council agrees to underwrite losses of up to £3,000 in each of New Hartley Community Services Limited’s first two years of operation.**

There being no other business on the Agenda, the meeting closed at 7.56pm

Signed by the Chair: .....

Dated: .....