

Seaton Valley Council

A Community Council

Minutes of a Meeting held on Wednesday 25 April 2018 at 7.00 pm. at St Mary's Church, Holywell.

The meeting started at 7.03 p.m.

PRESENT:

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

S Potts – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Members of the public - 4

CO036/18 1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been submitted by Cllrs Nesbitt and Hartland.

CO037/18 2. Disclosure of interests

There were no declarations of interest

CO038/18 3. Chair's Welcome and Civic Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no civic announcements.

CO039/18 4. Public Question Time

A Holywell resident commented on the flower beds throughout the Valley and said that they had come into bloom in the last few weeks. She went onto to ask when weed spraying was due to commence. In reply Cllr Stanners explained that a new team had been set up to tackle weed spraying this year. The team is made up from employees based in Seaton Valley, Blyth and Cramlington and is due to be in Seaton Valley from the middle of May for approximately 2 weeks. The spray that is to be used will leave a blue residue to show which areas have been sprayed and is harmless to both humans and animals.

Another resident asked for an update on the former Holywell Dene Care Home premises. Cllr Stanners reported that the case had been referred to both the Housing and Planning Departments of Northumberland County Council to ensure that suitable permissions are sought before any change of use comes into being.

The same resident suggested that the sustainable flower bed at Dale Top, Holywell, is in need of attention – Cllr Stanners said that the bed is on the Holywell In Bloom group's radar and will be thinned out in due course.

There being no further questions Public Question Time closed at 7.14pm.

CO040/18 5. County Councillor Update

No update was available.

CO041/18 6. Minutes of the Council's last Meeting

The minutes of Seaton Valley Council's Meeting held on 21 March 2018 were agreed as being a correct record and were duly signed and dated by the Chair. It was noted that the Council's Annual Meeting is to be held on Wednesday 30 May 2018 at New Hartley.

CO042/18 7. Minutes of Other Committee Meetings

The minutes of the Planning Committee held on 5 April was received for information.

CO043/18 8. Services and Partnership Update

In receiving the Services Officer's detailed report reference was made 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!
- A schedule of village litter picks is currently being drawn up and will be advertised in due course. Members discussed if such litter picks should take place during the week or at weekends, with the latter being preferred to enable workers to join in. Members asked if more efforts could be made to get schools to join in, or to organise their own community litter picks.
- The Clerk said that he was still having difficulty in securing NCC's agreement to provide a part time enforcement officer to work exclusively in Seaton Valley. He said that he was escalating the matter with senior officers and would provide members with an update as and when a response is received.

CO044/18 9. Community Fund Request

A request for a grant of up to £500 had been received from the Keel Row to help support a Community Summer Fayre it is holding on 7 July 2018. The funding will be used to provide free activities for the community.

After considering the request **Council RESOLVED TO: award a grant of £500 to the Keel Row Public House to support its Community Summer Fayre and that such funding be met from the Council's Community Fund budget.**

CO045/18 10. Northumberland Local Plan – Spring 2018 Consultation

A letter has been received from Northumberland County Council seeking the Council's views on the high level priorities that should be included in its Local Plan. Specifically NCC is inviting views on preferred locations for housing and employment development and the key planning issues that the Local Plan should consider. The letter does not seek views on matters of detail such as the exact boundary of a development site or the detailed wording of a policy, rather on high level views about the strategic location of development.

In discussing the matter members felt that the Council would have more input into the next level of the plan (detailed consideration of specific developments and settlement boundaries) and consequently agreed that members with strong views on the 'high level strategic location of development of Northumberland' should submit comments individually through the official consultation process.

With regard to the more detailed Seaton Valley issues that the Local Plan will need to consider, the Clerk said that he would arrange an around the table discussion within the next few weeks to kick start discussions on the topic.

CO046/18 11. Internal Audit – Summary of Findings 2017/18

The Clerk drew attention to the Internal auditor's report which detailed the testing of the Council's financial records that had been completed by the auditor, Malcolm Wilkinson. The Clerk said that this report, and page 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, helps to provide Councillors with the required reassurances that the Council's finances are being administered in line with best practices.

There were no specific items that the internal auditor needed to draw to the attention of Council.

RESOLVED TO: receive and note the content of the Internal Auditors report attached at Appendix 6.

CO047/18 12. 2017/18 Annual Governance and Accountability Return

In presenting his report the Clerk drew attention to the Annual Governance Statement at Section 1 of the accompanying Annual Governance and Accountability Return which contains a number of statements about the controls the Council has in place to ensure that it has a sound system of internal control. The Clerk reminded Councillors that both they and the Clerk are jointly responsible for signing off this statement.

In receiving the Clerks report, Council:

RESOLVED TO:

- **Note the contents of the Annual Internal Audit Report included at page 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return attached at Appendix 7A.**
- **Approve the Annual Governance Statement included as Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return attached at Appendix 7A**
- **Approve the Accounting Statements included as Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return attached at Appendix 7A, and**

CO048/18 13. Bank Reconciliation as at 31 March 2018

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

CO049/18 14. Budgetary Control Update – 2017/18

The Clerk introduced his own report and confirmed that the 2017/18 underspend, after taking into account budget carry forwards and contributions to earmarked reserves, was in line with previous estimates, i.e. circa. £40,000. The Clerk also referred to the Minimum Level of General Reserves held by the Council and asked Council to support increasing such reserves from £75,000 to £90,000 to recognise increases in the Council's revenue budgets over the last three years. He concluded by saying that the Council's unallocated general reserves now stood at circa. £43,000.

After considering the clerks report, Council **RESOLVED TO:**

- **Action the budget carry forward requests and transfers to earmarked reserves identified in paragraph 4 of the report and**
- **Increase its Minimum Level of General Reserves to £90,000**

CO050/18 15. Review of Council Meetings and Committees

The Clerk introduced his own report which reviewed the Council's current committee structure and schedule of meetings. The review had been carried out in response to some members concerns about having to attend some recent Planning and Finance and General Purposes Meetings that have had a very short agenda.

The Clerk's report pointed out that Full Council Meetings covered a wide range of topics and are very informative and are used to comply with the Council's statutory reporting requirements. The report also suggested that the two Finance and General Purposes Meetings held in October and December have become part of the Council's budget setting process and should be retained. In respect of Planning, the Clerk said that most items

considered were of a minor nature and items needing discussion and/or a decision were the exception rather than the rule.

In the debate that followed all members agreed that the schedule and content of Full Council Meetings should remain unchanged and that future Finance and General Purposes Committee Meetings should only be scheduled in October and December to support the annual budget process – additional meetings could be called, if and when necessary.

In respect of Planning Applications, members felt that the Clerk and the Administration Officer should take a lead role by identifying which applications might need further consideration by the Planning Committee and Ward Councillors. This would reduce the need for formal committee meetings to be held and as a consequence such meetings would only be called where more complicated applications required discussion.

At the conclusion of the debate Council **RESOLVED:**

- **That Full Council Meetings would continue in their present form,**
- **Finance and General Purposes Committee Meetings would only be scheduled for October and December each year, and**
- **That there will be no formal schedule of Planning Committee Meetings after the beginning of the new Council year, rather such meetings will be called as and when necessary.**

CO051/18 16. Review of Office Opening Hours

The Clerk's final report of the evening sought to seek a review of the Council Offices opening times. His report identified that it was becoming increasingly difficult to staff the office after 4pm due to the small number of staff's at his disposal. He also reported that in a recent survey (February 2018) only two members of the public had visited the Council's offices after this time. His report recommended changing guaranteed opening times from 8.30am to 4.30pm to 8.30am to 4.00pm.

After a short debate it was **RESOLVED to change the Council's office opening times to 8.30am to 4.00pm with immediate effect but to review the effects of this change after a period of 12 months.**

CO052/18 17. Dates of Future Meetings

2018		Committee/Council	Time	Venue
Thursday	10 May	Planning	6.30pm	Seaton Valley Council Offices
Wednesday	30 May	Annual Meeting and Annual Parish Meeting	6.30pm	New Hartley Memorial Hall CONFIRMED

There being no other business on the Agenda, the meeting closed at 7.45pm

Signed by the Chair:

Dated: