

MINUTES of the ORDINARY MEETING OF STANLEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held at Stanley Civic Hall, Front Street, Stanley on Tuesday 23rd January 2018 at 6.30pm

PRESENT: B Nair* A Clegg J Clark H Clark M Davinson
 C Hampson J Kane C Marshall D Marshall J Nicholson
 J Pallas J Stephenson L Timbey D Tully J Tully
 G Wilkinson

*Chairman

OFFICERS: Alan Shaw (Town Clerk)
 Nicola James (PA to the Town Clerk)

IN ATTENDANCE: 2 members of the public

ABSENT: Cllrs L Christie & T Armstrong

241 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Cllrs D Carmichael & J McMahon were accepted by Council.

242 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

243 **TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Town Mayor informed Members of the events he had attended in the month prior to the meeting which included:

- Catchgate and Annfield Plain Action Partnership Coffee Morning
- Chilton Carol Service.

The Town Clerk reminded everyone present to turn their mobile phones off or set them to silent and advised that the meeting was being filmed and recorded but not live streamed. He also advised those present that a member of the public was recording the meeting. Members were reminded to stand when speaking and only to speak after being recognised by the Town Mayor.

The Town Mayor reminded Members that they would not be allowed to vote on the budget if they were in arrears with their Council Tax.

244 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no written questions submitted prior to the meeting and no questions from the floor.

245 **CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

It was proposed by Cllr C Marshall, seconded by Cllr J Stephenson and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Ordinary Council meeting held on 28th November 2017 be **APPROVED** as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

246 MINUTES OF OTHER MEETINGS

Minutes of the Projects and Initiatives Committee held on 12th December 2017 and 9th January 2018 were **RECEIVED** by Council.

Minutes of the Finance and Governance Committee held on 13th December 2017 and 10th January 2018 were **RECEIVED** by Council.

Cllr J Stephenson stated that Minute #238 on the Finance & Governance meeting would be amended at the next Committee meeting to reflect that the budget was being rebalanced to give flexibility and refocus on frontline services.

247 ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT AND BANK RECONCILIATION

It was proposed by Cllr M Davinson, seconded by Cllr C Marshall and **RESOLVED** that the payment of accounts for December 2017 be **APPROVED**.

It was proposed by Cllr M Davinson, seconded by Cllr J Kane and **RESOLVED** that the Bank Reconciliations for December 2017 be **NOTED**.

248 RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS**(a) Finance and Governance**

(i) Budget - Dealt with under items 10 & 13 (*Minute numbers #250 & #252*)

(ii) Staffing - Dealt with under item 13 (*Minute number #252*)

(b) Projects and Initiatives

(i) Environmental Cleanup Team - Committee **RECOMMEND** that the Council should bring the cleanup team in-house in 2018/19. This item will be dealt with at item 13 (*Minute number #252*) once the Town Clerk has responded to a question received in writing from Cllr D Tully.

(ii) Christmas Events - Council **RESOLVED** that Christmas Events should be included in the tender to be prepared to externalise the organisation of events beginning in 2018/19.

(iii) Police Cars - Council **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** the proposal put forward by A/Insp Clarke and that the three year costs should be forward funded from reserves and paid back by setting aside a revenue budget equal to one years costs in each of the next three years.

(iv) Comms & Marketing Budgets - Council **RESOLVED** that these budgets should be held centrally so that the Council can take a more strategic approach to marketing the Civic Hall and promoting the work of the Town Council.

(v) Stars Youth & Community - Council **RESOLVED** that the project be funded in 2018/19 subject to a more detailed outline of the activity plan, aligned

to outcomes, be submitted to Committee before the end of the current financial year.

It was proposed by Cllr J Pallas, seconded by Cllr A Clegg and **RESOLVED** that Council accept recommendations (ii) to (v) and to defer a decision on recommendation (i) until item 13 (*minute #252*).

249 **STANLEY IN BLOOM**

It was proposed by Cllr M Davinson, seconded by Cllr L Timbey and **RESOLVED** that the Council would work in partnership with DCC to jointly manage the Stanley in Bloom campaign going forward and that officer time would be allocated to work in partnership with DCC teams to deliver the campaign.

250 **BUDGET AND PRECEPT (Part A)**

Cllr J Kane requested that a named vote be taken for this item.

Cllrs made the following statements in respect of the budget:

(N.B. Comments minuted in full at the request of members)

Cllr D Marshall - The budget and precept came from the proposal that was accepted and warmly greeted by the public and the pledges that were made. These pledges follow on into the Medium Term Plan which has been discussed in various meetings. The report recommends an increase in the precept. If there is no increase then the ability to provide the improvement in the services we are planning would not be possible and the unavoidable costs would be required to be found from savings as any proposal of any reduction in reserves would leave the council vulnerable.

In 2012 the Independents had £1.2 million in reserves, now this is £230,000 unallocated reserves. What have the public to show for their £1 million expenditure since then? The local government pay settlement is 2%, the Durham Living Wage increases our lowest paid staff by £1 per hour, the new Data Protection Regulations need to be implemented to ensure we are compliant. We need to find nearly £11,000 to pay for the by-election called for by the Independents, what an opportunity missed to invest in our community. Labour won handsomely and James Kane was elected.

I formally move, with the right to reply, that we increase the precept by 2.95% as stated in the report.

Cllr D Tully - Point of Order - The Derwentside Independents did not call the election, it was the democratic right of the people of Stanley to have the election. It was on behalf of the people.

Cllr J Stephenson - It is safe to say that there has been an awful lot of really good work done since this Council was elected in May in regards to the finances. The situation inherited wasn't a clear one, and defining the true financial situation wasn't easy as costs weren't shown in a clear and simple way. It was difficult without the analysis to understand what the clear picture was. Thank you to the staff and Cllr D Carmichael for providing clarity on the finances. The financial picture isn't a particularly good one, significant amounts of the Councils funds have been used to

subsidise the running costs of the Civic Hall and front line services have been neglected which is unacceptable going forward.

We now have a good balanced budget putting money back into front line services. I happily second Cllr D Marshall's proposal and urge all colleagues to support this budget which is focused on the needs of all our communities.

Town Clerk - Pointed out an error in the copy of the draft budget which was circulated to Members. The precept figure was given as £692,544 but should have been £706,256. This shows a 2.95% increase. The extra money needs to go into cost centre 300, environmental services, the £13,712 balance should go into there.

Cllr M Davinson - From the finance meeting, a Band A house will pay an extra £1.77 a year, less than 18p a month. I already think that the £59 I pay to Stanley Town Council is good value for money if you utilise the events that are on, and we will do a lot more for an extra £1.77. We will be holding Play in the Park events, supporting village halls, run a funding advice service, become more involved in the planning debates, working with DCC with empty buildings, reintroduce the neighbourhood wardens, expand the environmental caretakers role, extend youth funding to multiple years and support the Civic Hall. There will be further value for money in the next financial year.

Cllr J Kane - With regards to youth provision, we have good youth groups in the area, we have PACT House which run Chat and Chill, PACTivate and youth sessions. St Stephens have youth groups. There's the Activity Den, Oxhill Youth Group. Supporting this budget will make Youth a better priority for the Stanley area.

Cllr C Hampson - I think it's marvellous that we can support the advice hub, money advice, CAB, welfare advice. We also have PACT House which has advice services for the residents.

Cllr J Pallas - If the Civic Hall wasn't getting £3,000 a week subsidy, we would be able to do more around Stanley in all the Wards.

Cllr C Marshall - Personally I was very supportive of this Council when we were trying to get it set up. Even more so now it is important we have the Town Council to pick up the slack after the budget cuts at DCC.

I am not overly happy we are getting value for money from the Council Tax we pay, views which were echoed by residents during the election campaign. This is part of the reason why I wanted to stand to try and support and share some of my experience with the Council to get some leadership in, I am proud to be a Stanley Town Councillor now.

Since May we have unpicked the finances of the Council, the way the Council is operated and put a plan together that the public have supported. Some of the things we have uncovered since we came in are nothing short of scandalous. The allocation of tax payers money over recent years is a disgrace. A couple of things which can be backed up with reports from the Council's Finance Officer. There are serious concerns over financial controls of the Council and a distinct lack of leadership of the last few years.

Firstly the Chairmans "slush fund", a budget which has been allocated over recent years on buffets and 'piss-ups' for Councillors. Council money being spent on alcohol and

buffets after Council meetings. We've had it used to fund what I would class as "key election projects" in Independent target wards, this budget was solely at the discretion of the Chair, there was nothing the staff team could do to stop it, these things were solely approved by Cllr J Nicholson. Money was provided for buffets for a horticultural show that had already had significant money provided by this Council.

In my view, money to refurbish this building which was allocated by members without going through formal council processes, work was reported retrospectively. Stanley Town Council has just received a bill, just short of £11,000 for the by-election that was held within weeks of the elections in May, following the sudden and tragic death of Cllr Graham. Weeks earlier we got in with a resounding victory in a Ward that has been a safe Labour seat for years. It was submitted by a Derwentside Independent Councillor living in Tanfield, Cllr Tully. The petition was submitted by David Tully. This has cost us £11,000 which we could have allocated to front line community services. A complete waste of money in a safe Labour ward where James Kane was successfully elected.

Approximately 50% of the Council's budget has been going into the Civic Hall. Money stripped from front line services by scrapping Neighbourhood Warden services because the Independents on the Council couldn't reach an agreement with DCC without any idea on they would back fill these services. Despite pleas from the Labour members to enter a dialogue, we saw the lives of the people in the Stanley area deteriorate because we had more dog fouling, fly tipping and rubbish. How are people meant to be proud of where they live when they're living in that sort of environment because of the Independent ran Stanley Town Council.

Budgets spiralled out of control, no financial control, staff spending money above allocated budgets, no figures back to any committees and not one question raised in a meeting about numbers or attendances or value for money for the residents.

I am proud that the Labour controlled STC has put forward a plan, that was endorsed by the public in May, a plan that links to the consultation that the Derwentside Independents did in 2016 that nearly 500 residents returned and replied to, but nothing was done with it. Every one of our priorities that we are going to spend tax payers money on links to the feedback we have received from our community.

This Council is now engaging with our public and will ensure that we deliver value for money, at the next election residents will be saying that the Town Council have made sure my kids have somewhere to go on a weekend, they have provided advice services. I am confident by the next election we will be able to reconnect with the communities we serve.

Cllr D Tully - The only reason I signed that form was because I took it down to DCC, it was called by the candidate and I signed the piece of paper. According to electoral services I did not call that election.

Cllr D Marshall moved a 2.95% increase in the precept, seconded by Cllr J Stephenson.

Those in favour: J Kane, C Marshall, L Timbey, M Davinson, J Pallas, D Marshall, C Hampson, G Wilkinson, J Stephenson, B Nair, A Clegg (11)

Those against: J Nicholson, D Tully, J Tully, J Clark, H Clark (5)

The motion was duly passed. The Town Mayor and the Town Clerk signed the precept demand.

251 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC***

*Recording of proceedings was stopped at this point.

Council **RESOLVED** that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and representatives of the press and broadcast media be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

*Justification for excluding the public and press from consideration of the following item:
Commercial Sensitivity.*

252 **BUDGET AND PRECEPT (Part B) AND STAFFING STRUCTURE**

The Town Clerk answered Cllr D Tully's question in respect of the costs of bringing the Groundwork NE team in house.

Cllr C Marshall stated that the Town Council need the staffing capacity to deliver the budget that was just agreed in Part A.

It was proposed by Cllr D Marshall, seconded by Cllr L Timbey and **RESOLVED** that the staffing structure proposed by accepted and implemented subject to any necessary changes in the negotiations to reintroduce the Neighbourhood Warden service.

253 **DATE, TIME AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 27th February 2018, 6:30pm, Civic Hall Stanley.