

## **Finance and General Purposes Committee of Stanley Town Council**

## **Minutes of meeting held on**

## **Tuesday 12th April 2022 at 6.30pm at Stanley Civic Hall**

**ATTENDEES:**

G Binney (Chair) A Hanson (Vice Chair) H Clark L Ferry J Nicholson

S McMahon D Tully O Milburn ∞ A Clegg ∞ ∞Ex-officio

**OFFICERS**: Helen Richardson (Town Clerk)

Ann Barry (Finance Officer)

Michelle Robertson (Events & Administration Support Officer)

Sarah Parkin (Events & Administration Support Officer)

Cllr Binney welcomed everyone to the meeting and confirmed the meeting is being recorded and will be downloaded to YouTube for a period of at least 6 months

**242** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Cllr J McMahon and Cllr A Jones.

Absent: Cllr J Kane

**243** **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

A declaration was received from Cllr J Nicholson as she is the Vice Chair of the Police and Crime Panel.

**244** **PROCEDURAL AND APPROPRIATE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIR**

There were no announcements from the Chair.

**245** **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No members of the public were present, and no questions had been received in advance.

**246** **CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

It was proposed by Cllr A Clegg, seconded by Cllr S McMahon & **RESOLVED** that the minutes from the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on 8 March 2022 be  **APPROVED** and signed as a correct record.

**247** **ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT & BANK RECONCILIATION**

It was proposed by Cllr A Hanson, seconded by Cllr A Clegg and **RESOLVED** that the Committee **APPROVES** the payment of accounts for February 2022, and **NOTES** the bank reconciliation for February 2022.

**248     COUNCIL TAX QUERY**

A question was raised by Cllr D Tully about the increase in the precept on his personal council tax bill.

Stanley Town Council’s Finance Officer offered the following response which was provided by DCC.

*“The reason the precept increase showed as 1.3% (rather than 2.5%) was due to the change in taxbase between 21/22 and 22/23. The overall precept increase is 2.5%. However, the Band D had only increased by 1.3% due to the increase in taxbase.”*

**249      CIVIC HALL UPDATE**

An update was received from the Town Clerk. There is still no heating in the building, however, there are lots of conversations occurring behind the scenes, the Town Clerk has met with Cllr J Nicholson and is also waiting information from County Cllr. J Rowlandson following her meeting with him when he came to visit the building. A Surveyor has been out to the building and taken back her findings. We have also provided to Durham County Council with a quote for 1 industrial boiler, this boiler can be fitted in to any system that is agreed on, the quote and a request for consent to undertake the works have been sent to Durham County Council for their approval.

The Louisa Centre recently had some work undertaken on their roof which required scaffolding outside. On arriving at the building on Monday we found a broken window in the main theatre hall. The windows have been boarded up and secured and we are now awaiting the glass to be replaced.

The Town Clark has spoken to The Louisa Centre about the scaffolding being removed and they confirmed that the works had finished some time ago and they had been struggling to get contractors to remove the scaffolding. In a separate incident, one of the scaffolding knuckles had come in through the ceiling, the ceiling has been fixed. Durham County Council came out and found further scaffolding posts and joints on the roof, they have also found the lead around the windows had been partly removed. The damaged section of the roof has been fixed and has now dried out. The scaffolding incident has been reported to the police however, there is no CCTV available therefore the Police are unable to take the matter any further.

The scaffolding has been removed today, so hopefully this will stop any further damage.

The Town Clerk stated that we needed to keep the building safe and secure. There is maintenance that requires to be undertaken to ensure the safety and secureness of the building. The Town Clerk confirmed that together with the Finance Officer it had been established that the previous Town Clerk had set aside 3 different maintenance budgets which were significantly underspent. The Town Clerk is proposing that, the under-spend from those budgets, which were earmarked alongside the 2022/2023 maintenance budgets be earmarked for specific maintenance to keep the building safe and secure to be undertaken alongside the replacement of the 1 boiler. It was made clear to Councillors that this was about keeping the building running.

Cllr A Clegg asked about claiming from the insurance. It was confirmed that this was unlikely as they were able to access an unsecured site however we would be passing the costs relating to the repairs required due to the non-removal of the scaffolding to the Louisa Centre.

Cllr A Clegg asked about the replacement of the radiators. The Town Clerk confirmed that the building needed a boiler first. The Clerk confirmed that there was a great need to meet as a full council to discuss the future of the building following the D3 report.

Cllr O Milburn commented that releasing this budget would be a good solution and agreed it had to be done.

Cllr J Nicholson says the reason the building is as it is, is because there has been no maintenance done, we would be using allocated monies which should have been spent. Cllr S McMahon agreed with Cllr J Nicholson.

Members **AGREED** that the Council would earmark these funds as a reserve for the building.

**250    POLICE VANS**

The Town Clerk advised that the police vans which are supported by Stanley Town Council 3 years ago, there appears to be nothing in the paperwork to say that the vans would be returned to us at the end of the 3-year term nor is there anything in the paperwork to say there would be a cost of £5K per van after the term ended. There has been no budget put aside to cover this. The Town Clerk suggested that perhaps the police have one van and the other stays with the Town Council.

It was noted that 1 van was due to go out of commission in June and the other van was now out of agreement term.

Question from Cllr O Milburn and Cllr D Tully - Can we afford the vans – Town Clerk has confirmed there is no budget for this.

Cllr S McMahon says it would be nice to keep the vans but not sure if £5K is something we can currently afford. Suggests letting them go.

Question from Cllr H Clark - how does not having vans affect our warden service. The Town Clerk suggests asking the police if they would sell Stanley Town Council one of the vans. It was also noted that the Town Council hires a van directly from Durham County Council to deliver the warden service.

Question from Cllr D Tully – is there any funding available that we can tap into to fund the vans as it seemed wrong to just do nothing.

Cllr J Nicholson advises that the police are still running one of the police cars which we bought into some 8-9 years ago. The idea of having a car was because it was a greener option than driving around in a van.

Stanley Town Council’s position is we can’t afford the vans. The Town Clerk has offered to speak to the fleet depot to seek options directly and explain the situation. The Town Council have other matters which are a priority and supporting the vans are not the highest priority. All agreed.

Look at whether there are any grants available? All agreed.

Possible point of argument to fight for the vans - Without the availability of the vans, we would not be able to focus on anti-social behaviour incidents.

**251     STANLEY COMMUNITY FUND REPORT AND FUNDING PROPOSAL**

To **RECEIVE** **AND CONSIDER** the report and funding proposal, from County Durham Community Foundation

Cllr H Clark sits on the board of the County Durham Community Foundation. Proportioning the spend is being done by County Council division not Stanley Ward – can they split the fund, coming out as 4 divisions and not 7 wards. For transparency can this be shown as a split.

Discussion over the funding of £50K and paying someone £7.5K to look after the fund. Considered not a good idea, should we bring that money back in to spend as County Durham Community Foundation funding.

Cllr S McMahon likes the fund and thinks it is good for Stanley – would like to see fund continue for a period of 12 months rather than a period of 3 years. This has been budgeted for so fund it for a 12-month period whilst we look at exactly what the fund is being spent on.

Could a representative of County Durham Community Foundation come to full council meeting to answer questions?

Cllr J Nicholson is not happy – how do County Durham Community Foundation contact groups, previous applicants – can we invite to meeting.

The Finance Officer asks if it would be worth considering a reduction in the funding amount, still fund but with a lesser contribution.

Cllr J Nicholson suggested she would be happy for each councilor to have £1000k each, 20 councilors would be £20k which would not be difficult for the council to manage. The surplus of £30k would then go back to Stanley Town Council Funds, which would be the beginning of a maintenance budget.

The Town Council are not a funder. £150K brought in over 3 years, Cllr S McMahon says the fund has done its job.

Cllr H Clark has been to several meetings on the fund. They are saying we have had £300K – some of the money which would have been made available anyway. Now we know that County Durham Community Foundation exists, the Stanley funds – the costs to administer the Stanley fund are significant.

Fund amount has dropped over the 3 years and the fund is now supported by the Town Council and AAP which is Stanley money. Why should the people of Stanley not get some of money from Durham as well as from our own Town Council?

Better publicity and awareness is required so we can reach the wider area to ensure funds are distributed more fairly.

Consideration needs to be given to fund opportunities for the smaller community groups.

Majority consensus is to bring in County Durham Community Foundation to a full council meeting to ask why smaller groups are not being made aware of what is available to support them. Some little groups may only need £50-£100 amount.

Cllr J Nicholson would like to fund everyone; however, we can’t even fund ourselves. £50K may be a contribution to the Town Council’s heating. Cllr O Milburn agreed that we keep the money inhouse if we can. £1K may not be much to the County; but may mean the world to a smaller group, may be the difference between whether a small business continues to operate or not.

Cllr S McMahon would like to see the fund continue, happy for someone to come in and answer questions and look at how we can improve the use of the fund. The fund has done good work and feels we should continue to fund for the next year and review after 12 months, to consider the improvement of how the fund can be used.

Cllr D Tully asked for clarification over whether the small grants fund was a county wide fund or a Town Council fund – Cllr S McMahon clarified her was referring to the small grants fund that the town council had.

Proposed to continue for 12 month and bring into a Full Council to discuss, all agreed.

**252     EVENTS 2022**

The Events Group was a very small gathering on 23rd March made up of the Town Clerk, Cllr L Ferry and Scott Hilary. The group went through budgets for the Jubilee Play in Parks, Miners Sunday, to check the budgets set aside were going to cover the agreed costs. The Clerk confirm that the agreed budget set aside would cover the events costs for the year.

Miners Sunday moved to another day – suggested 21st August 2022 to hope that attendance may be better.

The Pantomime had now been confirmed with the Producer undertaking their own advertising this year, but we will jump on the back of this to support the event.

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

Tuesday 10th May 2022, 6.30pm, Stanley Civic Hall.