

MINUTES of the ORDINARY MEETING OF STANLEY TOWN COUNCILHeld at **Stanley Civic Hall on Tuesday 26th October 2021 at 6.30pm**

PRESENT: G Binney H Clark A Clegg L Ferry
C Hampson A Hanson A Jones C Marshall
S McMahon O Milburn* J Stephenson M Thompson
D Tully

*Chairman

OFFICERS: Alan Tubman (Deputy Town Clerk)
Ann Barry (Finance Officer)
James Harper (Environmental Services Team Leader)

121 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Members **ACCEPTED** apologies for absence from, Cllrs C Bell, K Coulson, D Fall, J Kane, J McMahon and J Nicholson,

No members were absent.

122 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

123 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements from the Town Mayor.

The Deputy Town Clerk updated members on the current situation within the Town Council operations and Civic Hall.

- Three kickstart members of staff have started from 18/10/21
- Blooming Good Fun awards night is on Wednesday 3rd November
- Remembrance update, we have the wreaths to prepare for collection for members and the Beacon should be installed by the end of October
- Through Soldiers Eyes Art Project is on track for 8 – 20th November,
- Members are all invited to the Think Positive open day 5th November 12 – 16:00
- Panto posters/promo are available for members to distribute
- November FC – Masterplan

124 LEADERS STATEMENT

Evening everyone, October has been a very busy month for staff, we have been looking at the budget. We are building on last year where a zero-based budget approach was taken looking at every line in the budget to make savings because of the significant budgetary shortfall we were experiencing because of the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic. I have been involved in the budget setting process for STC for the last four years as Chair of F&GP after many years managing budgets for DCC. But you are never too old to learn so I recently attended an online CDALC course on budget setting which I have to say was very informative. Since then the RFO and myself are looking to tweak some very small areas to bring us in line with best practice. It was a great relief to end

the course with the reassurance that our processes are sound and we were in some cases exceeding the expectations of CDALC.

You will have all received an invitation to a budget workshop where we can work together to develop our Medium Term Plan and agree the direction of travel for the budget to then begin its journey through the Councils decision making processes. The Interim Town Clerk and the RFO will be facilitating this workshop.

One thing I'm going to have to reiterate is the points made at the last Full Council meeting in my Leaders Statement around staff capacity to answer queries which are occurring after meetings have taken place the day before. So just for clarity this is the process: If you have a query about finance, please bring it up in the Finance and General Purposes meeting that is what it is for it is the place to ask questions to have discussion and debate about items on the agenda, not the following day or after the meeting. If you want to ensure a full and comprehensive answer to a query you have about an item on the agenda, please submit your question a couple of days before the meeting to give staff time to answer your question fully. All queries particularly those received directly after a meeting must be put into writing and will be answered at the correct meeting - for example if it was a query following F&GP the question and the answer will be tabled at that following meeting for full transparency. You are being asked, as a member, to support our staff who are working flat out by following these simple guidelines -they are not to stifle debate, in fact just the opposite we want debate and discussion to happen in the most appropriate and transparent manner – in the meeting where we can all be seen to be doing our jobs debating issues on behalf of our residents in a calm and measured manner.

125 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

One member of the public were present, they did not have a specific question and no questions had been received in advance of the meeting.

126 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

It was proposed by Cllr A Clegg and seconded by Cllr S McMahon that the minutes of the Ordinary Council Meeting on 28th September 2021 were **APPROVED** as a true record.

127 RECEIPT OF COMMITTEE MINUTES

It was proposed by Cllr A Clegg and seconded by Cllr G Binney that Council **RECEIVE** the minutes from Finance and General Purposes Committee Tuesday 14th September 2021

128 ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT & BANK RECONCILIATION

It was proposed by Cllr G Binney and seconded by Cllr A Hanson that Council **APPROVE** the payment of accounts and **NOTE** the bank reconciliation for September 2021.

129 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT JULY – SEPT 2021

The Council **NOTED** the report.

130 COUNCILLOR VACANCY

The Council **NOTED** the progress with the vacancy to date.

Cllr Marshall stated, and requested it be minuted.

“When a vacancy arises for the Town Council, regardless of the circumstances, and I’m sure all members of the Town Council have had the opportunity to read my email, and I didn’t get a response from it so I’m sure everyone agreed with the sentiment in it. When a vacancy arises on the Town Council effectively the community have the option to call an election if they want to and they do that by submitting a petition from ten people living in the area where the vacancy has arose, by a certain date, which in this case was the 11th October.

If that vacancy isn’t filled, and just for clarity for everybody, the Council as a group have the opportunity to co-opt a member on to save the cost of a by election and I think its important just to note that on this occasion there has been a petition submitted, and I think its even more important that we get it on public record, and I am going to be very carefull about what I say as I would like to make sure that this is minuted so we can approve it in the minutes next month. On the 30th of September at 10:28 in the morning Cllr David Tully sent an email to the Leader of the Town Council and to the Mayor of the Council suggesting they accept the proposal for a political appointment to that position, and that vacancy, via co-option. The first thing is that it isn’t within the Leader, the Mayor or Cllr David Tully or anybody’s gift to do that, and that’s the first point to note, but the second thing within that email Cllr Tully acknowledges that the other option, which is if there was a petition raised by the public which they are well within their rights to do, it would result in a costly election, which I’m sure the Finance Officer could confirm the costs of that which I’m sure is excess of £13,000, there or thereabouts, maybes even more, of the tax payers money.

By 12:35 on the same day after having a reply from the Leader of the Council to confirm that it wasn’t within her gift, it wasn’t with Olga as Mayor’s gift, there was reply from Cllr Tully basically saying that he was well aware of the process and well aware of the costs to the council of an election, however also stating that he’d already accrued the ten names for the petition and that unless we agreed that we were held to ransom or backmailed or which ever way you want to interpret the emails which we have in writing that he was going to put the petition in unless there was a political appointment of a Derwentside Independent member. Now given that most of the Derwentside Independent Members just in May several months ago put leaflets through doors around the whole of Stanley saying they put people before politics this just makes a mockery of the whole thing, by trying to blackmail Councillors and other Members of the Council that if they don’t agree to the co-option, a political co-option, which isn’t in anybody’s gift, that council and the taxpayers of Stanley would have to shoulder the burden of the cost of a byelection. So within 20 minutes, by my recollection, according to the time of the emails sent by David

Tully, he had managed to recruit ten names, I would suggest that Cllr Tully already had them names before he tried to coerce, blackmail or force through a political appointment which again wasn't in anybody's gift. So I just want that on the record, I would like that in the minutes and I think it's important and that the wider public understand the circumstances around this and understand the costs that are going to be shouldered by the taxpayers of Stanley, thank you chair.

Cllr Helen Clark

"Can I just come in there, obviously I did write to the Leader, I wrote to Jeanette earlier to what David put forward obviously the possibility of a co-option and whether that under circumstances and because we are pressed for cash whether obviously as a Derwentside Independent was standing down, and a Derwentside Independent has been elected and for whatever circumstances could not continue if it could be considered, if we could discuss a co-option because it wouldn't change the dynamic and of the council and it would have exactly the same dynamic, obviously I was told that that was not possible. I didn't know if it was something we could discuss and at some point before we got to the next stage because I will hold my hand up and I didn't fully understand if there was somebody there who could be co-opted that we had to go through the whole process. I know CDALC had to be involved and electoral services had to be involved I understand that but I didn't know if not changing the dynamic and saving the council money is an option that could have been looked at."

Cllr David Tully

"In the past we have had by elections that is exactly what Labour have done, one Labour out and one Labour in"

Cllr C Marshall

"It just makes a mockery of the whole process, lets put politics aside for one second, we are on about someone who is going to represent the community, regardless of political persuasion who will be the best person for the job, regardless of what political party they are tied with or not tied to, it's irrelevant, it's about who's going to best represent the public. I did not know there was two Derwentside Independent members who were trying to blackmail and coerce the Council"

Cllr H Clark

"I object to that, I object to that completely, I did not try to blackmail any Council I wrote to the Leader for instruction"

Cllr C Marshall

"Let me finish then members can say what they like about my views. I do think it's important people understand the consequences here, we have got emails from Members trying to say that if you pick this colour team over that colour team we won't charge the taxpayer £13,000+ for an election, it's bonkers, absolutely bonkers, there's nothing about capability, nothing about who's the best person for the job, no proposal about somebody who is already active in the community down there, simply that they are tied to the Derwentside Independents and to be fair chair this is the second election petition that David Tully has submitted to the County Council not in his ward, it happened in the last term where the election petition which I went and inspected was submitted by David Tully in another part of Stanley and here we are again, in an area he

doesn't even live in its absolutely bonkers, that's £13,000 that could have gone to our community.

Cllr H Clark

"Obviously when I did go to seek Jeanettes advice or whatever you'd like to call it and I do have a couple of people that I probably would have, had we gone further down that road, and I take offence that I tried to coorce or blackmail anybody, I am not and I am here to represent my community and the people that I stand for within the whole of Stanley not just Tanfield and I take exception at that, and I would like that on the record please"

Cllr J Stephenson

"Obviously I'm the person that everybody is emailing, Helen is right and she contacted me and it was very much about information, but Cllr Marshall is also right that the email from David was a totally different tone, I did seek CDALCs advice and I did seek electoral services advice and this isn't the correct process to be having a discussion and I did say this in every email that I replied and copied everybody into the responses and that response was it's a statutory process that has to be done by the book, it's a legal process and we should not be even talking about co-option until after the date the petition could have gone in and unfortunately what was going to happen, was some sort of political horsetrading to be done before hand that does happen in some places, but it certainly wasn't going to happen under my watch and things would be done correctly as far as I'm concerned"

Cllr D Tully

"Cllr Marshall, did you or your group ever co-opt anyone? Yes?"

Cllr J Stephenson

"All I know is that last two elections where there has been Labour people who have stood down then elections have been forced"

Cllr O Milburn

"I don't think theres anything futher to be gained by this as this can just go backwards and forwards and it can run and run, Alan is taking the minutes, sorry Ann is taking the minutes and what's been said will be a matter of record"

Cllr M Thompson

"Cllr Marshall commented at the beginning about the email he'd sent out and assumed everybody had agreed with it, can I just say that I don't like the tone of that email and I didn't agree with all of it"

Alan Tubman

"Was this an email about the resignation?"

Cllr C Marshall

"Sorry, just for a point of clarity this was an email sent to all Members regarding the position Cllr Wilkinson found herself in, was sent to all members and might be an email officers of the Council may not be aware of it"

Cllr M Thompson

"I think it was addressed to all Councillors. I think you assumed people agreed with it, I agree with bits of it, but there was bits I thought some of it was all wrong."

131 CIVIC HALL HEATING UPDATE

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that Durham County Council had been consulted as landlord on the potential agreement to renew the heating system, including solar pv panels and finance agreement. Officers from Durham County Council had said they disapproved of the project but had offered to work with Stanley Town Council on other potential solutions.

Officers from Durham County Council are to be invited to the next Full Council Meeting to discuss this further.

132 ELECTRONIC CHRISTMAS TREE

It was proposed by Cllr S McMahon, seconded by Cllr A Jones and **RESOLVED** that the Council agree for Durham County Council to dispose of the old electronic Christmas Tree, currently in storage.

133 EVENTS WORKING GROUP

Council **RECEIVED** the minutes from the Events Working Group and **NOTED** the update report.

134 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Press and public were excluded from the meeting and live streaming of the meeting was stopped

135 TOWN CLERK RECRUITMENT UPDATE

Council **RECEIVED** the minutes from the Town Clerk Recruitment Group and **NOTED** the verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk including the fact that 4 applications had been received and the group is to be reconvened on Monday 1st November to go through a shortlisting process.

136 INTERIM TOWN CLERK UPDATE

It was proposed by Cllr J Stephenson and seconded by Cllr C Hampson that Council **APPROVE** the recommendations of Finance and General Purposes Committee and Stuart Wardle is to be offered the position of Interim Town Clerk on a 20 hour per week basis, from 1st November 2021

137 DATE, TIME AND VENUE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, 23rd November 2021 6.30 pm Stanley Civic Hall.