

NEWBIGGIN-BY-THE-SEA TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Council Meeting held on Wednesday 11 July 2012 at 7 pm
at the Newbiggin by-the-Sea Sailing Club.**

PRESENT:

Councillors: R McCready (Mayor)

M Boon M Kirkup M Peden W Rogers A Thompson

Officer: D Earl – Town Clerk

IN ATTENDANCE:

8 members of the public were in attendance

OPEN SESSION

The following issues were raised by members of the public present at the meeting:

- A member of the public drew comparisons with the horticultural displays and grass cutting in Morpeth and expressed disappointment with the conditions at the east section of Front Street. It was explained that Morpeth Town Council had taken responsibility for these services some years ago and invested heavily from its greater town precept.

A number of maintenance issues were raised regarding the cleaning and painting of public seats; general litter and sand problems on the promenade requiring manual as well as mechanical sweeping. While acknowledging the extreme difficulties caused by the weather over recent weeks these matters would be taken up again with the county council.

- A further issue concerning the difficulty of use of the green spaces by local children was highlighted owing to the infrequency of grass cutting with the greater length leaving debris that made areas impossible for play. Grass cutting and maintenance of parks and open spaces were areas for further examination this year as part of the county transfer of local service responsibility and service delivery options and standards would be examined.

C028/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors L Anderson and M Cholerton.

C029/12 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2012 were agreed and signed as a correct record. Works to the Minewater drain had been delayed and representations were being made to the Freeholders so works would start at the beginning of August.

C030/12 MINUTES OF THE GRANT COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Grant Committee held on 13 June 2012 were received. The Chairperson referred to the grants recently awarded.

C031/12 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

New statutory provisions were now in force under the Localism Act 2011 regarding the declaration of members' interests covering the registration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other interests which would be considered as part of the following report on the new Standards Regime. No interests were declared in relation to business to be conducted at the meeting.

C032/12 NEW STANDARDS REGIME – INTERESTS AND CODE OF CONDUCT

The Town Clerk reported that the Secretary of State had laid regulations to define Disclosable Pecuniary Interests under the Localism Act 2011 that took effect on 01 July changing the previous requirements for members' interests.

This new definition as set out in the Appendix to the Code was important and applied not only to the interests of the member but also their spouse civil partner or person they were living with as such. Failure to register in future was a criminal offence and there was now a duty to disclose unregistered interests at the commencement of consideration of any matter in which a member has an interest. The maximum penalty of £5,000 on conviction and /or disqualification for up to five years had been created.

A new Register of Members' Interests including those of Town and Parish Councils was being established by the County Council and a new pro forma would be issued for completion with all entries being published on the Web Site.

The basic requirement regarding the new regime was to adopt a code of conduct that was consistent with the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty; and leadership and included provisions which the authority considered appropriate in respect of the registration and disclosure of 'pecuniary interests' and 'interests other than pecuniary interests'.

Northumberland County Council had adopted its new Code and put in place arrangements to deal with complaints including those relating to Parish Councillors following the appointment of a new Standards Committee and Independent Person.

Complaints regarding a breach of the new Code would now be handled by the county council as set out in Appendix 1 to the report although sanctions were significantly different to the previous Standards Regime. In the event that a member or co-opted member of a town or parish council breached its code of conduct the 2011 Act conferred no express powers to impose sanctions. A member could not be suspended or disqualified from office and actions were limited to censuring the member of the council. An apology or training could be agreed with the member.

It had been intended to have all local council's adopt the same Code for consistency and as the principle authority the County Council had been working with the Northumberland Association of Local Councils (Northumberland ALC) on a possible Code. This had not been achieved and both Northumberland ALC had issued a draft adapted from the national NALC version and NCC had resolved to request that its Code be adopted by all town and parish councils in Northumberland.

The new Code would apply to members when they conduct the business of the Council including the business of the office to which they were elected or when they claim to act or give the impression of acting as a representative of the Council.

There were special arrangements for a registerable 'sensitive interest' and for Dispensations to be issued for voting in appropriate circumstances. Minor amendments would be required so that the Council's Standing Orders reflected the new legislation.

Allegations of bias and pre-determination by members had been controversial areas in decision-making so the Localism Act included a presumption against a member having a "closed mind" unless that could be rebutted perhaps by the use of strong language or extreme views. Members were advised that this was still an area to be treated cautiously.

Members felt that there were no significant differences between the codes and that as the county council would be administering the new regime process it would be best to adopt that version.

RESOLVED that the Town Council:

- (i) note the changes to the Standards Regime and legislation regarding Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other interests;**
- (ii) adopt the new recommended Code of Conduct from Northumberland County Council;**
- (iii) delegate the Town Clerk to make appropriate amendments to the Standing Orders;**
- (iv) require all Councillors to complete and submit a new Declaration of Interests in accordance with the requirements of the new Code within 28 days .**

C033/12 CAR PARK SCHEME

An area of land had been identified as a possible temporary overflow car park that may be suitable for use during events that attracted increased visitors. The Town Clerk advised that the County Council considered access could be taken from Sea Crest Road and would progress consideration after a ground condition survey was carried out at the site. This investigation would cost between £2-3,000 and would have to be met by the Town Council.

Members considered that it was critical to investigate extra parking arrangements for events in the town and were particularly keen that they should be available for the

Triathlon event in September.

RESOLVED that: the Town Council meet the cost of the ground condition survey and request the County Council to progress consideration in time for the Triathlon event.

C034/12 APPRENTICESHIPS – NEWBIGGIN MARITIME CENTRE

The Chairperson reported that the Maritime Centre had already employed three new apprentices and funds could now be released to meet the Town Council's contribution.

Plans were already in hand at NMC as the hub organization for a Festival next summer linking with regional organizations in Arts and would be South East Northumberland-wide Igniting Imaginations to build capacity and showcase work for young people. The young apprentice team would assess evaluate and organize events with guidance as it was recognized that arts had been underfunded in this area. Support in principle was sought at this early stage.

A member referred to a leaflet circulated with the Leader which gave no profile to apprenticeship arrangements in Newbiggin and it was explained that they had to be linked through Ashington College and only the main hubs and office contacts were highlighted.

RESOLVED that Town Council confirm its support for the Festival arrangements for Newbiggin next summer.

C035/12 REVIEW OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR BUS SERVICES IN NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council was undertaking a review of the financial support it gave to bus services throughout the county which had only recently come to local attention by a letter from the Head of Sustainable Transport enclosing copies of the previous correspondence to over eighty parish councils in April and May. The background to the consultation was again the financial pressure on a budget of £2.46m supporting services throughout the county that had been held in cash terms meaning increasing costs would buy fewer services. Emphasis was placed on working in partnership with transport operators and local councils to encourage greater use of the bus services many of which were operating at a level in excess of £5 subsidy per passenger journey.

While better publication of services; re-timing ; changes of route; partnership applications for 'Get Going' funding from the National Sustainable Community Transport Initiative could all be explored there was a message of 'Use It Or Lose It' as the county council claimed it could not afford to support the costliest services in their current form any longer.

It was acknowledged that the Watbus Newbiggin Nipper service was being reasonably well supported and that subsidy levels were well within the critical level and the cost already being shared by the Town Council. It was clearly important that

local people continued to value and support this service and that it did not get caught up in this review.

RESOLVED: that the Town Council confirm the passion and support for the Watbus Newbiggin Nipper Service.

C036/12 ELECTRICITY CHARGES – TOWN COUNCIL COTTAGE

It had taken until now for the electricity supply responsibility to be transferred for the county council resulting in significant invoices being submitted for the previous two year period greatly exceeding the budget provision for the office accommodation. A number of issues of concern were raised about the delay and lack of information including whether other connections had been made by previous authorities to the supply.

RESOLVED: that the Town Clerk be authorized to challenge the accounts investigate the supply arrangements and meet the costs from balances.

Signed by the Chairman: Date:.....