

NEWBIGGIN-BY-THE-SEA TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Council Meeting held on Wednesday 23 January 2013 at 7 pm
at the Newbiggin by-the-Sea Sports and Community Centre.**

PRESENT:

Councillors: R McCready (Mayor)
M Boon M Cholerton M Kirkup
M Peden A Thompson

Officer: D Earl – Town Clerk

IN ATTENDANCE: 6 members of the public

OPEN SESSION

- In response to a query it was noted that the out-turn accounts at the year-end had been incorporated as part of the Annual Accounts that had been audited and published. The web site would be checked to ensure they were available.

C080/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors L Anderson and W Rogers.

C081/12 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2012 were agreed and signed as a correct record. It was noted that a new pit tub had been installed and that the Arts Centre lease had been transferred.

C082/12 MINUTES OF FINANCE COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee held on 19 December 2012 were submitted for approval. The Chairperson advised that the information concerning accounts over £500 was still to go on the web site and it was noted that the date included for the previous meeting of the Committee was incorrect.

The recommendations concerning Local Services Transfer were outlined by the Chairperson and updated information was provided by the Town Clerk. A further delay of one year had been announced by the County Council for the next phase of service transfers and officers had confirmed that not all of the play areas were likely to be transferred by April. Members were still of the opinion that responsibility could be accepted for Memorial Park following actual transfer. Recommendations regarding the Budget and Precept would be considered later on the agenda.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The minutes be approved and adopted;**
- (ii) The recommendations regarding Local Service Transfer be agreed with responsibility for Memorial Park being accepted from the actual date of transfer;**

(iii) The Project decisions be agreed;

(iv) The budget for grants be increased by £1,000 for 2012-13.

C083/12 **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS** –In relation to business to be considered later in the meeting Councillors Boon; Cholerton; Kirkup; Peden; Thompson declared interests as property owners; Councillors Peden and Thompson as members of Newbiggin Royal British Legion; Councillor Boon as Secretary of Newbiggin and District Allotments Association; Councillor McCready as a member of Newbiggin In Bloom and Councillor Thompson as Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services for Northumberland County Council.

C084/12 **DISPENSATION FOR MEMBERS**

The Town Clerk reported that following recent legislation and the adoption of new Codes of Conduct an anomaly had been created regarding declarations of interest in property and participation in debate and setting of budgets Council Tax and Precepts. Previous arrangements had been displaced and the report sought the Council's approval to grant a dispensation to allow all members to speak, participate and vote on these matters.

It had always been accepted that Councillors had no greater interest in setting the budget and Precept than other constituents and there would be no breach of the new Code of Conduct but there was still a technical problem relating to the requirements of the legislation. As it was now a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest there was a risk of committing a criminal offence by taking part in discussion and decisions unless a dispensation was obtained under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011.

The criteria was met for granting a dispensation for up to 4 years and it was suggested that these dispensations be for the remainder of the life of this Council (to 2 May 2013) for those existing members who were affected.

RESOLVED: that the Town Council grant a dispensation to Councillors with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest by virtue of an interest in property Councillors Anderson; Boon; Cholerton; Kirkup; Peden; Rogers; Thompson until 2 May 2013 so that all members could speak, participate and vote in all matters relating to the budget and setting the Precept.

C085/12 **PROPERTY TAX BASE FOR SETTING THE PRECEPT**

The County Council had to notify to each Town or Parish Council the Property Base which was the number of properties within the Parish Boundary from which the Precept was collected which currently amounted to 1,808.

Government legislation had changed the approach with regard to the localization of Council Tax benefit resulting in local schemes and the application of a differential tax base for Town and Parish Councils. The County Council had calculated the revised tax base by Town and Parish Council and advised that it agreed the default national scheme for 2013/14 as that protected working age claimants in addition to the national protection already afforded to residents of pensionable age. The impact by individual Town or Parish area would however vary depending upon the distribution of Council Tax benefit claimants and the distribution of empty properties and second homes.

The Town Clerk reported that the revised tax base for Newbiggin by-the-Sea was 1,348 after adjustment for other exemptions meaning that to collect the same Precept as the current

year the Band D charge would increase from £62.56 to £83.88 unless the County Council passed across 100% of the Grant from central government. Some 551 Band D equivalent properties in Newbiggin were removed from the tax base as part of the benefits scheme which in percentage terms was one of the largest reductions in the county amounting to 30%. Across the county there was an 11% reduction but very wide variations between individual parishes.

There was some uncertainty about when these final decisions would be notified and clearly as they were of great importance in the process of settling a budget and Precept representations had been made to the County Council by the Mayor and Town Clerk.

The County Council Executive had now recommended that the grant would be passed to Town and Parish Council's for 2013/14 to offset the anticipated impact associated with the localization of council tax benefit. The grant which would be paid with the April precept payment amounted to £28,742 for Newbiggin by-the-Sea Town Council. In order to protect local residents from any increase in the Precept payable as a consequence of the amended tax base the Town Council would need to deduct the grant from the Precept to be set for 2013-14.

Two late developments were reported by the Town Clerk which had a bearing on the Precept for this and future years. The passing on of Government grant was stated to be for one year only despite the fact that the only reason it came through the County Council was that the Government had no mechanism in place to pay direct. Government had clearly identified grant for Town and Parish Councils with the clear expectation it would be passed on and there was no need to make a decision regarding future years ahead of the grant settlement. Savings for the County Council against its baseline budget were minimal while there would be a huge effect on the Town Council Precept the following year.

The other issue was that the Director of Finance had changed the allowance for non collection of Council Tax from 0.5% to 1.8% having a knock-on effect to reduce the tax base further which had not been specifically notified. While the actual amount was not large the principle and timing were important and to retain the Band D figure would require a further allocation from balances.

RESOLVED: that

- (i) Tthe Town Council set the Precept for the budget requirement for 2013-14 after taking account of the government grant passed on from the County Council;**
- (ii) Strong representations be made to the County Council Regarding the tax base and future grant.**

C086/12

BUDGET 2013-14

The Chairperson outlined the budget proposals for 2013-14 and recapped on the service responsibility accepted the previous year and the options available relating to parks and playing fields and the recommendations of the Finance Committee. County policy; the result of Government transfer of benefits responsibility resulting in changes to the tax base with grant unlikely to be passed on next year had all been considered. As a result only Memorial Park would be considered for transfer this year.

Previous budgets had successfully enabled service delivery and support to a wide range of projects with the Town Council achieving much of what had been set out in the Town Plan agreed in 2010. It was intended to maintain the Precept at £113,110

the same as last year after taking account of the grant provided this year in relation to the change in the property tax base.

The Appendix circulated showed the merging of repairs and replacement budgets incorporated into the base budget and some reductions in special events and projects. The detail was outlined showing a reduction in administrative expenses; service delivery merged to cover a wider range of services; reductions for special events funding while maintaining support for key events; project funding continuing to progress other areas of the Town Plan.

In conclusion the Chairperson referred to the increased difficulty in setting a budget against the challenges of Government and the County Council and still delivers the range of projects and services expected. As an efficient and prudent Council the budget was sensitive to the local climate and needs and responsive to local expectations.

While the running of the Arts Centre had recently been taken over it was presently cost neutral so no specific provision was being made at this stage.

In order to compensate for the further change in the property tax base an additional contribution from balances of £1,107 was required to maintain the Precept at the current level.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The Town Council Budget for 2013-14 as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed at a total sum of £127,250;**
- (ii) A contribution from balances of £15,247 be used;**
- (iii) The Government grant passed via the County Council of £28,742 be taken into account in setting the Precept.**

C087/12 PRECEPT 2013-14

Taking account of the information regarding the budget; the tax base; Government grant and an increased allocation from balances Members decided to request a Precept that would result in no increase to the Band D equivalent payment of £62.56 for the next financial year.

Based on the presently known property tax base of 1,330.9 a Precept of £83,261 was required.

RESOLVED: that the Precept for 2013-14 be £83,261.

C088/12 NEWBIGGIN ARTS CENTRE

The Assignment of the Lease for Woodhorn Villa had been completed from Newbiggin Arts Forum following the issue of a license from Northumberland County Council with effect from 01 December 2012. Responsibility for the various utility accounts had also been completed and the various user groups notified.

The principle aim was to make the premises available for local community use in particular

and cover the operating costs through reasonable hire charges. Existing user groups were operating for as little as 2 hours per month with some clubs meeting weekly and the Gallery open at weekends. It was felt that there was scope for further use of both the Gallery area and some rooms within the main building and therefore rates for room hire by the hour day or month should be agreed.

In order to promote access to art for children and encourage visitors to the Gallery at weekends Members recognized that some hire rates would have to be subsidized and that would be done by approving grant to suitable local groups.

RESOLVED that:

- i) A basic hire rate of £7 per hour be agreed;**
- ii) The Town Clerk be delegated powers to agree room hire arrangements;**
- iii) The Grant Committee be delegated powers to consider grants to subsidise hire rates for approved users.**

Signed by the Chairman:

Date:.....