

NEWBIGGIN-BY-THE-SEA TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Wednesday 13 January 2016 at 7 pm at the Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre.

PRESENT:

Councillors: S Todd (Chairman)
M Boon L Burns M Cholerton R Dixon
M Peden W Rogers A Thompson

Officer: D Earl – Town Clerk

IN ATTENDANCE: 19 members of the public

OPEN SESSION

- Referring to a previous report regarding the condition of the bus shelter at Sea Crest Road a resident reported that the Perspex was shattered and was advised that Neighbourhood Services had been requested to arrange the repairs and this would be followed up.
- In response to a query about the Royal British Legion parade costs for Remembrance Day a resident was advised that while this was not an obligation for the Town Council it had made a contribution in each of the last six years and increased its donation in line with its budget both last year and in the current year.
- The production of a possible local list of significant buildings had been raised by the questioner by e-mail with Councillors who was concerned to prevent erosion of heritage buildings. While there were pros and cons identified by the RTPI to the local list approach it would be considered during the collation of the Town Plan.
- On behalf of a local business operator in Gibson Street an enquiry was made regarding responsibility for the paved parking area in front of the premises and the lack of drainage. It was felt that the area was likely to be owned by the building landlord but the Chairman undertook to visit the site with the Vice-Chairman.
- The Chairman referred to a list of questions submitted that afternoon by a local resident in relation to the budget proposals and indicated he would read out and reply to each separately as follows:
 1. Please can you explain why there is less transparency in the 2016-17 budget than there was in the 2015-16 especially since the thrust of central government regulation and advice is towards greater transparency?

Examples of a reduction in transparency in the 2016-17 budget is that budget forecasts for several items that were itemised individually last year are now grouped together under one global figure with no identifiable figure given for the individual items. The Special Events budget heading is one example of this and Project Funding is another. Bay Environmental Schemes, Town Environmental Schemes and Town Centre and Gateway Schemes are all now grouped together under one heading. This means residents can no longer identify what proportion of the global heading is being allocated to each area within it. We were able to do this last year.

There was no question of less transparency as the budget was in greater detail than necessary. Previous sub detail had proven to be of little benefit since moving to an enhanced services arrangement where priorities fluctuated throughout the year leading to monies being moved around. The details of County Council reductions were not yet known but would need to be looked at in due course. Members had considered and wanted greater flexibility in the other service areas mentioned to respond to demand and priorities.

- 2. Please can you explain the justification for a 9.6% increase on the budget total from last year, especially since inflation is running at virtually zero, core budget headings have remained static and Newbiggin is already the second highest taxed community in South East Northumberland?

The minutes of the Finance Committee indicated the reasons for the proposed increases and in particular a new budget for Town Improvement Schemes was added as shown in the appendix. The budget was tight and the Precept reflected the low property base of the town.

- 3. Please can you inform us of why it has been necessary to introduce the entirely new budget heading of 'Town Centre Improvements' this year and what exactly the new budget for it of £20,000 is to be spent on? As this new area accounts for virtually all of the 9.6% increase in budget it is important to know why this is a necessary and what it is for.

Members considered there was a need to be able to respond to reductions in county services following increased complaints regarding litter, dog fouling etc. They wanted to ensure improvements in the town were still possible to maintain economic wealth and visitor attraction to the town. No specific schemes had yet been identified or considered.

- 4. Please can you explain why the Triathlon is still being budgeted for when there was no event in 2015 and no event is planned for 2016-17? Please can you also explain why the Special Events budget has increased by £1,000 from last year rather than decreased especially since 50% of the allocated budget last year was for the Triathlon and this is no longer taking place?

The organisers of the very successful Triathlon event had advised the Town Council that they had insufficient capacity to run the event in 2015 but promised to review and see if an event could be re-introduced in 2016 so the budget was retained to support that. The Town Council had always covered the full cost of the associated road closure.

- 5. Please can you clarify exactly what the budget headings 'Youth and Adult Support Schemes' and 'Community Volunteering Support Projects' are spent on? These have appeared on every budget since 2013-14 but I have not been able to identify no spend on these specific budgets in the list of payments over £500.

No schemes had been identified to support in the current year but the Town Council wanted to maintain provision for possible suitable schemes in 2016.

- 6. Please can you explain why although the Finance Committee minutes indicate there is a need for additional staffing and website development, no provision has been made in the 2016-17 budget for these items. Does this mean no action will be taken on these areas until the next budget allocation in April 2017?

Until the Town Council had properly assessed what additional staffing resources should be put in place it had not increased the budget provision. A combination of existing budget, savings and balances should be sufficient to implement a part year or part time increase. It

would be considered for implementation in 2016.

- 7. Please can you clarify which of the 2 different figures given on the proposed budget is the correct one for Local Service Delivery? Page 1 gives a figure of £59,290, which represents a reduction of over £4,000 on the Service delivery figure for last year. Page 2 gives a figure of £63,350, which represents no change from last year. If the reduced figure is correct please can you indicate the reason for a reduction in the Service Delivery Budget for core services. Is the Town Council empowered to approve a budget document when there are discrepancies in the figures given and the total on P2 doesn't equate to the figures stated?

The figure at the top of page 2 had been amended and the document replaced the previous day. The reduction in overall budget took account of elements that could be delivered through the new budget for Town Improvement Schemes. There was no service reduction and in fact it was likely to increase. Queries regarding where Annual Accounts Statements were on the web site would be responded to by the Town Clerk.

- 8. Why is there no provision made in the budget for care and maintenance of the Colliery War Memorial? Previous correspondence with the chair has revealed that the only maintenance undertaken on this Grade 2 listed monument since the Town Council became responsible for it in 2012 has been the provision of a tidy up and floral planting prior to Remembrance Day. The report from the Town Clerk confirms the Town Council has the necessary powers to undertake appropriate maintenance. It is clear again from previous correspondence with and photographs provided to the Town Council that the monument is in need of an appropriate assessment of its condition and may require restoration work. Why has no provision in the 2016-7 budget been made for this?

A report was attached to the agenda dealing specifically with the War Memorials. The Town Council would later that night consider whether to undertake future responsibility for them as the County Council no longer would. The Town Council had not been responsible for the memorials since 2012 as previously advised as they were not transferred owing to the change in administration. If, as anticipated, future responsibility was accepted the maintenance requirements would vary from year to year and had to be covered by the overall Local Service Delivery budget.

C057/15 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C058/15 MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP

The minutes of the meeting of the Working Group held on 02 December 2015 were received. A short update was given confirming the installation of the arch at the Horseshoe Steps following the terracing and planting work and the half pit wheel at the former colliery entrance where Neighbourhood Services were to reinstate the surrounding land.

C059/15 MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee held on 09 December 2015 were received and approved subject to consideration of the budget recommendations later on the agenda.

C060/15 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS No new interests were declared at this point.

C061/15 WAR MEMORIALS

The report of the Town Clerk was considered covering the background to the question of responsibility for the care and maintenance of the War Memorials in the town.

The County Council had ceased to maintain them and while the Town Council had statutory powers to do so the memorials had never been transferred and remained on county land.

Cleansing and maintenance could probably be met from the local enhanced services budget but any significant work or repair to the Grade II Listed Memorials was likely to require specialist attention and be costly. That could however be addressed on a case by case basis and Members recognized the importance of the memorials to the community and the need for expert advice and estimates.

The community's gratitude to the Newbiggin Branch of the Royal British Legion was recorded for the enhancement of the Memorial Park with the installation of the new memorial walls.

RESOLVED that the Town Council:

- i) Consider the exercise of the powers under the War Memorials (Local Authorities' Powers) Act 1923 to maintain the War Memorials in the town when necessary;**
- ii) Seek expert advice and estimates for relevant work.**

C062/15 ELIZABETHAN HALL

The Chairman referred to the request from County Councillor Lang to consider the future running of these premises following the resignations from the Management Committee and advised that he was awaiting further information that had been requested. It was reported that the matter had been resolved that week.

RESOLVED that: the current position be noted.

C063/15 DISPENSATION FOR MEMBERS TO SET THE PRECEPT

The Town Clerk explained the position relating to the involvement of members of the Council with local property interests taking part in the setting of the Precept and recommended that the precaution of issuing dispensations be taken.

RESOLVED that: all Members of the Town Council are granted a dispensation to take part in the setting of the Precept.

C064/15 PROPERTY TAX BASE FOR SETTING THE PRECEPT

The Town Clerk confirmed that the base figure advised by the county council for the purpose of calculating the Precept for 2016-2017 was 1,371 Band D equivalent.

RESOLVED that: the Property Tax Base figure of 1,371 was noted.

C065/15 BUDGET FOR 2016-2017

Referring to the minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee the Town Clerk was invited to outline the recommendations for the budget set out in Appendix 1 with little change in the overall administrative expenses and the creation of a new budget for possible town improvement schemes.

The Chairman referred to discussions that morning with Neighbourhood Services concerning enhanced service work and that it was clear that with increasing budget pressure at the county council there were likely to be changes and the Town Council needed flexibility in its budgets to be able to respond to priorities during the year.

RESOLVED that: the Town Council Budget for 2016-17 be agreed at a total sum of £207,065 as set out in Appendix 1.

C066/15 PRECEPT FOR 2016-2017

With confirmation of the recommendation from the Finance Committee to allocate £10,000 again from balances towards the next budget and taking account of the property tax base the required Precept for the next financial year would be £197,065.

The increase for national comparator Band D properties would be £13.14 and that for Band A which covered 85% of properties in the town £8.76.

RESOLVED that:

- i) An allocation of £10,000 towards the budget was approved;**
- ii) The Precept for 2016-2017 was agreed at £197,065.**

C064/15 NEWBIGGIN DEVELOPMENT TRUST – A WAY FORWARD

The Chairman outlined the need to look at new challenges facing local government following greater devolution through the North East Combined Authority and increases in funding through the NE Investment Fund and advocated a new organization for the town to respond to meet them. Strategic plans and outline schemes would be required for satellite towns to be able to respond to economic regeneration and employment opportunities.

An independent and representative Development Trust made up of experienced business persons could pursue a strategic enterprise remit working alongside the Town Council when necessary but not led by it to bring a strategic plan to fruition. The need to develop workplace opportunities for local young people and the Human Capital Programme proposals were cited as examples of the different way forward that a Development Trust could progress the town.

Councillors were invited to support this way forward and while several supported a new business orientated organization one felt that the Town Team was developing that way and others requested further information before making a decision.

URGENT BUSINESS The Chairman agreed to the following item of urgent business:

C065/15 HIGHWAYS PROBLEMS ARISING FROM DEVELOPMENT

Councillor Dixon raised issues affecting pedestrians and the disabled in particular in the vicinity of the development of the former Windsor School site arising from indiscriminate parking on the footpaths forcing vehicles for the disabled into the road. References were made to the Method Statement for the development but pursuit of the developer and Site Manager had not met with a satisfactory response.

The Town Clerk confirmed that this matter and the issue of mud on the road had been referred to County Highways and the Chair undertook to contact the Site Manager and the developer.

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

Summary Budget 2016.17	
	Budget 2016.17
ADMINISTRATION	37,150
OFFICE/MEETING COSTS	7,955
FEES & CHARGES	5,920
CIVIC & MEMBERS EXPENSES	1,350
LOCAL SERVICE DELIVERY	59,290
REPAIRS AND REPLACEMENTS	27,500
TOWN IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES	20,000
SPECIAL EVENTS	6,000
PROJECT FUNDING	<u>41,900</u>
	<u>207,065</u>
ADMINISTRATION	
Salary provision	30,000
NI contributions	3,000
Pension Gratuity	4,000
Travel/Subsistence	50
Training/conference	100
	37,150
OFFICE/MEETING COSTS	
Rates	1,755
Building costs – The Bungalow	2,630
Telecommunications	700
IT Domain Web & Equipment	470
Room Hire – meetings	250
Printing & Stationery	450
Postage	100
Equipment & Furniture	100
Insurances	1,500
	7,955
FEES & CHARGES	
Audit – internal and external	750
Subscriptions – NALC	1,000
Professional Fees	200
Publications	3,500
Publicity	250
Bank charges	220
	5,920
CIVIC & MEMBERS EXPENSES	
Councillors expenses	600
Training costs	200
Town Assembly	100
Civic Expenses	100
Remembrance Day	350
	<u>1,350</u>
TOTAL ADMIN EXPENSES	<u>52,375</u>

LOCAL SERVICE DELIVERY	59,290
Enhanced Services Partnership	
Environmental work including cleansing of public seating; bus shelters; War Memorials	
Play Area Inspections	
Floral Bedding displays	
Newbiggin Nipper service contribution	
Christmas Lighting	
ASSET REPAIR AND REPLACEMENT	27,500
Bus Shelters; Play Areas; Public Seats; Public waste bins	
The Bungalow	
Facilities upgrade	
TOWN IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES	20,000
SPECIAL EVENTS	6,000
Gardens Competition/N in Bloom	
Newbiggin Triathlon	
Music events programme	
PROJECT FUNDING	
Environmental Schemes	
Bay Town and Gateway Projects	15,000
Holiday and leisure schemes	14,400
Youth and adult support schemes	3,000
Community volunteering support projects	2,500
Events Leaflet	1,000
Small Grants scheme	6,000
	<u>41,900</u>
Total budget	<u>207,065</u>