

NEWBIGGIN-BY-THE-SEA TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Council Meeting held on Wednesday 14 April 2010 at 7 pm at the Coquet Suite Sports and Community Centre Newbiggin.

PRESENT:

Councillors: W Rogers (Mayor)

M Boon	M Kirkup
M Cholerton	R Mc Cready

Officer: D Earl – Town Clerk

IN ATTENDANCE:

14 members of the public and 1 member of the press

OPEN SESSION

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

- A member of the organisation KEAP Creative operating from the Woodhorn Church Museum drew the Town Councils attention to the problems that could result in the organisation moving out of the premises at the end of the week despite negotiations with the county council over the past year. A further meeting with the landlord authority was scheduled for the following day and would be attended by a local county councillor and the Town Council's Mayor but if unsuccessful the group would have to move out.

She stressed that the church building which was a listed building had been part of the community for over 1000 years and needed to be occupied and in community use to avoid possible vandalism and deterioration. It was thought to be scheduled for disposal to secure a sustainable future but a report commissioned the previous year by the former Wansbeck Council had concluded that it had a zero market value and was not commercially viable owing to the high cost of operation and maintenance.

While there was an option and opportunity for the county council to transfer the building as a community asset it could also be a liability and since the vesting of the building in the new authority on re-organisation all decision-making remained with the county council.

- Prior written notice had been given of a number of questions relating to dog control matters from a member of the public associated with the responsible dog owners of the town. While introducing these she referred to an intended consultation exercise to be undertaken by the county council to review dog bylaws in the county including the order that applied to the beach at Newbiggin by the Sea and to the inefficiency of the county council in adhering to the rules.

New Orders could be made for failing to remove dog faeces; not keeping a dog on a lead; not putting and keeping a dog on a lead when directed to do so; permitting a dog to enter land from which dogs were excluded and it was stressed that the responsible dog owners were happy with the first three. She sought clarification from the Town Council of the following concerns:

- Will all Members ensure that any facts given as evidence are accurate?
- Can representatives from the local pressure group against the ban, be allowed to have a fair hearing, as an “other interested party”?
- Can an alternative to website based responses for Residents be provided?
- Will the result of the analysis be “open and transparent” and available to all?

While the conduct of the consultation exercise was a matter for the county council the Town Council was to be consulted and members would be clear about the facts; there was nothing to prevent the group requesting representation; even if the main exercise was web-based written responses could be submitted and copies of documents could be obtained through the Town Council if necessary; it was anticipated that the county council would make all the submissions available to the public as part of their reporting process to seek a formal decision in due course.

A member of the public referred to the Facebook Group and a card distributed by them which some felt gave an impression of support by the Chairman of the Town Council. While this was not the case or the intention the Town Clerk stressed the importance of not prejudicing a members’ position prior to decision-making and of seeking permission from councillors and the Council before publishing their contact information in other documents.

Some concern was expressed over photographs on the Facebook site of dogs on the beach and on the other hand a member of the public stated that some recent visitors would not have come to the town if they had known of the beach ban.

A report would be submitted to a subsequent meeting when all information was to hand.

- With reference to the minutes of the previous Council meeting the minimum rules on attendance at meetings by councillors were referred to again by a member of the public who claimed that Councillor Peden had not attended a meeting for more than six months. The Town Clerk confirmed that he had already checked the position and that he had attended a meeting of the Finance Committee in December and was within the terms of the six month rule.

C1O2/09 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were given on behalf of Councillors L Anderson M Peden and A Thompson.

C1O3/09 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2010 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

C1O4/09 ELECTORAL REVIEW OF NORTHUMBERLAND: FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The report advised that the electoral review of Northumberland undertaken by the Boundary Committee for England had been completed and awaited confirmation by an Order approved by Parliament.

It was intended to equalize electors per division so far as possible and a small amendment of the boundary between divisions in Newbiggin as shown on the plan attached to the report would also be reflected in the Parish wards which would continue to have four members each. While the county divisions were projected to have similar electorates the new Parish boundary would split the town approximately 75:25 leaving an imbalance.

RESOLVED that formal representations regarding this anomaly be put on record with the Boundary Committee.

C1O5/09 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2009/2010

Appendix 1 to the report set out the expenditure of the Town Council against the budget for 2009/2010 leaving an under spend in excess of £50,000. The detailed accounts would be finalised for audit and presentation to the Council prior to submission to the appointed external auditors in June.

It was explained that the under spend would be carried forward in balances to the next financial year and that any projects for which money was set aside should there be the need would be in the public domain before any formal decisions were made.

C1O6/09 NORTHUMBERLAND CHARTER FOR LOCAL SERVICES UPDATE

The Town Clerk updated the meeting regarding the Council's decision not to accept the transfer of local services on 01 April from Northumberland County Council other than allotments and seasonal lighting while issues over service levels and funding were clarified.

He had been advised of changes in the officers leading the local charter arrangements and the detailed operational issues as set out in the report but the approach still seemed to be a presumption that the services listed in appendix 2 of the charter were expected to be managed and financed by local council budgets. This would include play areas and bus shelters although only 3 of the 18 parishes affected had so far agreed to accept this transfer.

In the interim the Northumberland County Council had funded these services via a 'special expense' placed on the council tax bill to ensure that the expenditure was borne by the council tax payers of the parish where the service was provided.

A larger Implementation Group has been established with NALC and the county council to consider the transfer of local services and a review of the Charter would be undertaken shortly when terms of reference were finalised and also consultation arrangements with local councils. These matters would need consideration with the other larger councils in Northumberland.

.RESOLVED that the Town Council notes the position regarding the provision of local services and undertakes further negotiations with the county council.

C107/09 RISK MANAGEMENT

Members considered the report that explained each Parish Council should have in place a system to help it to manage risk and for the council's internal auditor to use the risk management system to help to identify what tests to carry out as part of the audit.

As members were ultimately responsible for risk management because risks threatened the council's ability to achieve its objectives they needed to identify the key risks facing the council; evaluate the potential to the council of one of these risks taking place and agree measures to avoid reduce or control the risk or its consequence.

The schedule of possible risks in Appendix 2 of the report was presented by the Town Clerk and the council was invited to confirm or revise the levels and controls identified.

One of the main ways of managing identified risks was through insurance and the Town Clerk referred to the late delivery of renewal proposals from the insurance brokers. Members considered the proposed increased premium of £1414.50 and discount offered.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the Council agreed the levels of risk and controls identified in the schedule;**
- (2) the insurance cover be renewed through Came & Co with Aviva.**

In view of the timing of impending changes the Chairman agreed to consideration of the following urgent item raised by Councillor Cholerton.

C108/09 REVISION TO LOCAL BUS SERVICES

Concern was expressed that Arriva was proposing changes to local bus services that would result in no direct service to Newcastle from the town after 30 May when passengers would have to change buses in Ashington. Issues regarding other services from the town were unknown but it was believed that the X31 service would pick up children for school. Councillor Cholerton volunteered to co-ordinate responses from the public.

C109/09 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items on the Agenda as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act relating to financial and business affairs.

Councillor Boon declared a personal interest in the following item of business.

C110/09 EUROPEAN POWERLIFTING CHAMPIONSHIPS 2011

The Town Clerk outlined arrangements and cost estimates for the European Junior Powerlifting Championships to be hosted at Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre in 2011 and advised that a number of grants were being sought by the organisers from various bodies.

This would be a very prestigious event bringing visitors to the town and the Council was asked to endorse the event and consider grant support if that were necessary. No expenditure would be required in the current financial year.

Members felt that the appearance of the town would be important and the cost of acquisition and erection of flags and bunting be investigated and planters and baskets for flowers.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Town Council endorse and support the hosting of the European Junior Powerlifting Championships in Newbiggin by-the-Sea in 2011;**
- 2) an allocation of £1,000 be made for support costs for the event and £1,000 grant if required.**

C111/09 INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE

The internal audit work immediately required certification not only of the accounts but also a range of matters specified by the Audit Commission for inclusion in the Annual Report including standing orders; financial regulations; risk management and financial controls. The Town Clerk had arranged for an appropriate finance officer to undertake this work at a preferential hourly rate.

The Council's financial balances were soon to be supplemented with the first instalment of the current precept and it would be prudent to make short and medium-term investment arrangements pending future expenditure.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) Richard Slater be engaged to undertake the internal audit work for the Council within a budget of £260;**
- (2) the Councillors that were signatories to the Bank Account be authorised to make investments of the council's balances up to £90,000.**

Signed by the Chairman:

Date:.....