

Minutes of a meeting of Cockermouth Town Council held in the council chamber, Town Hall, Cockermouth on Wednesday 21st February 2024 at 7.00pm.

Present:

Councillor Stephen Barnes
Councillor Howard Beanland
Councillor Cath Bell
Councillor Marion Bowman (from 19:01)
Councillor Isabel Burns
Councillor Julie Laidlow (Mayor)
Councillor David Malloy
Councillor Jim Samson
Councillor Gillian Telford
Councillor Helen Tucker
Councillor Richard Watson
Mrs Jane Ollerenshaw (Clerk)
Ms Kirstie Goodger (Admin)

Cumberland Councillor Andy Semple
Members of the Public – Nil

19:00 Meeting opened.

The Mayor welcomed Jane Ollerenshaw as the new Clerk and thanked Kirstie Goodger for having done an excellent job in keeping things together as acting Clerk in the interim.

242 Apologies Councillor Chris Bridgman had a prior commitment.

243 Minutes of the Town Council meeting of 17th January 2024 Cllr Burns pointed out that the list of objectives from the Staffing Committee had been asked to be deferred until this meeting by Cllr Malloy, but this had not been actioned, nor his request minuted. **Resolved** to add a sentence to note that point and to approve the minutes.

244 Minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting of 15th January 2024. Resolved to receive the minutes.

245 Declarations of interest Cllr Helen Tucker declared that she is a substitute member of the Cumberland Council Planning Authority.

246 Mayor's announcements There had been no engagements to report.

247 Public participation None

248 Planning applications

- **FUL/2024/0011** **Resolved** to recommend approval.
- **FUL/2024/0016** **Resolved** to recommend approval.
- **FUL/2024/0002** **Resolved** to recommend approval.
- **FUL/2023/0088** **Resolved** to recommend refusal as the Ecological survey has been conducted at the wrong time of year, during winter hibernation, and is therefore not indicative of the full ecology of the area. Cllr Tucker abstained.

249 Reports from Cumberland Councillors Cllr Semple (Cockermouth South) spoke about planned changes to waste services. There would be consultation with the public. Cllr Malloy asked if there could be a drop-in centre for this in Cockermouth and Cllr Semple said that he would lobby for one. Cllr Tucker (Cockermouth North) had submitted a written report. She also gave a verbal report and spoke about improvements to the Hiams system. Cllr Burns asked if the businesses affected by the road closure would be offered a reduction in business rates and Cllr Tucker confirmed that she had been chasing this. Issues regarding the state of the pavements following Fibrus work were raised, and Cllr Tucker said that they had been served with a notice to fix them. Concerns were raised about the former Wilco site; Cllr Malloy had contacted the owners and would pass on any news. The zebra crossing near the traffic control on Cocker Bridge was considered dangerous as pedestrians were crossing between stationary vehicles into flowing traffic coming from the other direction. This was particularly bad at school closing time. Cllr Tucker would contact the school about monitoring the crossing and would also see if a temporary pelican crossing could be installed further along Main Street and the zebra crossing closed, while the traffic control measures were in place.

250 Exclusion of Press and Public. Resolved That under the Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960, the press and public be removed due to the following two items containing personal information relating to staff and commercially sensitive information relating to contracts.

The press and public left the room.

251 Staffing Committee Recommendations. Ms Goodger left the room. **Resolved** to accept the recommendations from the Staffing Committee relating to pay scales, pension scheme and an extended honorarium period.

Ms Goodger returned to the room.

252 Town Hall Roof Repair. The Council considered quotations for the repair and agreed that they had a preferred contractor but had some queries regarding the

quotation. **Resolved** to delegate authority to the Clerk to engage the preferred contractor so long as the queries were answered positively, and the quotation did not exceed a specified sum.

The meeting was reopened to the press and public.

253 Financial. The end of year budget projection was submitted to the Council. **Resolved** To authorise the Clerk to make virements between budgets where possible to avoid overspends against budgets, but to agree that other budgets will have to be overspent in order to meet the Council's contractual and legal obligations, and that the shortfall will be met from reserves.

254 Budget 2024-25. The budget was reviewed due to extraordinary costs being realised. A number of recommendations were made to the Council.

Resolved:

- 1) The Clerk to research FSCS protected accounts in order to generate better interest income.
- 2) Allotment rents to be increased to £30 per half plot and £60 per full plot with a £10 fee for late payment.
- 3) Wedding room hire be increased to £150 + VAT (Mon-Fri) and £200 + VAT (Sat).
- 4) Fireworks budget to remain as proposed but alternative sources of income, including sponsorship and collections, should be investigated.
- 5) The budget was adopted as presented.

255 Precept. Resolved unanimously to request a precept for 2024-2025 of £376,362.

This is a balanced budget and represents an increase of £85,550 on the previous year's precept. This equates to a 25.39% or £22.13 per year increase to a band D property, which is less than 43p per week.

256 IT Contract. Resolved to accept the renewal of the five-year contract for accounts software and IT support, and to authorise the Clerk to sign the contract on behalf of the Council.

257 Garden Party Nomination. Resolved to nominate the Mayor to be put forward for the draw for invitations.

Cllr Watson suggested that in future years, the tradition of nominating the Mayor could be reconsidered.

258 Staffing Committee Terms of Reference. The document was discussed and queries raised about some points. It was confirmed that matters resolved by the Staffing Committee would be brought back to a full Council meeting for approval. **Resolved** to approve the terms of reference.

259 Allotment Eviction. Item withdrawn as the tenant had voluntarily surrendered their plot.

260 Schedule of Payments. Resolved to approve the schedule of payments.

261 Clerk's Report.

- I. Fire risk assessment action sheet had been circulated.
- II. Thirty-day trial of payroll software would be arranged with the possibility of bringing the function in-house to save money.
- III. Stamp sales would be restricted at the library.
- IV. The play area reports would be summarised.
- V. The fun day organisation is well under way.
- VI. The walk of witness request had been circulated **Resolved** to give permission for the walk to go ahead.
- VII. The library contract was due for renewal. The clerk would produce and circulate a report.
- VIII. Discussions were ongoing with Newcastle Building Society regarding their enquiry for a space within the library.
- IX. Complaints had been received regarding the waiting times in the post office and the lack of seating for the elderly while they waited.
Resolved for the Clerk to write to the post office expressing the Council's concern.

262 Banking Hub. Resolved that the Council would support and promote the petition calling for of a banking hub to be established in Cockermouth. Cllr Malloy would provide the petition wording.

20:58 Meeting closed.