

Minutes of a meeting of Cockermouth Town Council held in the council chamber, Town Hall, Cockermouth on Wednesday 21st May 2025 at 7.00pm.

Present:

Councillor Stephen Barnes
Councillor Catherine Bell
Councillor Chris Bridgman
Councillor Julie Laidlow
Councillor Alan Smith
Councillor Richard Watson

Councillor Howard Beanland
Councillor Marion Bowman
Councillor Isabel Burns
Councillor David Malloy
Councillor Gillian Telford

Mrs Jane Ollerenshaw – Clerk
Mrs Amy Jeffrey – Administration Assistant
Cumberland Councillor Andy Semple
Members of the public: 31

19:00

The Mayor, Cllr Richard Watson, thanked everyone for attending. Prior to starting the meeting, he wished to make some presentations.

Cheques for £785 each were presented to The West Lakes Squirrel initiative and Cockermouth Junior Football Club, the Mayor's chosen charities for the year.

Val Wright was presented with the Community Champion Award for her efforts supporting Fairfield School, the WI, and more recently raising funds through the Park Run café.

The Unsung Hero Award was presented to Bob Pritchard for his many years of voluntary work within the Town for various organisations, from youth work to the Kirkgate Centre and Cockermouth Live!

19.05 Meeting opened.

001/25 Election of Mayor for 2025-2026. Cllr Telford was nominated by Cllr Bowman, seconded by Cllr Bridgman. Cllr Malloy was nominated by Cllr Laidlow, seconded by Cllr Smith. **Resolved** that Cllr Malloy is elected as mayor for 2025-2026.

The Mayor thanked his fellow councillors for putting their trust in him. He presented Cllr Watson with the past mayor's badge and praised him for a successful year. His wife would be mayoress. The mayor signed his declaration of acceptance of office.

002/25 Election of Deputy Mayor for 2025-2026. Cllr Bridgman was nominated by Cllr Beanland, seconded by Cllr Watson. Cllr Laidlow was nominated by Cllr Smith,

seconded by Cllr Bell. **Resolved** that Cllr Laidlow is elected as deputy mayor for 2025-2026.

003/25 Apologies Cllr Samson had a prior commitment.

004/25 To approve the minutes of the meeting of 16th April 2025. Resolved to approve the minutes.

005/25 Declarations of interest Cllr Bridgman declared an interest in the Cockermouth Live! grant application as he is involved with organising the event.

006/25 Reports from Cumberland Councillors. Cumberland Councillor Semple spoke about Harris Park and mentioned the signage, footpaths and accessibility. He was keen to work with the Town Council to see if the area can be improved. He would speak to the leader of the Council and the portfolio holder to see what can be done. Cllr Smith said that the sign for Mayo Park was missing and the trees on Main Street were very overgrown. Cllr Bowman said that there could be more activities in the park. Cllr Barnes said that when the yellow lines had been repainted on Brigham Road, they had stopped short of where they were previously. Cllr Laidlow said that the bus shelter roof had been broken by the overgrown tree on Main Street. Cllr Bell said that the zebra crossing near the library was dangerous, as the Belisha beacons couldn't be seen due to the overgrown trees. Cllr Burns asked when people would receive the new bins. Cllr Semple said that those already ordered should be imminent, but there would be a second opportunity to request bins in September.

007/25 Public participation.

A question had been received from Mr A Clouston.

Following on from my question at the Annual Town Meeting, I should like to ask Cllrs Laidlow, Malloy and Smith what specific actions did the Council take to remedy the alleged failings of Cockermouth library? Was the decision to take over the library and spend £340 per man, woman and child in this Town worth it? Why are you still resisting passing responsibility back to the local authority which will, if it doesn't go through, saddle this Council with £70,000 worth of bill every year?

- Cllr Smith responded that the Council had looked at ways to improve the service and shortcomings, to increase membership. It had looked at opening hours, particularly to be open after school as it had closed at 3.30pm. It examined extra income, making it into a hub with a partnership with district. The Town Council owned and staffed the building and operated the TIC from that building rather than renting the building in King's Arms Lane, which saved money in rent. Cumbria County Council ran the library service, Allerdale Borough Council operated its area office from the library. Service Level Agreements were set up with these councils which fetched income in from

both. The current Town Council did not enter into a Service Level Agreement with Cumberland Council. In March 2018 the Cumbria Council library budget was slashed by £270,000, cutting back on the services provided, including reduced spending in adult and young people's fiction, audio-visual materials and newspapers and magazines. It was cut further in the next month, by doing away with the television licence for people who wanted to access the iPlayer. Services were being chipped away by the County Council and the Town Council stopped that. As far as passing the responsibility back for the library, it was too late, the library had gone and was with Cumberland now. No doubt the Town will reap the benefit now as the library and TIC is run by Cumberland. There were 12 councillors that made the decision in 2018, 4 are still councillors, Mr Clouston had omitted Cllr Burns from his question. It was a political decision and a democratic vote was taken. He had no idea what it cost, Mr Clouston had given a ball-park figure of £70,000, he didn't know that, it was just an aspect that was dreamt up by the present Town Council. He had nothing to apologise for. He reiterated that it was a political decision taken for the benefit of the Town and the people of the Town loved the fact that the library were doing extra things in there, that it was a hub and used by U3A, and that's what the Town Council provided. What Cumberland would do with it now, he didn't know, but he was fearful if they came to make further cuts.

- Cllr Malloy echoed Cllr Smith's comments but added that there were 3,000 people going through the library every month. He didn't know the breakdown of costs, but 3,000 people was an achievement from what it was, and it has turned into a hub and it was something to be proud of.
- Mr Clouston said that he found it very difficult to get the figures, but they were in the minutes, and it was £70,000 per year, probably more. He suggested that they ask the Clerk to confirm.
- Cllr Malloy said that there were 3,000 people utilising the library and we could only hope that it continued under Cumberland Council.
- Cllr Smith said that the usage figures went up by a lot when the Town Council took it over. He was wary of it being run by the County Council because when budgets are tight, they will look at soft things to cut.
- Cllr Laidlow said that the library was an asset that was gifted to the Town. All assets cost money and nobody had ever complained about having to pay extra on the precept for the library. Now it had been given back to Cumberland and the Town Council had no control over it at all, her guess was that at the first chance Cumberland get, with the empty building coming up in

town, that's where they will move the library and the library building will be sold off and end up as flats.

- Cllr Telford said that the use hadn't changed, they had more books and the library looked better. Because of the level of usage, they didn't think that it would be on the list for closure any time soon.

A member of public raised that it was difficult having to sit and look at the backs of some councillors, which he had raised at the Annual Town Meeting. He asked if any decision was going to be made on this.

The Chair said that no decision would be made on this.

Cllr Telford said that she had planned to review the seating arrangement had she become mayor.

The member of public said that they would email the question to the Clerk every month.

008/25 Planning

- **WTPO/2025/0014 Resolved** to recommend approval, but to request that Cumberland Council work with the owner to draw up a woodland management plan going forward.
- **FUL/2024/0192 Resolved** to recommend refusal for the reasons previously given and to raise additional points regarding flooding, biodiversity, paths and access safety. The Council agreed that a request for S106 funding should be submitted in the event that permission was granted.
- **HOU/2025/0092 Resolved** to recommend approval
- **HOU/2025/0020 Resolved** to recommend approval. Cllr Beanland suggested that the ward councillors may wish to make the overlooked neighbours aware of the condition included within the decision notice, which is a measure to safeguard their privacy.
- **FUL/2023/0088 Resolved** to recommend refusal for the reasons previously given, plus there was now clear evidence of squirrels dreys to support the objections.
- **ADV/2025/0009 Resolved** to recommend approval

009/25 Planning Decisions Under Delegated Authority. Resolved to note the schedule as received.

010/25 Review of items under standing order 5J

- v. **Delegation Arrangements. Resolved** to remain unchanged.
- vi. **Terms of Reference. Resolved** that the Staffing Committee would review their terms of reference in July and bring these back to the Council for approval; the Town Twinning Committee terms of reference would remain unchanged.
- vii. **Appointment of Members. Resolved** that Cllr Laidlow is appointed to the Town Twinning Committee. **Resolved** that Cllr Telford is elected as Chair of the Town Twinning Committee. Cllr Smith said that the membership of the Staffing Committee needed to be politically balanced. The Clerk stated that within the terms of reference, membership was for the term of the Council for continuity, and the terms of reference were now being considered by the committee at their July meeting. Cllr Watson stated that political balance is not recognised at this level of government.
- viii. **New Committees. None.**
- ix. **Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. Resolved** to accept the extant Standing Orders. A minor amendment is required to the Financial Regulations which will be brought back to a future meeting.
- x. **Other Authorities. N/A**
- xi. **Representation on External Bodies. Resolved** that Cllr Smith would remain as the Council's representative to the Cockermouth & Papcastle Recreational Trust.
- xiii. **Asset Register.** Would be considered with the annual return.
- xiv. **Insurance.** The Council remained in a three-year deal with Zurich.
- xv. **Subscriptions. Resolved** that current subscriptions be maintained.
- xvi. **Complaints Procedure** was still under review and would be brought to a future meeting.
- xvii. **FOI & Data Protection Procedures.** The Clerk would review by the end of September.
- xviii. **Press & Media Policy. Resolved** to keep the extant policy.
- xix. **Employment Policies.** All have been reviewed recently.
- xx. **GPOC/S137 Spending.** £25 had been spent on the poppy wreath.
- xxi. **Date of future meetings. Resolved** as
 - 18th June 2025
 - 16th July 2025
 - 20th August 2025
 - 17th September 2025
 - 15th October 2025
 - 19th November 2025
 - 17th December 2025
 - 21st January 2026
 - 18th February 2026
 - 18th March 2026

15th April 2026

20th May 2026 (Annual Council Meeting)

011/25 Internal Audit Report. Resolved to approve the report and note that there were no recommendations to action.

012/25 Annual Governance Statements. The Clerk read through the governance statements and the answer to each was agreed.

013/25 Annual Accounting Statements. Resolved to approve the accounting statements.

014/25 To agree the period for public rights. Resolved to agree the dates 3rd June to 14th July 2025.

015/25 Internal Auditor appointment for 2025/26. Resolved that Mrs G Airey be appointed as internal auditor.

016/25 Schedule of regular payments. Resolve to approve the schedule as submitted.

017/25 Climate Emergency Group

- **Greyrigg Play Area.** Cllr Beanland said that he had visited the site and the Isel Road site, along with other councillors. There was scope for planting fruit trees and bushes around the area which would not affect residents. He was hoping to review the location of the football pitch. Consultation of local residents was planned. He thought that a design consultant would be advisable. The area under the swings needed attention and there were thoughts that trees could be thinned out. He would bring a report to a future meeting
- **Isel Road Play Area.** Cllr Barnes said that it might be possible to have someone manage the wooded area, coppicing etc, in exchange for the timber. He was concerned about a tree at the side of the road which looked to be dead and was potentially hazardous. Cllr Barnes said that there may be nature and wildlife charities that would help with design work, so he would look into this. The clerk would arrange for inspection of the tree.

018/25 Community Led Plan. Cllr Bridgman said that there had been a meeting with Action for Communities in Cumbria and a constitution and steering group had been established. There would be wide consultation so everybody could be involved in putting forward a vision for the Town.

019/25 Memorial Bench & Tree Policy. Deferred to the next meeting.

020/25 Remedial work for the Town Hall steps. Resolved that the contract be awarded to Eric Nicholson for the agreed specification and cost.

021/25 Grant Applications. Applications were considered from Cockermouth Titans ARLFC and Cockermouth Live! The applications were for more than £500 which meant that in accordance with the policy, the application would need to be submitted by the deadline in the previous financial year. **Resolved** that £500 be awarded to both applicants and the Clerk to explain the policy to the applicants.

022/25 Fireworks budget and road closure. Resolved that the funding for the full road closure for safety should be found from reserves, and the display should be kept as was agreed.

023/25 Payments for approval. Resolved to approve the payments.

024/25 Pre-approved payments. Resolved to note the schedule of payments.

025/25 Clerk's Report. The Clerk's report had been circulated.

- The NHS Trust had been unable to attend the meeting to discuss the Yewdale ward closure. The Clerk was asked to write to Markus Campbell-Savours to ask for his support to prevent this.
- The Clerk had raised the problems with the trees on Main Street with Cllr Tucker who was chasing this with Highways.

026/25 Councillor Matters.

- Cllr Smith asked about a footpath survey that had been carried out. Cllr Beanland said that it had been carried out in 2023 and sent to Cumberland Council, but no response had been received. The Clerk would try to find any original correspondence. Cllr Watson said that the budget heading was reworded and had never been intended for urban footpaths.
- Cllr Telford said that the Twinning visit that was here last month had gone very well, despite it having to be done on a smaller budget.

027/25 Date of next meeting. Confirmed as Wednesday 18th June 2025.

21.00 Meeting closed.