

Minutes of a meeting of Cockermouth Town Council held in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Cockermouth, on Wednesday 15th October at 7.00pm

Present:

Councillor Stephen Barnes
Councillor Chris Bridgman
Councillor Isabel Burns
Councillor David Malloy (Mayor)
Councillor Alan Smith
Councillor Richard Watson

Councillor Howard Beanland
Councillor Marion Bowman
Councillor Julie Laidlow
Councillor James Samson
Councillor Gillian Telford

Mrs Amy Jeffrey – Acting Clerk
Members of the Public: 7

19:00 meeting opened.

133/25 Apologies Cllr Bell had submitted apologies.

134/25 To approve the minutes of the Cockermouth Town Council Meeting of 17th September 2025. Resolved to approve the minutes.

135/25 Declaration of interests.

Cllr Malloy declared an interest in planning application FUL/2025/0149 due to being a customer of the applicant.

136/25 Exclusion of Press & Public. Resolved to exclude the press, public and staff from the meeting during consideration of item 22, due to the confidential nature relating to staffing matters.

137/25 Mayor's Announcements.

Cllr Malloy had attended the Mayor of Wigton's Civic Service and the Mayfield School Coffee Morning.

138/25 Reports from Cumberland Councillors.

- **Bus Service.** Cllr Semple reported that the Cockermouth Bus Service is expected to be announced soon as part of a wider announcement covering multiple services. Cllr Burns stated that the service was anticipated in November. Cllr Smith added that the service was promised to be fully operational by 3rd November. Cllr Semple confirmed that it would be in November and that the announcement would happen soon.
- **Greenway.** Cllr Semple reported that if Story Homes agree to install lighting, Cumberland Council will adopt it. A meeting on this is scheduled and he will provide an update. Cllr Semple also reported that the Greenway and Harris Park were being proposed to the Lakes to Sea community panel for the 'place review' which will happen in early spring. The panel will select one area for review and aim to improve. Cllr Semple will update the Council if the

Greenway and Harris Park are chosen and expressed a desire for Town Council involvement.

- **Mayo Park.** Cllr Semple confirmed that the Mayo Park Street sign would be put up the following day.
- **Ellermire Drive.** Cllr Semple reported that contact has been made with Strawberry How Nursery School, located across the road. The children will be creating drawings to display along the roadside to remind vehicles that children may be crossing. In addition, appropriate signage will be provided by Highways.

Cllr Smith commented that the updates from Cumberland were positive. He enquired whether Cumberland Council would be operating the new bus service, and Cllr Semple clarified that the Council is solely providing funding. Cllr Smith further noted that the reinstatement of the Mayo Park sign has taken four months and expressed concern that the town has been neglected. He requested that the trees on Main Street be attended to as soon as the Christmas lights are removed in the New Year, as this work had been promised for the autumn but has not yet been completed. Cllr Smith also requested that the street markings be repainted as they are now very faded. Cllr Semple confirmed that he had received an email stating this work is scheduled to commence next week.

Cllr Laidlow asked whether there was any update regarding the tree on Station Street. Cllr Semple could not provide an update.

139/25 Guest Speakers. None present.

140/25 Public Participation.

Questions had been received from Mr Alan Clouston which were addressed to Cllr Laidlow.

Mr Clouston: Do you see the £2,200 you received for each of the four times you were Mayor, as expenditure to cover expenses or as a Mayor allowance?

Cllr Laidlow: It covered both expenses and allowances.

Mr Clouston: Was the bit that was an allowance taxed?

Cllr Laidlow: It wasn't until 2023 where we started receiving it by a cheque and it was taxed at source. We got an allowance prior to that and we used it accordingly.

Mr Clouston: Tax was paid?

Cllr Laidlow: I can't answer that.

Mr Clouston: Well if the allowance was paid to you, you would either know if it was taxed by you or taxed by the Council by the Clerk.

Cllr Laidlow: I can't answer that question, you'll need to ask the Clerk.

Mr Clouston: Were there any conditions applied to the allowances and how could or should be spent?

Cllr Laidlow: In the Mayor's Handbook there is a list of guidelines.

Mr Clouston: And did that include things like clothing?

Cllr Laidlow: Clothing, yes.

Mr Clouston: And that directly related to the public requirement to spend the money appropriately and in the public interest? Which is in the Code of Practice.

Acting Clerk: There is a reasonable clothing allowance for Civic Events for the Mayor.

Mr Clouston: and that's in the?

Acting Clerk: That's in the Standing Orders in our Mayor's Allowance Policy which was done in 2024.

Mr Clouston: Can you justify your expenditure at the time of COVID?

Cllr Laidlow: I still continued to fundraise even though I couldn't attend events. I had Firms at the time and I raised money through the shop. I still fundraised out of my own expenses and at the end of my two years I presented my charity with a cheque for £4,000 I raised over those two years. All raffles I held, I bought my own raffle prizes for my charity fundraising.

Mr Clouston: So it was a means of supplying.

Cllr Laidlow: No it didn't all go on that and I'm not prepared to discuss my finances.

Mr Clouston: I'm not asking you to discuss your finances I'm asking you whether-

Cllr Laidlow: Part of it went on a laptop because I didn't have one for team meetings. I used part of my allowance for that as well, because I couldn't chair the meetings.

Mr Clouston: And were all these goods and services recorded?

Cllr Laidlow: Yes.

Mr Clouston: And they are available in the documentation that the Council hold?

Cllr Laidlow: No it's my personal records. I just kept receipts myself.

Mr Clouston: So there's no record of what you spent that money on.

Cllr Laidlow: I don't have to answer that. That was my own personal finances.

Mr Clouston: So there's no record of what money was spent on?

Cllr Laidlow: I kept receipts at the time.

Mr Clouston: When the Town Clerk retired. Several leaving parties were arranged which were charged to the Town Council.

Cllr Laidlow: There was one leaving party and I paid for the buffet out of my allowance. It was a small civic event in here for organisations and individuals that the former clerk had been involved with during her time in post.

Mr Clouston: But not all Councillors were invited.

Cllr Laidlow: And that was at her request. Which is why it came out of my allowance rather than entertainment, otherwise I would have been duty bound to invite everyone, and that isn't what she wanted.

Mr Clouston stated that he was distressed that money is being spent at a rate of £2,200 without proper accountability. This is the second time he'd asked for this information and it has not been forthcoming. This was public money. He felt that the rules, Code of Conduct, had not been followed.

Cllr Malloy advised Mr Clouston that while he understood his comments, any issues should be submitted in writing to the Clerk rather than raised at that moment.

Mr Clouston: It's an expectation of the Code of Conduct for persons in Public Office to adhere to the Code of Conduct. Are you aware of the Code of Conduct and have you ever failed to meet its requirements?

Cllr Laidlow: In my capacity as a Town Councillor, I have never knowingly not adhered to the Code of Conduct. I have never failed to meet the Code of Conduct in my capacity as a Councillor.

Mr Clouston: Are you saying that in your capacity as a Councillor is separate from your individual capacity? So you can do what you like as an individual?

Cllr Laidlow: I can't do what I like but I can have a different opinion as an individual than I do as a Councillor. That is the Town Council Code of Conduct, not an individual's Code of Conduct.

Cllr Smith clarified to Mr. Clouston that the exchange was intended as a question and answer session rather than an interrogation. Cllr Malloy further confirmed that the item was not a debate.

Cllr Laidlow noted that Mr. Clouston had missed a question concerning Marvejols. She explained that the matter related to the 40th Twinning Anniversary and confirmed that she was entitled to use her allowance to cover the cost of the flight.

141/25 Planning

- **FUL/2025/0149 Resolved** to recommend approval. Cllr Malloy did not participate in this item.
- **FUL/2025/0142 Resolved** to recommend approval.
- **LBC/2025/0026 Resolved** to recommend approval.
- **WTPO/2025/0029 Resolved** to recommend approval.
- **HOU/2025/0155 Resolved** to recommend approval.

142/25 Planning Decisions Under Delegated Authority. Noted as received.

143/25 Climate Emergency Group.

- **Isel Road.** Cllr Bowman explained that the group had hoped to find someone local who might be interested in managing the woodland. Following a discussion with The Coppice Co-op, based in Silverdale, it was concluded that the site would not be suitable for coppicing. However, a member of that organisation who lives in Cockermouth will make contact in due course to offer free advice on the best way to proceed. Cllr Bowman noted that this would be a significant project and agreed to report back in due course. Cllr Barnes thanked Cllr Bowman for her work.

144/25 Community Led Plan. Cllr Bridgman reported that the group had agreed not to rush the process and would aim to hold the visioning day in the spring to allow more preparation time. A meeting of the group was scheduled for 20th October, with the hope of bringing a more detailed timeline to the November meeting.

145/25 Call for Sites. Cllr Malloy reminded the Council that the deadline for submissions was in January and asked members to continue putting forward suggestions for the Clerk to collate. Cllr Smith supported the ideas put forward, particularly those addressing development on the eastern side of the town, which he felt had expanded too much. Cllr Samson suggested providing maps of all proposed sites. Cllr Bowman noted that, given the January deadline, the proposals would need to be finalised at the December meeting. Cllr Malloy reiterated the importance of submitting suggestions to the Clerk.

146/25 Traffic Signage at the top (south end) of Kirkgate. Cllr Beanland reported that at the top of Kirkgate there were two signs: one incorrectly positioned on the reverse side of an existing signpost and another temporary sign that had been in place for around six months. He also noted that the current wording reads "Road unsuitable for long vehicles" rather than "No long vehicles" and suggested adding road markings stating "NO HGV".

Cllr Smith confirmed that he had reported the issues on 12th February and again to the Highways Manager on 25th February, who advised that it was a budget item for 2025/26 with a 4-6 month delay for ordering signage. He had recently requested an update but had not yet received a response.

Cllr Beanland thanked Cllr Smith for his work and suggested that correspondence from the Town Council as a whole may be more beneficial. Cllr Barnes emphasised that signage should be placed well in advance of the junction and on both sides of Lorton Road. Cllr Malloy suggested that Cllr Smith pass details to the Clerk to combine with previous correspondence. **Resolved** to write to Cumberland Highways regarding insufficient signage on Kirkgate.

147/25 Tracy Walker Park. Cllr Bowman asked the Council to resolve to place on record Cockermouth Town Council's appreciation for the work of the late journalist Tracy Walker Park.

Tracey served as Cockermouth reporter for CN group publications for many years, attending Council meetings regularly and reported diligently, accurately, professionally and fairly on all newsworthy proceedings of the Council and activities in the town.

She fulfilled the vital role within democracy, exercising the historic rights to freedom of the press and freedom of expression on behalf of the public, not least in scrutinising local government and holding elected representatives to account. Cockermouth Town Council also notes that the concern that since his walker left the CN group titles, now owned by Newspress, a subsidiary of the American media giant Gannett, no members of the local media have attended council meetings to report on the council's discussions and decisions. This is evidence of a serious decline in a critical function of local media, which is to contribute to keeping them the local electorate well informed

and able to participate in our democratic system. **Resolved** to send a proposed letter to local media outlets for publication where possible.

148/25 Proposal for separate Facebook Group to promote weddings. A written report was received from Amy Jeffrey detailing the reasoning and benefits behind the proposal. **Resolved** to accept the recommendation.

149/25 Budget Comparison. Noted as received.

150/25 Payments for Approval. **Resolved** to approve the payments.

151/25 Pre-approved Payments. **Resolved** to note the schedule of payments.

152/25 Clerk's Report. The Clerk's report had been circulated.

- **Jennings.** Following an explanation regarding the nature of the invitation, Jennings confirmed they would aim to attend a future meeting
- **Allotments.** Plots 20a and 20b Gote have now been merged into a single plot numbered 20.
- **Banking.** The banking mandate has been completed and will be submitted to HSBC.
- **Mayoral Chain.** Photographs of the chain have been taken and will be sent to Fattorini to obtain quotations.
- **Tivoli.** The Acting Clerk invited Councillors to submit any specific questions to the Clerk that they would like forwarded to Tivoli.
- **Memorial Gardens.** The outdated sign previously reported by Cllr Telford had been removed. A fallen tree, damaged during Storm Amy, had also been cleared.
- **Lakes to Sea Event.** Cllr Bowman confirmed her intention to attend.

153/25 Councillor Matters.

- Cllr Telford suggested sending a letter of congratulations to Linking Lives for winning the Community Group Award at the recent Make A Difference Awards Evening. **Resolved** that a letter of congratulations be sent.
- Cllr Telford expressed concern over the number of trees being removed along Low Road. Cllr Malloy suggested that Cllr Telford should raise the issue with Cumberland Council.

Staff and public left the meeting.

154/25 Staffing Committee Report. Councillor Watson presented a confidential report and then recommendations from the Staffing Committee were considered. **Resolved** that the recommendations on pay awards and leave entitlement be agreed. A further review would be conducted in a month which would be considered by the Staffing Committee before a further recommendation to the Council.

155/25 Date of next meeting.

Confirmed as Wednesday 19th November 2025.

20.45 meeting closed.