

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Town Council held on Tuesday 08 September 2015 at 6 pm at The Town Hall, Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed

PRESENT:

Councillors:	H Bettison (Town Mayor)	E Goodyer
	J Beresford	K Graham
	D Blackburn	J Lang
	I Dixon	G McLean
	A Forbes	C Seymour
	T Forrester	G Smith
	A Gibson	

IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Pattison, Town Clerk
Steve Cozens, Assistant to the Clerk
Joyce Benton, Sergeant-at-Mace
Cllr G Hill (Left the meeting after the Open Session)
34 members of the public

OPEN SESSION

Cllr Bettison advised the public that Mr Tony Kell had requested to video/record the meeting and asked if the public had any concerns regarding this? They had not.

Mr B Darling queried the Council's insurance arrangements and also expressed his concern at a 'listed wall' being knocked down at the Governors House. Mr Chris Gregory mentioned his long term battle against wrongful dismissal. Mr A Marshall advised Cllr Hill was his sister and she was not a bully and advised the Standards Committee hearing had no legal basis and also mentioned the shutdown of Portas. Mr Watts requested information on the legality of Councillors being able to vote at the meeting who had previously supported Cllr Hill at the standards committee. Mr Mark Graham stood up in support of Cllr Hill. Mr D Anthony felt Cllr Hill had let the people down and thought she should now

step down and let the people of Berwick decide. Sue felt the Council and Berwick needed to move forward. Mr T Kell advised his passion for transparency and Mr Keith Wilson wanted further information on other queries pertaining to Cllr Hill.

C094/15 **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been accepted on behalf of: Councillor G Roughead.

C095/15 **2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Cllr Hill declared a personal and prejudicial interest and left the Meeting

C096/15 **3. REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION**

None

Cllr Bettison asked Councillors if they wished the meeting to be held in public or in private? Councillors were unanimous in agreeing the meeting should be heard in public

Cllr Bettison then asked Councillors to speak.

Cllr Forrester advised Cllr Hill was not a bully and had campaigned tirelessly for greater transparency. Cllr Hill had devoted considerable time to updating the Council's standing orders and financial regulations. Councillor Forrester also expressed his concern at recent by-election expenses. Cllr Forrester then proposed an amendment to accept receipt of the recommendations and reject items 1-3 but accept item 4. Cllr Goodyer advised his thoughts on how the Council had improved dramatically since he attended a meeting 2 years ago which was both intimidatory and also bullying and Cllr Hill was not present at that meeting. Cllr Blackburn advised Cllr Hill was not a bully and the term bullying should not be misused. Cllr Seymour said that the standards committee hearing was deeply flawed and Cllr Graham advised that it was vital to protect a whistle blower with guidelines set out in the 'disclosure policy' Cllr Smith said although he was not an elected member he fully supported Cllr Hill. Cllr Forbes advised nobody was above the rules and the code of conduct was there for a purpose and the Council cannot encourage bad behaviour. Cllr Mclean though it was a sad night for the Council but the standards committee had made their recommendations and the Council must now look to the future. Cllr Beresford declared Cllr Hill was a good person but confidential information should not have been put onto Facebook. Cllr Lang advised the sanctions against Cllr Hill did

not prevent her from voting, being a member of any committees and also speaking at any of the aforementioned. Cllr Dixon did not want Councillors to argue any further in regard to these matters. Cllr Gibson mentioned confidentiality issues and Cllr Bettison who was overcome with emotion and became upset advised it was a pity this issue had not been dealt with before new Councillors had come on board. Cllr Bettison went on to say that Cllr Hill was an excellent Chair of Finance Committee but expressed her concern that confidential Council papers had ended up on Facebook.

C097/15

4. TO CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Chairman, Cllr Bettison asked Councillors whether they preferred a named vote or a secret ballot and the majority agreed on a named vote.

Cllr Forrester requested his proposed amendment be considered - *to acknowledge receipt of recommendations and reject items 1, 2, 3 and accept 4*. This was seconded by Cllr Seymour. 6 Councillors voted for the amendment to be accepted, Cllrs Forrester, Seymour, Graham, Smith, Goodyer and Blackburn with 7 Cllrs, Lang, Forbes, Gibson, Mclean, Bettison, Dixon, Beresford voting against.

A request by the Chairman to ask Cllr Hill to come back into the room was not fulfilled due to Cllr Hill having left the meeting.

A request for a further amendment by Cllr Goodyer and supported by Cllr Blackburn became confusing and was not accepted.

1. That it be recommended to Berwick upon Tweed Town Council that the Subject Member be issued with a formal censure by that authority
Against the recommendation – Cllrs Goodyer, Blackburn, Graham, Seymour, Smith, Forrester – 6
For the recommendation – Cllrs Bettison, Dixon, Lang, Gibson, Forbes, Beresford, Mclean – 7

RESOLVED: Cllr Hill will be formally censured by Berwick Town Council

Cllr Bettison formally read out;

The Town Council censures Cllr Hill in relation to the Members Code of Conduct found by the Standards Committee.

2. That it be recommended to Berwick upon Tweed Town Council that the Subject Member be removed, and remain removed, from any position she currently holds as Chair or Vice Chair of all Committees and Sub Committees of that

authority for a period of twelve months from the date of that authority agreeing any such sanction.

Against the recommendation – Cllrs Goodyer, Blackburn, Graham, Seymour, Smith, Forrester – 6

For the recommendation – Cllrs Bettison, Lang, Dixon, Gibson, Forbes, Beresford, Mclean – 7

RESOLVED: Cllr Hill to be removed as the current Chair of Finance for 12 months from September 8th 2015 until September 7th 2016

3. That it be recommended to Berwick upon Tweed Town Council that training be arranged for the Subject Member which shall include training in relation to the Members' Code of Conduct and Bullying and Harassment

Against the recommendation – Cllrs Dixon, Goodyer, Blackburn, Graham, Seymour, Smith, Forrester – 7

For the recommendation – Cllrs Bettison, Lang, Gibson, Forbes, Beresford, Mclean – 6

RESOLVED: Councillor Hill will not undertake Members Code of Conduct / Bullying and Harassment training

4. That it be recommended to Berwick upon Tweed Town Council that training be arranged for all members of the authority in relation to the Members' Code of Conduct and Bullying and Harassment.

Against the recommendation – Cllrs Dixon, Goodyer, Graham, Blackburn, Seymour, Forrester, Gibson, McLean, Smith, Beresford - 10

For the recommendation – Cllrs, Forbes, Lang and Bettison – 3

RESOLVED: Councillors will not undertake Code of Conduct /Bullying and Harassment training.

C098/15

5. GENERAL FINANCIAL AUDIT AND 2014/15 AUDIT

The Clerk advised that unfortunately Price Waterhouse Cooper had to bow out from doing a general audit re the Council's finances due to a conflict of interest with NCC. Costs were approved from 6k to 12k to do this work and the Clerk has delegated authority in regard to the work going ahead. Two companies have declared an interest in taking on the audit work, one of which is a high profile Scottish Accountancy and Audit Company who have no conflict of interest in Northumberland

and another South of England company who also have no interests in the Northumberland area.

RESOLVED: It was agreed by all to delegate authority to the Clerk to appoint alternative auditors

C099/15

6. STANDING COMMITTEES

Cllr Seymour thought there were too many Councillors on some Committees and the present committee system was confused and there should be 2 full Council Meetings per month instead. The rest of the discussion was deferred to the next meeting.

C100/15

7. AUTHORISATION OF PAYMENTS AND ORDERS

Agreed by all

C101/15

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Monday 28 September 2015 at 6 pm.