

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held on Monday 23 November 2015 at 6 pm at The Town Hall, Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed

PRESENT:

Councillors:	H Bettison (Town Mayor)	E Goodyer
	D Blackburn	K Graham
	I Dixon	G McLean
	A Forbes	G Roughead
	G Hill	C Seymour
	P Hodgson	G Smith
	A Gibson	

IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Pattison, Town Clerk

Steve Cozens, Assistant to the Clerk

Mr Stephen Warren, Consultant

Mr Stephen Warren presented his report to Councillors re his Review of Financial Management pertaining to the Town Council. Mr Warren emphasised that he was presenting the report as a consultant rather than an auditor and that, whilst he served as Deputy Comptroller and Auditor General of Jersey, the report was prepared in a personal capacity.

Mr Warren explained that the report covered the Berwick Portas Project, aspects of internal control, conclusions and next steps. The report and the Council's response could help to restore public confidence. Weaknesses from the top were recognised, risks were not managed correctly and the Portas Project was not identified as a risk but it was. The Council delegated decisions on approving schemes of up to £5k to a group comprising of Councillors and non-Councillors. This group met in private without public notice of its meetings. As a result the group's decisions on the authorisation of expenditure are open to challenge. Effective risk management must be put into place. Significant weaknesses were found in the design and operation of the Finance Regulations and other internal controls. There was a lack of clearly articulated objectives, an absence of effective oversight of the

system of internal control from the Council and a weak accountability for finance therefore the role of the Chair of finance is pivotal in this work.

There will be much to do, leadership must be given from the top, with effective monitoring of the implementation of agreed actions. It won't be a quick fix but it is achievable. Mr Warren made detailed recommendations for improvement in all areas.

Councillor Hill advised the report may seem depressing but things can now move forward and the Council must look to the future. The Clerk advised the Council that she would like the assistance of Mr Warren to put the improvements into place and this was agreed unanimously by all present with Councillor Hill advising that the Council did not have the actual costs.

Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held on Monday 23 November 2015 at 7 pm at The Town Hall, Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed

PRESENT:

Councillors:	H Bettison (Town Mayor)	E Goodyer
	D Blackburn	K Graham
	I Dixon	G McLean
	A Forbes	G Roughead
	G Hill	C Seymour
	P Hodgson	G Smith
	A Gibson	

IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Pattison, Town Clerk
Steve Cozens, Assistant to the Clerk
Mr Stephen Warren, Consultant
Joyce Benton, Sergeant-at-Mace
18 members of the public

Cllr Bettison asked for a minutes silence for the people of Paris and also for the death of a former editor of the Berwick Advertiser.

C144/15

1. REPORT FROM AUDITOR

Mr Stephen Warren spoke to Council and gave a summary of his findings, re expenditure regarding the grant funded Portas Project and aspects of the Council's systems of control. His work did not identify any expenditure on the Berwick Portas project which was incurred other than for the intended purpose. Significant weaknesses in the controls in place re the project exposed the Council to risk. There was insufficient focus on internal control and an absence of any effective procedures for identification and mitigation of risk. There were weaknesses in design of financial controls and widespread non-compliance within these controls. There were weaknesses re information and communications and weaknesses in arrangements for monitoring of the implementation of action arising from internal and external audits. Leadership will be required from Councillors, along with a change in culture and robust monitoring of agreed actions. The Council resolved unanimously (i) to receive Mr Warren's report and (ii) to retain Mr Warren's services to assist the Council in moving forward.

C145/15

2. OPEN SESSION

Mrs Mclean advised of public concern regarding corruption and under staffing and Mr Warren advised whilst it was not in his remit to determine whether fraudulent activity had occurred and he had found no evidence of impropriety. Mr Stewart mentioned Police involvement and whether anyone found wanting from any previous years re Council administration should be barred from office and Cllr Bettison advised that the Police would be mentioned further under the Mayor's announcements. Mr Spencer Barclay said a debt of gratitude should be given to Cllr Hill. Cllr Graham said there were no effective controls and Cllr Blackburn advised the public were also to be praised for bringing this to Councillors attention.

C146/15

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been accepted on behalf of: Councillors J Lang, T Forrester, J Beresford.

C147/15

4. MINUTES

Cllr Roughead advised the electronic timetable at Golden Square was still 2 hours behind and the bus shelter was still leaking. The Clerk advised repairs to the timetable were promised by NCC and the bus shelter has recently had several repairs undertaken to try to fix the roof. Cllr Hill mentioned the death of Cllr Ferguson which was advised at the last meeting as being rather premature and that he was still actually alive and well.

Cllr Bettison apologised and said the Council would write letter of apology. The minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council meeting held on 26 October 2015 were then agreed and signed as a correct record.

C148/15 5. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Cllr Roughead, item 11.

C149/15 6. REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION

There were no requests for dispensation.

C150/15 7. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Bettison advised the Council were not alone in having problems and this was now being addressed, transparency has been given on all internal matters and Finance/payments were always discussed by the Clerk, Finance Chair, Finance Officer and the Chairman. No evidence of criminality had been found and Cllr Bettison read out a communication from BDO which also advised that the Police had found no irregularities. Cllr Bettison spoke of the difficulties the Finance Officer had encountered in trying to do his job and had suffered considerably. Cllr Blackburn requested Cllr Bettison confirm that this was a personal view, which she did. Cllr Bettison went on to mention several civic functions recently attended, and in particular the marvellous turnout for Remembrance Day. Also mentioned was Mr Derek Sharman and Mr Tom Wakenshaw (posthumously) who were recently honoured for their service to Berwick and Community. Cllr Bettison thanked Cllr Hill for her efforts to bring financial concerns to the forefront and Cllr Hill advised her thanks but also expressed concern at Cllr Bettison's previous remarks in regard to the Finance Officer and mentioned minutes from May 2014 and not learning from mistakes. Cllr Graham also expressed her concern and requested Cllr Bettison to agree that this was a purely personal statement and Cllr Bettison advised it was.

C151/15 8. REVIVING BERWICK BARRACKS

Sir Philip Mawer addressed Council and gave a very interesting talk on the project to regenerate Berwick Barracks and make it into a Heritage Hub attraction. A request has been submitted to the Coastal Revival Fund for nearly £50,000 for a feasibility study and business plan to assess whether a heritage hub comprising a museum and archives service is a realistic goal, both in terms of the fabric of the building and from a financial standpoint. Cllr Blackburn advised that by making this into a tourist attraction meant that a Coach Station/drop off point was needed as a necessity. Cllr Goodyer left

the room and declared an interest. Sir Philip took some questions from the public and was then thanked by the Mayor for his attendance and interesting talk.

C152/15

9. COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORTS

Councillor Goodyer came back into the room.

Councillor Jones sent in a written report as did Cllrs Hunter and Smith which were circulated to Councillors. Cllr Smith was present at the meeting but had to leave early and Cllr Hunter presented Council with an update re various Northumberland and NCC matters. Cllr Hill asked Cllr Hunter is she approved of the proposed NCC move to Ashington and Cllr Hunter advised in regard to travel issues she did not agree and this was also echoed by Cllr Roughead who advised it was an extra half an hour on any bus journey from Berwick. Cllr Seymour mentioned Cllr. Jones report (item 17) which advised of the recent charges which were made against Cllr Hill. Cllr Seymour commended Cllr Hill and advised the Council should consider revoking their decision re the censure of Cllr Hill which included bullying.

C153/15

10. APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTING STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2015

Councillors unanimously noted and resolved to approve part one of the BDO Annual report which is an account of what the Council have earned and spent. Mr Warren advised that the BDO Annual report was in 2 parts and the second part was the governance statement and consisted of nine questions which the Council must answer having made appropriate enquiries. He drew attention to the implications of the findings of his work for the answers to the questions. The Council resolved to answer Question 1 as YES, questions 2 to 8 as NO and question 9 as not applicable. A vote of thanks to Cllr Hill was proposed by Cllr Bettison and seconded by Cllr Goodyer and Cllr Blackburn advised the Council should apologise to the people of Berwick.

C154/15

11. BUDGET SETTING

Cllr Hill advised that the budget was draft only and based on the provided draft figures thought that the precept should not be raised and Council reserves should be used if deemed necessary, this was seconded by Cllr Seymour. This was also echoed by the Chair of Finance, Cllr Hodgson who advised Council that budget-setting under present circumstances was being undertaken in a vacuum. Cllr Graham and Cllr Mclean also opposed an increase in the precept. The Council resolved not to increase the precept by 11 votes to 2.

RESOLVED: To not increase the precept on the current draft budget figures.

C155/15

12. LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Cllr Goodyer requested this item was deferred due to time factors until the next Council Meeting and was agreed by all.

RESOLVED: To defer discussion until December 21st 2015 Council meeting.

C156/15

13. CORE STRATEGY

Councillor Goodyer advised of findings and additions re the NP Steering group in regard to the Core Strategy and expressed concern that Berwick was mentioned only 17 times and Tweedmouth and Spittal were not mentioned at all. It was felt the Strategy was very much South of the County/Tyne Valley orientated and had concerns that the 1999 Berwick Plan may be incorporated and which was out of date. Duelling the A1 has been written back in and an extension to the North Northumberland AONB which ends before Spittal Beach will also be mentioned. Minerals re Fracking and Landfill were also a concern. Suspend Standing Orders – Mr John Haswell expressed worries that Berwick was mentioned as a Market town but not as a seaside town- Re-instate Standing Orders. Cllr Goodyer said he would amend and reflect Berwick as a Coastal and a Market Town. Cllr Bettison expressed her thanks to Cllr Goodyer for his work in regard to Berwick and the Core Strategy. Cllr Goodyer proposed 3 items which needed Council approval. No 1 - To accept the Core strategy document proposals – agreed unanimously. No 2 – To insert Berwick as a Coastal and a Market Town – unanimous. No 3 – Minerals - fracking and landfill, those in agreement 1, those against 12.

C157/15

14. INVESTORS CONFERENCE

Cllr Goodyer advised plans to hold an investors conference in Berwick, this was agreed and proposed by Cllr Bettison and seconded by Cllr Dixon and agreed unanimously by all.

RESOLVED: To hold an investors conference in 2016.

C158/15

15. AUTHORISATION OF PAYMENTS AND ORDERS

Councillor Hill expressed concern at a payment in regard to item 286 - Wilsons Tales which was a payment agreed by the Portas Management Group for £1,600 and requested more information and also mentioned item 287 - River Tweed Salmon, also a Portas decision for an amount of £5k. It was then agreed to approve all payments apart from 286 and 287.

RESOLVED: To approve the payments and orders appended to these minutes apart from items 286 and 287.

C159/15

16. APPROVAL OF PLANNED EXPENDITURE

None.

C160/15

17. ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: Proposed by Cllr Dixon and seconded by Cllr Smith and agreed by all to adopt the minutes of the Environment and Regeneration Committee meeting held on 14 September 2015.

C161/15

18. FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: Proposed by Cllr Hodgson and seconded by Cllr Dixon and agreed by all to adopt the minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee meetings held on 7 September 2015 and 12 October 2015.

C162/15

19. PLANNING COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: proposed by Cllr Seymour to adopt the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 2 September 2015 and 29 September 2015 and proposed by Cllr Bettison to approve 11 August 2015 and were seconded by Cllr Graham and agreed by all.

C163/15

20. REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Riding of the Bounds Committee are requested to contact the Town Clerk in the first instance.

C164/15

21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Monday 21st December 2016 at 6 pm.

**Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council
PAYMENTS TO BE APPROVED****See page 3 for accompanying explanatory notes**

Voucher Code	Date	Cheque	Description	Supplier	Net	VAT	Total
276 Remembrance Day	18/11/2015	101205	Remembrance Day Band	Berwick Concert Band Society	105.00	0.00	105.00
277 Civic expenses	18/11/2015	101206	Subscription	Guild of Macebearers	25.00	0.00	25.00
278-84 Salaries:	18/11/2015	101207	Salaries:	Northumberland County Council	6675.86	0.00	6675.86
285 Salaries: Payroll costs	18/11/2015	101207	PAYroll	Northumberland County Council	2.00	0.40	2.40
286 Wilson's Tales	18/11/2015	101208	Grant	Wilson's Tales project	1,600.00	0.00	1,600.00
287 River Tweed Salmon Co.	18/11/2015	101209	Grant	River Tweed Salmon Co.	5,000.00	0.00	5,000.00
288 Councillor Travel & Subsistence	18/11/2015	101197	Flowers	D Blackburn	15.00	0.00	15.00

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council
DIRECT PAYMENTS TO BE NOTED

Voucher Code	Date	Cheque No	Description	Supplier	Net	VAT	Total
273 Telecoms	18/11/2015	directdebit	phone	BT	63.96	12.79	76.75
274 SSP Electricity	18/11/2015	directdebit	Electricity	British Gas	9.15	0.45	9.60
275 Electricity	18/11/2015	directdebit	Electricity	Southern Electric	48.03	2.40	50.43

Explanatory Notes to accompany payment list.

Voucher	Notes
276	Charge for Berwick Concert Band attending Remembrance Day
277	Annual membership cost of Sargent at Mace being a member of Guild of Mace Beraers
278-85	November pay costs
286	Part payment of approved Portas grant to Wilson's Tales project to support displays and other materials for 2016 pop-up museum
287	Full payment of approved Portas grant to River Tweed Salmon Co to promote salmon netting as an attraction
288	Payment of cost of Flowers for DoE participants