

## BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

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

#### PRESENT:

Councillors:	I Hunter (Town Mayor)	G Jones
	J Beresford	J Lang
	H Bettison	G McLean
	I Dixon	G Roughead
	T Forrester	C Seymour
	A Gibson	G Smith
	G Hill	

#### IN ATTENDANCE:

W Pattison, Acting Clerk

S Cozens, Assistant to the Clerk

M Richardson, Sheriff

J Benton, Sergeant-at-Mace

22 members of the public

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone present to the meeting.

#### OPEN SESSION

Concern was mentioned re questions repeatedly being asked of BTC but no answers given - 1. Has finances had been set aside for severance pay for the Clerk, 2. Why was there was no County Council representation at the NCC budget setting meeting and 3. Why has Mr D Sharman been ignored re Berwick 900 appointment? Questions were raised re a 'so called gagging clause' re grievance procedures and further accusation that Cllr Hill had led a campaign of bullying against the Town Clerk. Cllr Hill responded to this by advising that the specific grievance against her had been withdrawn and she would be happy to make known the confidential grievance report which would show her complete transparency and allow her to defend herself. The coach park was raised as matter of concern and also the decision made re the Kwik Save building and NCC/Arch involvement in this matter. Tourism was felt as vital for Berwick and disappointment was voiced

that the proliferation of litter was working against this. BTC were urged to work with partners and come up with a long term action plan to combat the litter problems. Direct questions were made to Cllr Mclean, and Cllr Lang on what they thought about BTC not being represented at the NCC Budget Setting Meeting, Councillors advised no comment. The Mayor, Cllr Hunter advised that the budget was already set before the meeting commenced and could only be voted on by either accepting, abstaining or against. A further question re the Kwik Save building and why was a petition signed by many residents who were against the decision was still ignored. Cllr Jones advised he had listened to all views from across his ward and no other funded opportunities regarding this building had been made during the 9 years the building had been left derelict. Councillor Seymour requested the 'open session' be extended to allow further questions. Cllr Seymour proposed and Cllr Forrester seconded with 2 abstentions and was agreed by the majority.

The Portas money request to ask for an extension of time was considered as not necessary due to other groups such as the Sunderland Innovation Centre taking several years to use up their allocated funding. Questions pertaining to Arch financial services, was responded to by Cllr Jones who advised they were a commercial enterprise and he was not able to answer the question. A request which was made to the Mayor last June to hold a public meeting for residents to discuss matters of concern and which was never initiated was again brought to the meeting. Cllr Hunter requested that residents respond to this request by sending in their questions to BTC and arrangements will then be made to invite the relevant officers from NCC, BTC, Arch etc, to a meeting which would take place after the general election and probably towards the end of May. Cllr Hunter hoped that the Berwick Advertiser would publish the request for questions from the public. Concern was again expressed by Cllr Forrester at the absence of all County Councillors at the NCC Budget setting meeting, Cllr Hill advised that amendments could have been made if County Councillors had been present. Cllr Jones advised he had attended NCC and had expressed his grave concerns re the current Ambulance Services and also lack of Paramedic training. Cllr Roughead also brought the issue of the consultation re subsidised buses coming to an end and requested that BTC ask for an extension of time in which to respond. This was proposed by Cllr Roughead and seconded by Cllr Forrester and agreed by Councillors.

**RESOLVED: To request an extension of time from NCC to allow BTC time to respond re subsidised buses.**

**C092/14**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been accepted on behalf of: Councillor F Simpson

(unwell).

Absent: Councillor A Turnbull.

**C093/14**

## **2. MINUTES**

- i. The minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council meeting held on 19 January 2015 were agreed and signed as a correct record.
- ii. The non-confidential minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council meeting held on 24 February 2015 were agreed and signed as a correct record.
- iii. Cllr Hill asked for the vote on payments to Nereo to be recorded. Cllr Hill voted against and Cllr Seymour abstained, everyone else present voted for. The non-confidential minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council meeting held on 10 March 2015 were then agreed and signed as a correct record.

**C094/14**

## **3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillor H Bettison declared a personal interest in Item 10 (Play Areas & Spittal Splash Park Sla Agreement With NCC);

Councillor I Hunter declared a personal interest in Item 10 (Play Areas & Spittal Splash Park Sla Agreement With NCC);

Councillor G Jones declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Item 9 (Additional Bike Racks);

Councillor G McLean declared a personal interest in Item 13 (Environment And Regeneration Committee).

**C095/14**

## **4. REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION**

There were no requests for dispensation.

**C096/14**

## **5. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor reported on bereavements/events she had attended since the last Council meeting.

Honorary Freeman, Mr Henry McCreath has sadly passed away in his 99<sup>th</sup> year. Mr Bernard (Ben) Farragher who was employed by BTC prior to re-organisation in 1973 has also died. The Civic Party attended the opening of the Burrell Collection in the Granary. The Mayor also attended the revamped Tweedmouth Parish Hall which includes new toilet facilities. This hall is well used but still needs to continue the promotion of the hall availability. There were joint winners this year of the Eastern Borders Development Association award. They were EB Living from Eyemouth and Berwick Animal Rescue Kennels. The Civic Party attended the Fair

Trade School Awards ceremony, 3 schools took part, Holy Trinity, St Mary's and Scremerston. The Sheriff's lady and the Mayor attended the annual Womens World Day of prayer, each year, the theme is based around a country and this year it was the Bahamas. The Mayor recently opened the new B and M store, which is of great advantage to the town, B and M took on all redundant Co-op staff along with additional staff. On 10<sup>th</sup> March, the Britain in Bloom Committee hosted the Northumbria in Bloom spring meeting at the Swan Centre. This was supported by volunteers, local businesses as well as BTC and NCC. The awards ceremony will be held in Berwick later this year. The Mayor and the Sheriff attended Berwick Rotary Club to give the annual talk and were warmly welcomed. On Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March the Civic Party attended Riding of the Bounds sashing Ceremony on the Town Hall steps. The Mayor expressed her good wishes to Lorraine as she will lead the riders out on 1<sup>st</sup> May and will represent Berwick on other ride outs in the Borders. This traditional event needs continuing support.

**C097/14**

## **6. STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

Cllr Hill proposed acceptance of the NALC Model Standing Orders and Financial Regulations which have not been updated since 2008. These are based on the NALC models. The suggestion is that these should be adopted, subject to amendments and if other changes arise during the likely/ upcoming review period they could be addressed. Cllr Hill has liaised with David Francis, NALC, on finance regulation breaches and with Bill Batey, Alnwick Town Council re advice regarding tighter control decisions made under delegated authority. Advice was that they should not be too controlled and Clerk/RFO could authorise routine amounts of up to £1k. Cllr Jones had reservations in that the RFO had not gone through the finance proposals in detail. However, weaknesses which were pointed out by the external auditor in 2013/14 must be addressed before submitting the 2014/15 annual audit figures.

Cllr Bettison proposed acceptance providing amendments could be made if necessary and this was seconded by Cllr Forrester and unanimously agreed by Councillors.

**RESOLVED: To accept NALC Model Standing Orders and Financial Regulations**

**C098/14**

## **7. RISK ASSESSMENT**

Cllr Hill advised her concerns that no risk assessment regarding the Portas money had been put into place, Cllr Hill didn't feel all the risks had been identified and the

external auditors BDO had agreed. Cllr Bettison also wanted the wording in the Risk Assessment to advise regular inspections and not 'periodic'. This was then agreed to go onto the Working Group agenda in May.

**RESOLVED: (i) To note that in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2011, the Town Council has conducted a review of the risks it faces; (ii) To approve the risk assessment as a complete record and continuous working document consisting of the risks identified**

**C099/14**

## **8. WORKING GROUP**

Cllr Hill discussed the formation of a Working Group to decide on the way forward for BTC and this would hopefully include amongst others, NEREO, Bill Batey, Norman Dunn, Clerk etc. All Councillors would be part of the group. Cllr Bettison thought it would be a new start and Cllr Hunter advised her agreement but preferred meetings not to be held on Friday's. This was then agreed by all Councillors.

**C0100/14**

## **9. ADDITIONAL BIKE RACKS**

### **Standing Orders were suspended**

Mr Mark Graham advised he had repeatedly tried to get a bike rack installed on the cycle route at Megs Mount but had not been able to get any response from BTC. Councillors were in general agreement, however, Mr Graham wanted to know a time frame for when this could be installed. Cllr Hunter advised ownership of the land would have to be ascertained before going ahead and Cllr Jones advised he had money in his small grants fund but this project would have to sit behind the Bankhill access only project and would not be a quick option. Mr Graham was concerned that the impetus and need for the bike rack would be lost by delays. Mr Spencer Barclay offered to project manage this initiative and another suggestion to get funding from the Portas group from a member of the public was advised that this request had already been rejected.

Cllr Bettison advised that the appropriate information re the landowner (it was thought the landowner was either NCC or English Heritage) is requested asap, ascertain the cost of a bike rack, (an offer to concrete the bike rack in was made by the Sheriff, Mr M Richardson) utilise local labour and then the project can be sent directly to Finance to save time and hopefully be in place by summer. Cllr Jones was charged with ascertaining who the landowner is. This was then proposed by Cllr Bettison and seconded by Cllr Dixon and agreed by all.

### **Standing Orders were resumed**

**C0101/14**

**10. PLAY AREAS & SPITAL SPLASH PARK SLA AGREEMENT WITH NCC**

The ongoing problems regarding the handover by NCC to BTC and the corrosion problems re the cabinet holding the operating equipment are ongoing. Cllr Dixon advised that all problems needed to be resolved before the Play Park is handed over to BTC by NCC. The delay in the handover has been advised as 2 years by NCC. Discussion ensued on the best way forward and Cllr Bettison expressed her anger at the Contractor's handling of this matter regarding the cabinet housing the operating equipment. Cllr Dixon advised that before handover the weekly inspections by NCC should all be provided in writing, Cllr Hill advised a need to ensure the freehold transfer is not compromised. Cllr Hill also mentioned grass cutting and who had agreed the current service agreements. Cllr Hunter advised 3 extra cuts had been requested and Cllr Hill advised NCC were invoicing BTC for an amount of £100k which was considerable.

It was agreed for the Assistant to the Clerk Mr Steven Cozens to write to NCC giving a 2 week deadline and requesting that the contractor fix the cabinet problem, request why the delay in transferring to BTC and to request a meeting to discuss service level agreements.

**RESOLVED: Mr Cozens to write to NCC**

**C0102/14**

**11. PARISH LIAISON WORKING GROUP**

The report was noted and agreed

**C0103/14**

**12. PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Minutes were proposed by Cllr Seymour and seconded by Cllr Forrester as a true record.

**RESOLVED: To adopt the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 16 December 2014 and 27 January 2015.**

**C0104/14**

**13. ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE**

Cllr Dixon proposed an application for financial assistance to the Riding of the Bounds. Cllr Dixon advised that this needed to be agreed before 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015 and as the next BTC meeting was not until April 27<sup>th</sup> was concerned that the date was too late to advise the members of the Riding of the Bounds of the decision.

Councillors agreed to allow Cllr Dixon to email them with the details and this was then proposed by Cllr Dixon and seconded by Cllr Hunter.

The Minutes were then proposed by Cllr Dixon and seconded by Cllr McLean as a true record.

**RESOLVED: To adopt the minutes of the Environment and Regeneration**

**Committee meeting held on 5 January 2015.**

**C0105/14 14. FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

The minutes were proposed by Cllr Roughead and seconded by Cllr Hunter as a true record.

**RESOLVED: To adopt the minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee meetings held on 15 December 2014 and 12 January 2015.**

**C0106/14 15. REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

Decisions deferred until the May meeting

**C0107/14 16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Council would be held on Monday, 11 May 2015 at 6 pm in the Town Hall.

**RESOLVED: To exclude the press and public during discussion of the following Items, which include issues of a personal and confidential nature.**

**C0108/14 17. HONORARY FREEMAN**

Two members of the community have been nominated for the title of Honorary Freeman of Berwick-upon-Tweed, the nominations were supported by and agreed by Councillors.

**RESOLVED: To confer the title of Honorary Freeman of Berwick-upon-Tweed upon the nominated persons.**

**C0109/14 18. MINUTES**

Cllr Hill said that there had been a breach of confidentiality from the meeting of 24th February 2015 and regarding the grievance report so now felt that she could not be bound by the confidentiality and had a public right of reply to defend herself against alleged claims made by a member of the public. Cllr Seymour strongly agreed with Cllr Hill and also advised her own concerns regarding this matter. Cllr Hunter will put together a press release expressing BTC concerns and will copy in all Councillors.

- i. The confidential minutes of the Berwick upon Tweed Town Council meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015 were agreed and signed as a correct record.
- ii. The confidential minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015 were agreed and signed as a correct minute.