

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Town Council held on Tuesday 29 February 2016 at 6 pm at The Town Hall, Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed

PRESENT:

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Pattison, Town Clerk
Steve Cozens, Assistant to the Clerk
Joyce Benton, Sergeant-at-Mace
17 members of the public

OPEN SESSION

Mr Spencer Barclay expressed concern regarding the draft budget, Schedule 3 monies and the deficit. Cllr Hodgson advised the Council had to approve a budget by tonight and also a precept as the Council would be contravening not only the Local Government Act but also an Act of Parliament. Cllr Hodgson further advised the Annual 2014/15 audit has now been approved by BDO, but, they had mentioned concerns re precept setting. Mr Waugh was concerned the Council had gone ahead and appointed 2 handy persons even though they had a deficit. Cllr Roughead advised he had proposed a decision on this issue be deferred until a budget was agreed and that this had been democratically voted down. Cllr Mclean said they would be an asset to the town and were costing £12k each and were value for money. Cllr Graham advised that the Council had to be allowed to make decisions for the good of the town. Cllr Hodgson mentioned that there had been exceptional expenses in the year which has contributed to the deficit. Mr Darling queried why the town council had not used their insurance company to act for them during difficult times. Cllr Bettison advised the Council could not go on doubling their deficit year after

year. Cllr Blackburn said correct systems were not in place. Mr Stewart said he did not agree with any rise in the precept. Mr Beresford said he was an accountant but couldn't understand the Council's draft budget. Cllr Goodyer agreed there had been maladministration and pointed out that the Council had no management accounts. Cllr Forbes advised everyone that at recent Councillor Training, which took place last Saturday, Mr David Francis, NALC had advised the Freeman money should be taken into account when deciding on a budget.

C231/15

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been accepted on behalf of: Councillors Beresford, Hill, Lang and Seymour. No apologies received from Cllr Forrester.

C232/15

2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Cllr Roughead, Hoppa Bus.

C233/15

3. REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION

None.

C234/15

4. BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2016/2017

Councillor Hodgson proposed an amendment to the proposal for a £50k rise in the precept and instead asked for a rise of £33k to cover the Council's deficit. This was seconded by Cllr Blackburn. Cllr Hodgson advised Councillors and the public that this equated to just over a £1 per month rise for Berwick households. Cllr Forbes read from her notes and advised her concern that people were struggling due to redundancy and some families in Berwick were living on just £40 per week, and also mentioned her concerns that the second half of the precept - £109k from 2015 was not showing in the Council's bank account. Cllr Hodgson advised this had been paid into BTC's bank account on September 10th 2015. Cllr Goodyer advised BTC financial systems were currently not acceptable and the Council also has no management accounts; therefore, BTC can only do their best re inherited problems. Things will be better managed next year when a proper management accountancy service is in place. BTC cannot rely on the Freeman money as 'income' as it is not under Council control and is unpredictable and variable. Therefore, the better approach is to assess how much comes in in any year and allocate it for expenditure on one-off items and projects for the following year. Cllr Blackburn said there had been no financial plan, or, an approved contingency. Cllr Roughead expressed obfuscation issues re £32k deficit on one hand and others saying approximately £60k left over and mentioned current BTC balances and queried

Freeman Money /Schedule 3. Cllr Mclean quoted figures from other Councils and advised that Berwick had the third lowest precept in Northumberland. Cllr Gibson then requested approval to vote on the draft budget and the precept and this was seconded by Cllr Hodgson.

Cllr Bettison called upon Councillors to vote.

a) Approval of the draft budget was agreed unanimously by all Councillors.

b) To approve a rise in the precept to cover the deficit as amended and proposed by Cllr Hodgson was voted for by Cllrs Smith, Bettison, Dixon, Hodgson, Blackburn, Graham, Mclean, Goodyer and Gibson and against – Cllrs Roughead and Forbes.

c) Approval to raise the precept to cover the BTC deficit and to make a precept request of £251,000.00 to NCC was voted for by Cllrs Smith, Bettison, Dixon, Hodgson, Blackburn, Graham, Mclean, Goodyer and Gibson and against – Cllrs Roughead and Forbes.

RESOLVED: Approval was given for the 2016/17 Budget and to also request a BTC Precept of £251,000.00 from NCC for 2016/17.

C235/15

5. INVESTORS CONFERENCE

A request from Cllr Goodyer for BTC to pay £250 towards the Investors Conference was approved unanimously.

C236/15

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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