

Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in St Michael's Suite at the Frank Jordan Centre, Lichfield Street, Stone, on Tuesday 13 December 2022

PRESENT: Councillor R. Kenney in the Chair, and
Councillors: K. Argyle, A. Best, Mrs A. Burgess, J. Davies, Mrs K. Dawson,
I. Fordham, Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt, C. Thornicroft, R. Townsend and S. Walley

Officers: L. Trigg and Mrs T. Williams

ABSENT: Councillors: Mrs L. Davies, M. Green, M. Hatton, J. Hickling, P. Leason and J. Powell
(mayoral engagement)

GP23/128 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: Mrs L. Davies, M. Green, J. Hickling,
P. Leason and J. Powell (mayoral engagement).

GP23/129 Declarations of Interests

Councillor Davies declared a personal interest in agenda item 11a – Grants to Local
Organisations: RAFA (Minute Reference: GP23/138 (a)).

GP23/130 Requests for Dispensations

None

GP23/131 To receive the report of the County Councillors

County Councillor Mrs J. Hood

The Chairman invited Councillor Mrs Hood to address the Committee.

Councillor Mrs Hood provided the Committee with updates on County matters
relating to the town:

Walton Roundabout

Confirmation has been received from the Highways Department that the defective
road surface on Walton Roundabout would be repaired in February 2023.

Placements for Children

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that full County Council (at its
meeting last week) had discussed the entitlement by eligible families to free
sporting and other activities for their children during the school holidays, and the
shocking finding that 37% fail to turn up.

She pointed out that there are families in the town with full time working parents
who are struggling financially but just fall short of the eligibility criteria for the
service and are having to either find childcare or work from home (with the

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associated pressures of keeping children occupied and provided with meals while they work).

Councillor Mrs Hood said that she had asked Councillor Mark Sutton, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, whether he could investigate the setting up of an absentee notification system so that families outside the scheme could access unused places. The cost of living is such that working families are needing to use food banks and the opportunity would take some pressure off them.

County Councillor I. Parry

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

GP23/132 To receive the report of Borough Councillors

The Chairman (as a Borough Councillor) reminded the Committee that Stone had benefited from the Shared Prosperity Fund through monies awarded to the Scout & Guide Hut and Crown Wharf Theatre.

The Chairman acknowledged Town Councillors input in starting the ball rolling by allocating the Town Hall Charity Fund to Crown Wharf Theatre. The trustees had also worked very hard and there had been private donations and fundraising events. The £500,000 grant from Stafford Borough will enable the theatre project to be completed at an earlier date and to a higher specification.

The Chairman thanked Borough Council officers and the Cabinet for supporting the bid which will be a massive boost to the town.

Town Councillors were also thanked by Councillor Davies for their contribution to the project and the achievement of a long-held dream.

The Chairman invited Councillor Fordham to address the Committee.

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that Stafford Borough Council and Cannock Chase District Council had agreed to move to stage two of a shared council services arrangement. When complete (assumed to be in the next financial year), all services except housing and elections will be delivered on a shared basis.

There will be a seven-person executive team to head up the joint services, led by a single Chief Executive and two deputies.

The Chairman invited Councillor Mrs Hood to address the Committee.

Councillor Mrs Hood drew the Committee's attention to a map she had brought to the meeting illustrating the proposed redevelopment of Westbridge Park. She informed Members that she had felt privileged to be invited to join the Board as ward representative, providing the opportunity to draw from her knowledge of the area and contribute to the design of the scheme.

Councillor Mrs Hood said that to see the project come to fruition after all the hard work was excellent and she commended everyone who had been involved. The cross-party working had been good natured and pleasant with disagreements worked through and resolved.

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Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that there were no separate facilities for children with special needs in the park's design as all facilities would be fully inclusive and accessible.

She suggested that Town Councillors look at the plan and report any design concerns to her for feeding back to the Board. She said the redevelopment work should begin in April and conclude by the end of 2023 with a fantastic facility in Stone.

GP23/133 **Representations from Members of the Public**

None

GP23/134 **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 1 November 2022 (Minute Numbers GP23/100 – GP23/119, be approved as a correct record.
- b) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 15 November 2022 (Minute Numbers GP23/120 – GP23/127, be approved as a correct record.

GP23/135 **Minutes of Sub-Committees**

- a) Estates Sub-Committee held on 15 November 2022 (Minute Numbers EST23/020 – EST23/027), that the draft minutes be noted, and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number EST23/027 be adopted.
- b) Environment Sub-Committee held on 15 November 2022 (Minute Numbers ENV23/020 – ENV23/028), that the draft minutes be noted, and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Numbers ENV23/026 and ENV23/027 be adopted.

GP23/136 **Budget 2023-24 to 2025-26 – Overview**

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk* (which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting) commencing the process of examining the budget and precept level for the financial year 2023-24 for recommendation to the Council.

The Town Clerk reminded the Committee of the budget process which begins with the Committee's consideration of the overall position of the Council followed by each Sub-Committee considering the details of their budgets and any changes they might want to make. The budget details for all Sub-Committee would then be brought back together at the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee for determination of the budget recommendation to the Council.

The Council in February will determine the budget and precept to be requested from Stafford Borough Council.

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The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the figures in the report set the scene for the budget preparation. They are based on a standstill position and represented the continuation of the Council's existing activity and policies.

The Town Clerk drew the Committee's attention to the major budget issue this year which was the high level of inflation, addressed in the report by taking inflation out of individual budgets and creating a separate single inflationary budget that could be reconsidered, changed and updated as needed.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that in addition to the precept the Town Council receives two grants from Stafford Borough, Local Council Tax Support Scheme Grant (added to the precept) and a Concurrent Allowances Grant which were both forecast to continue at the same values as last year.

RESOLVED:

- That the Committee notes the standstill budget position for 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26 and the issues related to setting the Council Tax and precept.
- That each sub-committee is asked to consider its financial needs for the next three years and reports back to the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee on its budget proposals.

GP23/137 **Members Items**

Councillor Jim Davies

"At the Tourism and Town Promotion Sub-Committee meeting on 25 October 2022 (TTP23/021) I suggested as a future event in February 2023 the recognition of the 80th anniversary of the death of Flight Lieutenant R N Stubbs DFC DFM RAFVR. On 15 November 2022 I met with Rev Paul Kingman of Christ Church and Air Vice-Marshal Ray Pentland (a local resident). We agreed to hold a service of commemoration on Sunday 26 February 2023 at Christ Church. The event would be arranged by the Stone & District Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association in conjunction with Christ Church. Stone Town Council would be asked to recognise and support the event.

I ask the Town Council to resolve to give its official recognition to this commemoration of one of the Town's most decorated heroes of World War 2 and to provide assistance and support where possible."

RESOLVED: That the Town Council supports the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the death of Flight Lieutenant R N Stubbs and provides assistance and support where possible.

GP23/138 **Grants to Local Organisations**

The Committee considered requests for grant aid from local organisations.

The following organisation meets the eligibility criteria within the Council's grants policy:

- Organisation:** RAFA
Amount Requested: £500

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Reason: To provide support for the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the life and sacrifice of Flight Lieutenant R N Stubbs DFC DFM RAFVR

RESOLVED: To award a grant of £500 to RAFA.

The following organisation did not meet the criteria within the Council's grants policy and at the Committee's meeting on 1 November 2023 had asked that further clarification be obtained on the value of reserves earmarked for the repair of the roof to enable an accurate assessment of the effective level of reserves held, before the application was approved:

- b. **Organisation:** Walton Community Centre
Amount Requested: £500
Reason: Timed sensors and flushing units for the Centre urinals
Criteria Not Met: Level of reserves

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that Walton Community Centre had been unable to specify the value earmarked for expenditure on roof repairs and as a result he was not able to advise whether the application met the Council's criteria or not. He reminded Committee Members that they were able to award a grant whether or not the 'reserves' element of the criteria was met.

After considering the additional information there was no proposer/seconded to discuss the award of a grant to Walton Community Centre.

GP23/139 Floating Market

The Committee considered the location for a floating market in Stone along with suggested dates for the market to take place.

Emails from the Chairman of the Roving Canal Traders Association* and a map showing the proposed location* were attached to the agenda for the meeting.

The Committee noted that this item had been considered by the Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee at its meeting on 25 October 2022 (Minute Reference: TTP23/023).

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the Traders Association/floating market organiser had agreed Stone as a potential location, but their process involved moving forward only when the local council had expressed its approval. After this had been done, they would go forward in bulk with everything they want to do in the following year.

The market organiser had confirmed that they would like to arrange for the market to take place on the late May Bank Holiday 2023 weekend. If the Council supported the market on this date, the proposal would be put forward to the Canal & River Trust.

The suggested location for the market was confirmed as the section of canal running from Stafford Street bridge and out in the direction of Marks and Spencer, the Leisure Centre and Scout Hut (detailed on the map).

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The Town Clerk advised the Committee that there would be no cost implication to the Town Council for holding the market.

Councillor Walley confirmed that he had attended previous floating markets and most stalls were set up on the boats with very little encroachment on the tow path.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council supports the holding of a floating market in Stone on the late May Bank Holiday weekend and that the Town Clerk is instructed to ask the floating market organiser to progress the necessary enquiries.

GP23/140 National Pay Award 2022-23

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk* which had been attached to the agenda for the meeting.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the Council historically supported the national pay award (although parish councils are not included in the negotiation mechanism) and pay increases in line with national pay awards were included in the contracts of employment for all Council staff.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council adopts the new 2022-23 salary levels for staff on national pay scales, as set out in the Town Clerk's report.

GP23/141 Town Council Payments

RESOLVED: To note the list* of Town Council payments made during the period 1 to 31 October 2022.

GP23/142 Update from Working Groups:

Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Councillor Mrs Hood reported that the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group had not met.

Stone Heritage Centre Steering Group

Councillor Kenney advised the Committee that there had been no meeting of the Steering Group as it was awaiting the appointment of a building contractor.

Engagement with Young People

Councillor Mrs Dawson advised the Committee that no meeting had taken place.

GP23/143 To receive reports from Town Councillors on attendance at meetings of local organisations and outside bodies as a representative of the Town Council

Stone Area Parish Liaison Group

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that the next meeting of the Liaison Group would take place on 25 January 2023 (virtually on Zoom) and Town Councillors were invited to attend.

Stone ATC

Councillor Davies informed the Committee that the Air Cadets AGM had been postponed until the New Year.

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Age Concern Stone & District

Councillor Thornicroft advised the Committee that no meeting had taken place.

Stafford & Stone Access Group

Councillor Kelt reported that a meeting had taken place the previous day and the main points of discussion had included the change of Chairman and manufacturing process for wheelchairs (as a guest from a wheelchair manufacturer had attended the meeting).

Stone Common Plot Trustees

Councillor Thornicroft reported on a meeting of the Common Plot Trustees where the Treasurer had provided a briefing on costs (with reference to water bills, tree surgeon costs, tractor repairs and maintenance of the Lock Keeper's Cottage). Finances were reported to generally be in good order.

He advised that the Plot generates revenue through the sale of grazing rights and hay crop from the meadow. Currently there is an agreement with a farmer to graze cattle and take the hay and the arrangements were continuing into 2023.

Councillor Thornicroft advised the Committee that there was an issue with Ash Dieback on the Plot, and a tree surgeon had removed/made safe two dangerous trees. He said that all Ash trees would be monitored over the next two to three years.

Other discussions involved repairs to woodland steps, replacement of hay meadow fencing and the theft of wood from the woodland. Most of the funding for the Common Plot's activities comes from a Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Stone Community Hub Liaison Group

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that no meeting of the Liaison Group had taken place.

SPCA Executive Committee

Councillor Green was not available to provide a report.

Stone Traders Group Directors' Meeting

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that no meeting had taken place.

The meeting was adjourned and then reconvened after the Planning Consultative Committee meeting and the closed session of the Town Council meeting had taken place.

GP23/144

Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve, pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting whilst the next items of business are discussed on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the debate.

RESOLVED: to exclude the Press and Public from the next items of business.

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GP23/145 **Confidential Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the Confidential Minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 1 November 2022, Minute Numbers GP23/100, GP23/117, GP23/118 and GP23/119 be approved.

GP23/146 **Confidential Minutes and Recommendations of Sub-Committees**

- a) Estates Sub-Committee Meeting held on 15 November 2022, Minute Numbers: EST23/020, EST23/026 and EST23/027.

RESOLVED: To note the minutes and approve the recommendations contained in Minute Number ENV23/027.

GP23/147 **Heritage Centre**

The Committee considered an update on the Stone Heritage Centre building works tendering process and the appointment of a main contractor for this work.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that he was currently awaiting a report from the Council's mechanical and electrical engineering consultant.

CHAIRMAN