

# Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 7 February 2023

**PRESENT:** Councillor R. Kenney in the Chair, and  
Councillors: A. Best, J. Davies, Mrs J. Hood, T. Kelt, P. Leason, J. Powell,  
C. Thornicroft, R. Townsend and S. Walley

Officers: L. Trigg and Mrs T. Williams

**ABSENT:** Councillors: K. Argyle, Mrs A. Burgess, Mrs L. Davies, Mrs K. Dawson, I. Fordham,  
M. Green, M. Hatton and J. Hickling

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**GP23/148**     **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors: Mrs L. Davies, Mrs K. Dawson,  
I. Fordham, M. Green and J. Hickling

**GP23/149**     **Declarations of Interests**

None

**GP23/150**     **Requests for Dispensations**

None

**GP23/151**     **To receive the report of the County Councillors**

**County Councillor Mrs J. Hood**

The Chairman invited Councillor Mrs Hood to address the Committee.

**Looked after children**

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that as a County Councillor and Corporate Parent, she had been invited to attend a meeting of 'The Voice Project' which gives looked after children (whether adopted, fostered or living in a residential home) an opportunity to talk about how their care is going, including how their health plans should progress.

She said it was lovely to meet the two young people who attended the session. They were delightful and it was incredible to see how they were flourishing with the high-quality care they were receiving. She said she was very proud that in Staffordshire young people were looked after until they were 25 years of age (rather than the standard 18 years, which was the case in most other parts of the country).

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that 1300 children were currently being looked after in Staffordshire, many coming from challenging backgrounds. She asked that looked after children living in Stone are welcomed, and called for Councillors to spread the word that there was a shortage of foster carers in

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Staffordshire and the County Council were looking to appoint new recruits – young and mature.

**County Councillor I. Parry**

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

**GP23/152 To receive the report of Borough Councillors**

There were no reports from Borough Councillors on this occasion.

**GP23/153 Representations from Members of the Public**

None

**GP23/154 Minutes**

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 13 December 2022 (Minute Numbers GP23/128 – GP23/147, be approved as a correct record.

**GP23/155 Minutes of Sub-Committees**

- a) Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee held on 15 November 2022 (Minute Numbers TTP23/027 – TTP23/036), that the draft minutes be noted, and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Numbers TTP23/032 and TTP23/033 be adopted.

The recommendations contained in Minute Number TTP23/035 were considered as part of Minute Number GP23/158 (agenda item 11).

- b) Estates Sub-Committee held on 17 January 2023 (Minute Numbers EST23/028 – EST23/035), that the draft minutes be noted.

The recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number EST23/032 were considered as part of Minute Number GP23/158 (agenda item 11).

**GP23/156 Environment Sub-Committee – Budget 2023-24 to 2025-26**

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk\* (which had been attached to the agenda for the meeting) examining the requirements for the Environment Sub-Committee budget 2023-24 to 2025-26.

The General Purposes Committee had needed to consider the Environment Sub-Committee's budget because it had not been possible for an earlier meeting of the Sub Committee to take place.

The Committee reviewed the standstill budget and the amounts included for each service. It also considered other costs and savings when setting the budget for 2023-24 and future years.

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The Town Clerk advised the Sub-Committee that a number of items in the current year's budget required consideration along with consideration of the forward year's budget 2023-24.

The Committee considered a written budget proposal\* made by the Environment Sub-Committee Chairman in respect of the Environment Sub-Committee budget, which was distributed at the meeting.

RESOLVED: To accept the following items for consideration as part of the budget report later on the agenda:

1. The standstill budget set out in the Town Clerk's report is accepted, after making the adjustments set out below:
2. Provision of £2,000 is made for the investigation and, if necessary, removal of asbestos at Newcastle Road allotments.
3. Allotment fees be increased by 10% from April 2023.
4. At the Crown Meadow, the planned one-off works on Scrape 2 (£2,200) and the new information board (£1,500) should be halted, but additional annual funding should be provided for the removal of willow saplings (£500) and for grass cutting and collection in Scrape 1 (£500).
5. The unspent balance on the Environmental Initiatives budget should be reduced by £3,000 in the current year.
6. As a result of the above, the Sub-Committee's budget would be changed as follows compared to the standstill budget:

	£	
2022-23	6,700	Reduction
2023-24	3,000	Increase
2024-25	1,000	Increase
2025-26	1,000	Increase

RESOLVED: That the outstanding items for the current financial year, referred to in paragraph 5.a of the Town Clerk's report, be approved. This consisted of felling of the split tree at the Amphitheatre (£640), replacement of the Walton Roundabout "Lock Gate" (£400), replacing plants/filling gaps in town borders (£600), replacing plants/refurbishing Walton Roundabout (£600) and work on the scrapes and benches (£1,000).

#### **GP23/157      Management Sub-Committee – Budget 2023-24 to 2025-26**

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk\* (which had been attached to the agenda for the meeting) examining the requirements for the Management Sub-Committee budget 2023-24 to 2025-26.

The General Purposes Committee had needed to consider the Management Sub-Committee's budget because it had not been possible for an earlier meeting of the Sub Committee to take place.

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The Committee reviewed the standstill budget and the amounts included for each service. It also considered other costs and savings when setting the budget for 2023-24 and future years.

The Committee considered a written budget proposal\* made by the Management Sub-Committee Chairman in respect of the Management Sub-Committee budget, which was distributed at the meeting.

RESOLVED: To accept the following items for consideration as part of the budget report later on the agenda:

1. That the standstill budget set out in the Town Clerk's report is accepted, after making the adjustments set out below:
2. That the low take-up of grants by outside bodies is reflected in a budget reduction of £3,000 in the current year and £4,300 per annum from 2023-24.
3. Usage of the Stone Helpline has reduced to a very low level. It is therefore proposed that this facility should now be drawn to a close.
4. An amount is included in the standstill budget for a proposed Stone Heroes award scheme. As this scheme has not yet commenced, it is recommended that this provision is removed.
5. Filling of the post of Events and Marketing Officer has been delayed. The saving from this delay has been removed from the budget, less an amount to fund re-advertising costs.
6. The next General Purposes Committee will be considering the provision of badges to be presented to past Mayor and Deputy Mayor's Consorts. It will be a decision for that Committee whether to support the proposal, but provision has been made for this in the current year, funded by a reduction in the Civic Regalia budget in future years.
7. As a result of the above, the Sub-Committee's budget would be reduced as follows compared to the standstill budget:

	£
2022-23	4,900
2023-24	7,770
2024-25	7,070
2025-26	7,070

**GP23/158     2023-24 Budget Recommendation to the Council**

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

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that having considered the recommendations from all Sub-Committees, it was now necessary for the Committee to recommend an appropriate budget to the Council on 14 February 2023.

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The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the key budget issue was the extreme levels of inflation being forecast and its effect on both costs and the increases that would need to be made in charges for services (referencing paragraph 10c in the report).

He said that he would prefer reserves to be maintained at six months of typical spending, but accepted that with the forecast level of inflation this was difficult to achieve in the short to medium term. For this budget his recommendation was therefore that reserves could be reduced to three months of spending as a minimum, whilst looking to reinstate the value of reserves as soon as there was an opportunity to do so. The estimate for the end of the current year was that the Council would have around 3.8 months' spending in reserves.

The Town Clerk asked the Committee to consider whether it agreed the standstill budget proposed, the adjustments that needed to be made bearing in mind the recommendations of the Sub-Committees, and the Council Tax and precept levels to be recommended at to the Council.

The Committee considered a written budget proposal\* made by the Chairman in respect of the budget to be recommended to the Council, which was distributed at the meeting.

The Chairman advised the committee that the proposals represented a Council Tax increase for Town Council purposes of £1.64 for a Band D property in 2023-24 - around 3 pence a week.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Council that:

1. The Town Council's standstill budget for 2023-24 to 2025-26 should be as set out in the Clerk's report supplemented by the following additions/amendments:
  - a. Estates:
    - i. Fees and charges at Community Centres to be increased by 25%, with a 10% discount for community groups and similar non-business usage.
    - ii. Maintenance to be ceased on bus shelters where no bus route is served, with a view to removing these shelters once funding becomes available.
    - iii. No further spending to be undertaken on the Joules Clock due to the prohibitive cost.
    - iv. The unspent building maintenance provision of £10,000 in the current year to be removed from the budget.
  - b. Environment:
    - i. A provision of £2,000 to be made for the investigation of the possible presence of asbestos at Newcastle Road allotments.

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- ii. The planned one-off works on Scrape 2 (£2,200) and the new information board (£1,500) should not be undertaken, but additional annual funding should be provided for the removal of willow saplings (£500) and for grass cutting and collection at Scrape 1 (£500).
    - iii. The unspent balance on the Environmental Initiatives budget should be reduced by £3,000 in the current year.
  - c. Tourism and Town Promotion:
    - i. An additional budget of £2,000 should be provided in 2023-24 for the King's Coronation Celebrations.
    - ii. The events budget should be reduced by £2,000 per annum from 2024-25.
  - d. Management:
    - i. The unspent sum of £3,000 should be removed from the Grants budget in the current year, and a reduction of £4,300 per annum made in subsequent years.
    - ii. Having served its purpose admirably, the Stone Helpline is now little used and can no longer be financially justified. The service should therefore be ceased, which is estimated to produce a saving of £900 in 2023-24 and with a further saving of £1,200 in each subsequent year.
    - iii. The proposed Stone Heroes Awards Scheme has not been implemented. Budget provision of £1,300 per year can therefore be removed from the current year onwards.
    - iv. There has been a delay in filling the Marketing and Events Coordinator post, which will save £1,400 in the current year and £1,000 in 2023-24, net of the costs of re-advertising. This should be removed from the budget.
    - v. A provision of £800 should be made for the purchase of Consort's badges, subject to a reduction of £270 per annum from the Civic Regalia budget. This is to provide a contingency to allow separate consideration of this item by the Committee.
  - e. General Purposes:
    - i. The inflation provision should be reduced by £310 in 2023-24, £590 in 2024-25 and £610 in 2025-26 to reflect the impact of the above changes.
- 2. As a consequence of the above, the 2023-24 Council Tax for this Council's purposes should be £58.15 for a Band D property, an increase for the year of £1.64, with indicative Council Tax levels of £59.84 and £61.58 for the

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following two years. This would result in a precept on Stafford Borough Council for 2023-24 of £369,163. Local Council Tax Support Grant of £21,552 would be added to this.

The Committee thanked the Town Clerk for his work and guidance on the budget recommendations.

The Committee also thanked the Chairman of each Sub-Committee for working together in this challenging economic environment and to have amicably agreed reductions in their budgets.

## **GP23/159      Grants to Local Organisations**

The Committee considered requests for grant aid from local organisations.

The following organisations met the eligibility criteria within the Council's grants policy:

a. **Organisation: Stone Choral Society**

**Amount Requested:** £250

**Reason:** To assist in determining the feasibility and popularity of a series of talks/masterclasses (running until June) which would if successful be able to run again.

**RESOLVED:** To decline the award of a grant to Stone Choral Society due to the limited funds remaining in the budget for 2022-23.

b. **Organisation: Stone Outward Division Rangers**

**Amount Requested:** £500

**Reason:** To support the costs of an increased annual subscription fee and to access activities provided by the Division.

**RESOLVED:** To decline the award of a grant to Stone Outward Division Rangers due to the limited funds remaining in the budget for 2022-23.

c. **Organisation: Stone Lions Club**

**Amount Requested:** £500

**Reason:** Prostate testing

**RESOLVED:** To award a grant of £500 to Stone Lions Club.

The following organisation did not meet the eligibility criteria within the Council's grants policy and no proposer/seconded came forward to instigate a discussion about making an award of a grant:

a. **Organisation: Windmills Charity**

**Amount Requested:** £1,000

**Reason:** To support Memory making sessions and activities.

**Eligibility Criteria not met:**

- i. Amount of grant requested.
- ii Level of reserves.

**GP23/160**      **Review of Standing Orders**

The Committee undertook to review the Council's Standing Orders\* which had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting. The document had been reviewed by the Town Clerk, who had not proposed any changes or revisions to its content.

RESOLVED: To defer consideration of the revised Standing Orders until the next meeting of the Committee in accordance with normal practice.

**GP23/161**      **Review of Financial Regulations**

The Committee undertook to review the Council's Financial Regulations\* which had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting. The document had been reviewed by the Town Clerk, who had not proposed any changes or revisions to its content.

RESOLVED: To defer consideration of the revised Financial Regulations until the next meeting of the Committee in accordance with normal practice.

**GP23/162**      **Meeting Schedule for 2023-24**

The Committee considered a proposed programme of meetings and events\* for the period May 2023 to April 2024.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the meetings over December 2023 and January 2024 had been arranged to repeat the way they had been organised this year which seemed to have worked better in respect of budgetary timeframes.

RESOLVED: To approve the circulated schedule of meetings and events dates which included incorporating the Mayor Making ceremony into the Civic Sunday Church Service on 9 July 2023.

**GP23/163**      **Past Consort Badges**

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk\*, which had been attached to the agenda for the meeting, considering whether outgoing Mayor and Deputy Mayor's Consorts should be presented with 'Past Consort' and 'Past Deputy Consort' badges at the end of their term of office.

The Town Clerk circulated a sample Past Consort badge design for Councillors to consider which had been costed at round £80 when purchasing a minimum quantity of five of each design. He said that if supported, an additional budget of £800 would be needed in the current year for the purchase of an initial stock of badges, which had been provided for in the budget recommendations to Council considered earlier in the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council should purchase and present 'Past Consort' and 'Past Deputy Consort' badges annually to commemorate their year in office but that alternative designs, considered more suitable for wearing by ladies and men, are brought back to the Committee for consideration.

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**GP23/164**     **Review of Staffordshire County Council Divisions**

The Committee considered a Boundary Commission for England review of division boundaries for Staffordshire County Council.

A link to information on the Review had been provided with the agenda for the meeting. The Committee noted that the closing date for consultation responses was 20 March 2023.

The Committee also noted the invitation from Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association to attend a briefing (on Thursday 16 February 2023) on the review of Division Boundaries in Staffordshire and Councillors were invited to join the online Teams session.

RESOLVED: That the Boundary Commission for England's Review of Staffordshire County Divisions be brought forward to the next meeting of the Committee.

**GP23/165**     **Town Council Payments**

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

**GP23/166**     **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 an update would be given by the Town Clerk in the confidential section of the agenda.

**Engagement with Young People**

No meeting had taken place.

**GP23/167**     **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 a good meeting of the Liaison Group had taken place on 25 January 2023 which had been well attended by local councils including Fulford Parish Council, one of the larger parishes in the area.

The notes for the Liaison Group meeting in October 2022 had been attached to the agenda for the meeting.

The next meeting of Stone Area Parish Liaison Group would be held after the parish elections in May 2023.

**Stone ATC**

Councillor Davies informed the Committee that a meeting of the Air Cadets Welfare Committee had taken place on 31 January 2023 and the Squadron were doing very well with 34 cadets which was an excellent number. The Annual General Meeting (previously postponed) would be taking place on 20 March 2023.

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He said the current Commanding Officer was moving to a new role and a new Commanding Officer will soon be appointed.

**Age Concern Stone & District**

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

**Stafford & Stone Access Group**

Councillor Kelt advised the Committee that the next meeting of the Access Group would be held on 20 February 2023.

**Stone Common Plot Trustees**

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that no meeting of the Stone Common Plot Trustees had taken place.

**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 Town Clerk advised the Committee that he had received some dates for meetings of Stone Traders Group Directors' and would be circulating the details to the nominated Councillors.

**GP23/168**      **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.

**GP23/169**      **Confidential Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the Confidential Minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 13 December 2022, Minute Numbers GP23/128, GP23/145, GP23/146 and GP23/147 be approved.

**GP23/170**      **Confidential Minutes and Recommendations of Sub-Committees**

- a) Estates Sub-Committee Meeting held on 17 January 2023, Minute Numbers: EST23/028, EST23/034 and EST23/035.

RESOLVED: To note the minutes of the Sub-Committee.

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**GP23/171**     **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**