

# Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 6 June 2023

**PRESENT:** Councillor R. Kenney in the Chair, and  
Councillors: J. Battrick, A. Burgess, K. Dawson, I. Fordham, J. Hood, T. Kelt,  
B. Kenney, J. Metters, A. Mottershead, J. Powell, N. Powell, C. Thornicroft and  
R. Townsend

Officers: L. Trigg & T. Williams

**ABSENT:** Councillors: A. Best, J. Davies (Mayoral Duty), L. Davies (Mayoral Duty) and  
P. Leason

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### **GP24/020** Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: A. Best, J. Davies (Mayoral Duty)  
L. Davies (Mayoral Duty), and P. Leason.

Where a reason for absence is given, this reason was approved for the purposes of  
Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **GP24/021** Declarations of Interests

None

### **GP24/022** Requests for Dispensations

None

### **GP24/023** To receive the report of the County Councillors

#### **County Councillor Jill Hood**

The Chairman invited Councillor Hood to address the Committee.

#### Walton Island

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that the resurfacing works and collapsed  
drain repairs on Walton Island would be starting tomorrow (7 June 2023), taking  
13 weeks to complete. She said that local businesses had expressed concern about  
the effects on their trade and she had asked highways officers for answers to the  
questions that had been asked of her.

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that officers had been vague about the  
diversion routes but assured her they would forward them when available.

#### HS2

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that there was currently a lot of  
uncertainty with HS2. After being told HS2 had been suspended for two years, civil  
works had continued. After being told Pirehill Lane would not be considered as a

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haul road for HS2 construction traffic she now learns from the HS2 Press Office that Pirehill Lane may still be included in the Schedule 17 routes.

Councillor Hood has written to Staffordshire County Council and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Alan White, and must now wait to see what develops. She said it was worrying that on Friday 9 June the Schedule 17 routes were due to be heard by the County Council.

Councillor Mrs Hood advised the Committee that she was hoping Pirehill Lane would not be listed.

#### **County Councillor I. Parry**

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

#### **GP24/024 To receive the report of Borough Councillors**

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that due to the close proximity of the last General Purposes Committee meeting, there was nothing new to report.

#### **GP24/025 Representations from Members of the Public**

None

#### **GP24/026 Minutes**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 23 May 2023 (Minute Numbers GP24/001 – GP24/019), be approved as a correct record.

#### **GP24/027 Minutes of Sub-Committees**

There were no Sub-Committee Minutes.

#### **GP24/028 Police & Fire Commissioner**

The Chairman extended a warm welcome to Staffordshire Police and Fire Commissioner, Mr Ben Adams, and invited him to talk about the services provided by Staffordshire Police, and specifically about anti-social behaviour and crime in the town.

Mr Adams thanked the Committee for inviting him to attend the meeting.

He informed the Committee that the world had changed since he came into office two years ago. He has twelve months left of a three-year term which was reduced by one year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. He said that a lot of positive things were going on with the Police and Fire Services and he was anxious to see these continue.

He informed the Committee that Staffordshire boasted low crime rates overall, but the situation with anti-social behaviour wasn't quite as commendable and remained a priority area for him. He disclosed that there had been a shift in the demographic exhibiting this behaviour with a notable 30% decrease among young people in public places contrasted by an increase in the 25–40-year age bracket

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where the incidents generally involved noise, dogs and neighbour disputes. The trend could relate to more people working from home or an increased awareness of their surroundings.

Mr Adams highlighted the encouraging news that crime in Stone had reduced by 13% in the last twelve months (over the previous 12) which was positive when considering the nationwide increase in crime following the pandemic.

Mr Adams advised the Committee that the four key points in his plan (made two years ago) mirroring public feedback on the changes needed in Staffordshire are:

- To tackle anti-social behaviour
- The need for more police officers to be out in the community
- Quicker responses to incidents when reported
- For phones to be answered more quickly

The improvements he believed had been made so far include:

- Improved responses to 999 calls
- Introduction of a triage system for 101 calls where most calls are answered within a few minutes and callers who are required to stay on the line might expect to wait around 20 minutes. Around a third of all calls are not police related and the triage system enables these to be addressed thereby freeing up the queue for those in genuine need of the service.
- Live Chat incident reporting which is working well as individuals can leave messages and receive responses via the website. This system provides a means for the public to report valuable information to the police.
- By May next year Staffordshire Police Force will employ 2,000 officers. A significant number are part of the nationwide government funded initiative to recruit 20,000 new officers, and an additional 100 officers (approximate) are financed by local taxpayers. Many of these officers are stationed within Local Policing Teams.
- Local Policing Teams now independently manage their response units, as opposed to units being despatched from Cannock, Stoke on Trent and Burton on Trent. Each Local Policing Team is led by a Chief Inspector who oversees locally set policing activities.

Mr Adams advised the Committee that Tim Norbury the Deputy Commander had asked him to convey the increase in patrols during the weekends. There was now a dedicated 'Safer Nights' operation in place, which is significantly benefiting Stone's nighttime economy. This has led to a decrease in the number of incidents occurring in the town centre. Colleagues in the Licensing Department have reported fewer incidents and are considering the potential appointment of a dedicated town centre officer to maintain order from Monday to Friday.

Mr Adams discussed the surge in 'protest' related policing, a topic that has gained national prominence and has subsequently increased the demand on Staffordshire police services. He drew attention to issues in Cannock following the housing of asylum seekers in local hotels, and an industrial protest around a factory with sites in Lichfield and Tamworth.

Mr Adams remarked on the surprising prevalence of crime in relationship contexts – domestic violence and crimes involving acquaintances. Additionally, he highlighted concerns regarding young and vulnerable individuals being an 'easy

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target' to be lured into criminal activities.

He said that annually, he has committed approximately £8million towards supporting victims (especially those of domestic abuse), diversification activities for the young, services for children who go missing, children at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation, and measures to prevent or limit demands on the police by supporting ex-offenders to reduce reoffending.

Mr Adams clarified his role, which is external to the police service. He is responsible for recruiting the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer. He oversees the budget and seeks funding through the precept. Last year less financial support was requested than any other area in the country, although he still sees the sum (£12.50) as being substantial in the current economic climate.

£6million has been allocated towards addressing high harm crime which includes children's services handling online child abuse. The teams involved in this area comprise forensic experts, IT personnel and specialist staff. He said the Force were balancing high visibility policing with high-risk services, which, fortunately, impacted only a small proportion of the community.

Mr Adams said that Staffordshire's current situation was not ideal. Things went awry during the Covid-19 crisis, but the Chief Constable is steering the services back towards the level of excellence that should be expected. The police have undergone a special programme that focuses on identifying vulnerability and prioritising risky cases. There have been issues with the time available for proper investigations due to a response model that necessitated police rushing around the county under emergency conditions.

Mr Adams is hopeful that based on the feedback so far, Staffordshire might be the first service to emerge from this process, with confirmation expected in the autumn. Regardless, he emphasised that they are now a completely different police force, one where local leaders make decisions for local interests and specialists deal with high harm crimes.

Road safety remains a priority, with a surge in motorbike incidents being a cause for concern. More investment is being channelled towards speed cameras and efforts to tackle uninsured, intoxicated, and drug influenced drivers.

Mr Adams advised the Committee that the Fire Service was doing fine, keeping fire stations open and firefighter numbers up. They have expanded their role to responding to calls from people who have suffered falls. The ambulance service is facing its own challenges with slow response times putting people at risk of hypothermia, dehydration, and in serious need of hospitalisation. In such instances, the fire service has been stepping in to handle some of the calls initially meant for the ambulance service.

Generally, they provide an excellent service, often arriving on site within half an hour. With the use of specialist equipment, they can help individuals back into their beds or chairs, hopefully preventing a hospital admission. During these visits, they also carry out a fire safety check of the premises. Looking ahead there is a clear need for more of this integrated approach.

The fire service is a highly capable professional body that not only fulfils its primary role admirably but also has the capacity to assist other organisations. There is

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anticipation for a government White Paper that will enable expansion of these collaborative efforts over the coming years. This is pioneering work, and it is an area to watch closely.

At the end of Mr Adams presentation he invited the Committee to ask questions:

### **Questions**

#### High Street

There is longstanding local concern about unauthorised vehicles accessing the High Street and the resulting risk of serious accident, potentially endangering school children who often converge there when a high volume of traffic is present. This is a worrying situation that requires immediate attention, given the dangerous situations that have been witnessed.

How might the Police and Crime Commissioner assist the Town Council in dealing with this situation via access controls or improving levels of enforcement?

### **Answer**

Mr Adams questioned whether direct intervention by the Police would represent a good use of resources. PCSOs don't have the power of enforcement and manning a gate wasn't an option.

The police are currently considering the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system, which may enable management of the situation.

He acknowledged this was a complex issue worsened by food businesses with takeaway delivery drivers and customers parking on the High Street close to their destination.

Mr Adams said he was fully committed to staying engaged in discussions to find an effective solution. While the police are aware of the issue, their capabilities are stretched when dealing with higher-priority responsibilities.

He said the town's patrolling officer might have some capacity, but issuing fines, while possibly changing some people's attitudes, is unlikely to eradicate the problem entirely. Implementing a solution like ANPR may be more promising.

The Town Council acknowledged the local police efforts in conducting occasional operations. However, a sustainable solution requires some form of funding or an amplified voice on behalf of the Town Council to influence decision-makers.

Mr Adams said as Police and Fire Commissioner, he was committed to advocating for resolution as it could prevent potential harm.

He said contacting the County Councillor is an essential step in reaching out to the Highways Authority. Still, the solution should be a collaborative effort, in which the Police will play a part.

The Committee informed him that Stone has one of the best groups of police officers and were sorry to be losing one of its longer standing officers who was very highly thought of.

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### Perception of the Police

We appreciate the hard work of our police officers in Stone and their increased efforts in communication is acknowledged and appreciated.

The move towards embracing digital and social media channels and productive interactions with PCSOs represent positive changes.

However, there is still a perception among many residents that policing is low level, lacking in visibility, unresponsive, and that the absence of a physical police station is a disadvantage. How can you combat this public perception?

#### **Answer**

Mr Adams advised the Committee that the feeling of safety was intrinsically linked to perceptions of one's local area. While most people are unlikely to experience serious crime, the stories we hear can lead to fears about becoming the next victim. Thus, addressing the perception of crime is very important.

He said that a recent initiative, a telephone survey conducted (nine months ago) in collaboration with the Chief Constable, was an attempt to gauge public sentiment on police visibility, public confidence, and the perception of fair treatment. The mixed responses provided valuable insights and a benchmark for comparison with other national regions. Regrettably, many of these responses were negative.

However, upon repeating the survey four months later, after the introduction of the Local Policing model, a significant shift in public sentiment was noted. A 9% increase in people feeling better informed and reassured demonstrates the power of increased visibility and localised messaging.

Mr Adams reaffirmed the commitment to doing a better job and was eagerly awaiting the additional officers (upon completion their training) and them becoming an active presence on our streets. However, he said that it was important to note that a visible police presence may mean different things to different people. For some, an absence of the police signified a peaceful area, while others may associate a visible presence with safety. Balancing these perceptions can be challenging, given the vast area to cover and prioritising more pressing issues.

However, he foresees an enhancement in police visibility which many residents may have already noticed, and the police are keen to hear reflections on this improvement. Also, improving the experience with their contact hub was a priority. If someone takes the time to report a concern, they must ensure a prompt response, contributing to a positive overall experience.

He said that feedback and engagement were vital as they make improvements and must continue the discussion to ensure expectations of residents are met.

### Recording of Statistics

Are the statistics based on crimes reported or inbound calls to 101?

#### **Answer**

The statistics are based on legitimate crimes reported, excluding those calls that

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are not related to police matters (as identified by the triage system).

Crime recording has seen an increase since the lifting of the Covid-19 lockdown measures although general crime levels hadn't exceeded pre-Covid levels until recently. The nature of the crimes has shifted somewhat towards violent crimes, especially those related to domestic situations.

Domestic abuse in Staffordshire during the pandemic, despite national concerns, was lower. However, it's now apparent that individuals previously trapped in troubled relationships, unable to seek aid or refuge at that time, are now reaching out for assistance.

They have dedicated £5million to bolster domestic abuse support services and are seeing shifts in how certain incidents are classified. For example, neighbourhood incidents previously classified as anti-social behaviour are now often recorded as harassment, which is a crime. Changes like this can affect the overall balance of crime statistics, but generally crime figures are comparable.

They are aware the delay in response times for the 101 line can be a source of frustration and concern for residents. Mr Adams reassured the Committee that the matter was being taken seriously and was in discussion with the Chief Constable about adding another 60 staff to the contact centre to secure improvement.

Mr Adams said he understood the hesitation to use the 999 line for non-emergency incidents, and aimed to make the 101 service better and more efficient for those non-emergency calls. Mugging, while distressing and serious, falls under this category if there's no immediate danger or threat to life. They want to ensure that victims of such incidents can report them without undue delay.

#### Police Post/Station

People see a yellow box (intercom) with a sign indicating police assistance and they expect a response. It is disconcerting when they're left pressing the button, in all weathers, without any response.

#### **Answer**

Mr Adams advised the Committee that this was not the service the Police Force aimed for, especially if the signage implied accessibility.

However, they want resources focused on active-duty officers, not maintaining old, unsuitable and expensive buildings. Their aim is to have officers out in the communities, responding to crimes, and being present where they are needed most. Stone, being a significant area, warrants a base for officers to operate from but the option to report incidents at a police station is no longer feasible.

He said that if someone is pressing the emergency button, it demanded immediate attention, similar to a 999 call, even if it needs to be passed on afterwards. Mr Adams said he would ensure the issue was addressed and will find a means to report back on progress.

Mr Adams advised the Committee that he will not support further investment in building estates for police use as investment is now directed towards shared estates where police and fire services can collaborate, like Stone Fire Station. This

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strategy is being implemented all over the county. Investing in a more traditional town centre presence isn't beneficial, considering the high costs per visit. They're looking forward to creating efficient and cost-effective ways to serve communities.

Mr Adams advised the Committee that the primary focus should be on investing in personnel and ensuring they are in the right place, rather than on physical estates. Nevertheless, the idea of a police station still holds significant meaning for many residents, and this is something they need to address in their communication and branding within the town.

While they are planning to invest in vital infrastructure, the concept of having police stations in every town is deemed outdated. However, they do understand that the older generation often feel more secure with a tangible police presence, and that this transition must be carefully managed.

Mr Adams reminded the Committee that any issues or concerns can be sent directly to him and his deputy by writing to: [Councillor@staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk](mailto:Councillor@staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk) providing an opportunity for him to listen and work on the Town Council's behalf.

At the end of the item the Chairman thanked Mr Adams for his update and insights. He said that it had been really helpful to have the information and discussion.

#### **GP24/029 Dissolution of the Management Committee**

The Committee considered the report\* of the Town Clerk (which had been attached to the agenda for the meeting) dealing with the actions needed to dissolve the Management Sub-Committee and absorb its responsibilities into the General Purposes Committee.

The decision had been taken on 23 May 2023 by the General Purposes Committee to dissolve the Management Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED:

The Committee agreed that:

- a. Appeals under the disciplinary and grievance procedures are made to the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee, and that the appeals panels under both procedures are made up of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the General Purposes and Planning Consultative Committees.
- b. The Complaints Sub-Committee is changed to an ex-officio group made up from the six Chairmen of Committees and Sub-Committees plus the Vice-Chairman of the General Purposes Committee. These could be substituted by Vice-Chairmen should any conflict of interest arise in respect of a specific complaint.
- c. The programme of meetings for 2023-24\* is updated.

#### **GP24/030 Heritage Centre**

The Committee considered an update on Stone Heritage Centre following the appointment of a main contractor for the building works.

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The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the work was progressing, and that the Chairman and Town Clerk would be meeting for a tour of the building on Friday 9 June 2023.

**GP24/031 Town Council Payments**

The list of payments for May will be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

**GP24/032 Update from Working Groups:**

**Stone Heritage Centre Steering Group**

The Chairman advised the Committee that there was no report.

**Engagement with Young People**

Councillor Dawson confirmed that the Working Group were in the process of arranging a meeting.

**GP24/033 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 was not available to give a report.

**Stone ATC**

Councillor Davies was not available to give a report.

**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 no meeting had taken place.

**Stone Common Plot Trustees**

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

**Stone Community Hub Liaison Group**

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

**SPCA Executive Committee**

Mr M. Green was not available to give a report.

**Stone Traders Group Directors' Meeting**

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that Councillor Hood would be attending the next meeting of Stone Traders Group Directors'.

**CHAIRMAN**