

Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 5 December 2023

PRESENT: Councillor R. Kenney in the Chair, and
Councillors: A. Best, J. Battrick, L. Davies, J. Davies, I. Fordham, J. Hood, T. Kelt,
B. Kenney, P. Leason, J. Metters, J. Powell, N. Powell, R. Townend and
C. Thornicroft

Officers: L. Trigg and T. Williams

ABSENT: Councillors: A. Burgess, K. Dawson and A. Mottershead

GP24/135 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: A. Burgess, K. Dawson and
A. Mottershead

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

GP24/136 Declarations of Interests

None

GP24/137 Requests for Dispensations

None

GP24/138 To receive the report of the County Councillors

County Councillor Jill Hood

The Chairman invited Councillor Hood to address the Committee.

High Street Signage

Councillor Hood asked Town Councillors whether they had noticed the huge 'No
Entry' sign at the top of the High Street which had been installed following a High
Street walkabout with Officers from the Highways Department.

Newcastle Road

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that Newcastle Road was now pothole
free as the Highways Department had repaired all defects in the road's surface.

County Councillor I. Parry

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

GP24/139 **To receive the report of Borough Councillors**

The Chairman invited Borough Councillors to address the Committee.

Councillor Leason advised the Committee that he had attended a recent meeting of the Community and Wellbeing Committee where a report had been given by the people who empty bins. He said that everything was satisfactory and offered to make available the related statistics.

Councillor Leason said a meeting had taken place with the Fire Brigade who gave a report on the types of incidents attended in Stone from 23 April to the end of October. He informed the Committee that there had been 26 false alarm callouts caused by equipment and 11 false alarms caused by people ringing in. None were malicious. 8 special service calls had been made as the fire brigade now assist uninjured people who have falls. No road traffic accidents had been attended in Stone.

Councillor Fordham advised the Committee that the statistics (referred to by Councillor Leason above) included Veolia making 4.2 million collections across the Borough (in the year ending March 2023) with 99.95% of these successfully completed. There was an improvement plan to try to reach 100%. The collections constituted 37,000 tonnes of waste material.

Councillor Fordham said that air quality had been discussed with the 28 monitoring points across the Borough indicating that levels were within the Government's guidelines for particulates and nitrous dioxide.

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that she and Councillor Fordham had been contacted by a County Officer who explained how the Community Change Fund could be used. The fund comes directly from crime (such as speeding and parking fines) and groups and organisations can apply if their project has a connection with anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Hood made a call to Town Councillors for toys and in particular footballs to be donated for Afghani children (of all ages) who are staying at Swynnerton.

The Chairman advised the Committee that Cabinet on Thursday evening (7 December) were considering the acquisition of the Guild Hall Shopping Centre.

GP24/140 **Representations from Members of the Public**

None

GP24/141 **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

- a) That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 7 November 2023 (Minute No's GP24/118 – GP24/134), be approved as a correct record.

GP24/142 **Minutes of Sub-Committees**

There were no sub-committee minutes.

* Items marked with an asterisk refer to reports or papers circulated with the agenda or distributed at the meeting. They are attached as an appendix to the signed copy of the Council minutes.

GP24/143 Budget 2024-25 to 2025-26

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 2024-25 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-committees 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.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the figures in the report set the scene for the budget preparation. They were 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 of high inflation, particularly energy, which he said was well contained within the provision that had been made in the budget last year. He said there was an unspent forecast for the current year (of around £27,000) but this could change as the current financial year progressed.

The Town Clerk said that he had identified a few things that the Council was considering in the service elements relating to benches in the Market Square and Christmas trees in the town. He had allocated the inflation contingency but needed approval for this as well as needing specific guidance to the sub-committees in respect of considering their budgets.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the standstill budget position for 2024-25, 2025-26 and 2026-27 and the issues related to setting the precept, and:

- a. Authorises the reallocation of the inflation contingency, in accordance with the figures in the Town Clerk's report.
- b. Asks each sub-committee to consider its financial needs for the next three years and report back to the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee with its budget proposals.
- c. Agrees to consider its own budgets at the next meeting of this Committee.
- d. Did not give any specific instructions to sub-committees to which they would need to have regard while preparing their proposed budgets.

GP24/144 National Pay Award 2023-24

The Committee considered the report* of the Town Clerk (which had been

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circulated with the agenda for the meeting) on the outcome of the 2023-24 national pay award negotiations for local government staff and its impact on the Council.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council accepts the recommendations of the Town Clerk and adopts the new salary levels for staff for 2023-24, as set out in the report.

GP24/145 Heritage Centre

The Committee considered an update from the Town Clerk on the Heritage Centre project.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that he had been informed verbally that the grant application for the Heritage Centre, administered by Stafford Borough Council on behalf of the Government, had been approved and was currently awaiting the formal agreement to sign. The award was worth £40,000 and would allow improved facilities and displays to be installed.

He said that a condition had been placed on the grant that required at least 500 visitors to visit the Heritage Centre before the end of 2024.

GP24/146 Town Council Payments

RESOLVED: To note the list* of Town Council payments made during the period 1 to 31 October 2023.

GP24/147 Update from Working Groups:

Stone Heritage Centre Steering Group

Councillor Leason advised the Committee that there had been no meeting.

Engagement with Young People

Councillor Dawson was not available to provide a report.

50th Anniversary of Stone Town Council

Councillor Davies informed the Committee that he had been discussing the anniversary with the Heritage Centre Manager with a view to bringing the opening of the Heritage Centre and anniversary together. He said one of the exhibitions could be a retrospect of Stone Town Council.

GP24/148 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 will take place in January 2024.

Stone ATC

Councillor Davies advised the Committee that a welfare meeting of Stone ATC had taken place on 14 November where he learned that the Squadron continued to have excellent numbers with a waiting list of young people wishing to join. He said that the financing of the various projects seemed to be going well and the turnout of the Air Cadets, Army Cadets, Scouts, Guides etc on Remembrance Sunday was

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extremely good and they were all a credit to the town.

Age Concern Stone & District

Councillor Thornicroft advised the Committee that Age Concern Stone & District had not met.

Stafford & Stone Access Group

Councillor Kelt informed the Committee that a meeting would be taking place next week.

Stone Common Plot Trustees

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that the Trustees had not met.

Stone Community Hub Liaison Group

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

SPCA Executive Committee

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

Stone Traders Group Directors' Meeting

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that there had been no meeting.

The meeting was temporarily suspended and then reconvened after the Planning Consultative Committee meeting had taken place.

GP24/149 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.

GP24/150 Staffing Matters

The Committee considered the confidential report* of the Town Clerk (which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting).

RESOLVED: To approve the recommendations of the Town Clerk as detailed in the report.

CHAIRMAN

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