

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD IN PONTELAND MEMORIAL HALL, PONTELAND ON 12 AUGUST 2020

Present: Councillor A Varley (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs C Caisley, L Darwin, A Hall, Mrs S Johnson, Mrs K Overbury, Mrs K Woodrow and A Shanley.

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Town Council for some time. He hoped that everyone attending felt comfortable with the arrangements made for the meeting.

He wished to thank everyone for their efforts during this difficult period of the Pandemic, in particular the office staff and outside contractors who had kept services running as normally as possible during this time.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Ahmed, R Dodd, T Edwards-Clay and Mrs C Greenwell.

2. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD 11 MARCH 2020

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 11 March 2020 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs K Overbury declared an interest in item 6(i) below and took no part in the voting or discussion.

4. MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute 154 – Update on new play area at Callerton Lane

The Clerk reported that work was due to start on the new play area at Callerton Lane. Details of the layout and costs had been previously circulated. It was anticipated that the temporary play area would remain open until the new permanent space was ready to open.

Councillors asked if they could have a photograph taken with all Councillors at the new play area prior to opening for publication in PNV. This would be arranged.

(ii) Minute 155 – Event to educate Ponteland residents re waste Recycling

This event had not yet taken place due to the Coronavirus situation. It was noted that it may be some time before this could take place

4. MATTERS ARISING (Continued)

(iii) Minute 162 – Meritorious service award

Members asked when it was planned to present the award to Mr Deans. It was suggested that this may be delayed to next year in view of the current situation with Covid-19 restrictions. Members agreed that the presentation would be made next year at the appropriate time.

5. PLANNING

As all minutes had been circulated to Councillors during the past few months, a decision had been taken not to re-circulate them for this meeting.

5. GRANT APPLICATIONS

(i) Ponteland Community Primary School (formerly Ponteland Community Middle School)

A grant application had been received from the Head teacher of the above school requesting a grant of £3000 towards the cost of ancillary work required for their project to refurbish three classrooms. Details of what the grant would be spent on was set out in the application form.

The costs of the scheme and details of funding already pledged was also set out in the form.

Councillors were pleased to approve the grant particularly in view of the benefits to the community and the level of fundraising that had already taken place. They asked if they could be kept informed of the progress of the scheme.

RESOLVED – A grant of £3000 be approved and the Clerk be requested to ask if the Town Council could be kept informed of the progress of this scheme.

Note – Councillor Mrs Overbury declared an interest in the above and took no part in the discussion or voting.

6. PROJECTS REPORT

The projects report had been circulated for consideration.

The report set out the current status of each of the projects listed.

It was noted that work on the Oxbow lake maintenance would be carried out in September. This had been agreed in October 2019.

The Clerk advised members that funds had been included in the budget for some bank repair works in the Park. This followed the annual inspection of the riverbank by the Tyne Rivers Trust. A sum of £3500 had been included in the current budget however, the actual costs were lower than anticipated. The amount quoted for the work was £1950.80 plus VAT and members were asked to approve the expenditure for the work which would also be carried out in September 2020.

RESOLVED – The report be accepted, and the Council agree to the bank repair works in the Park at a cost of £1950.80 plus VAT.

8. SIX MONTH RULE FOR ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

A report by the Clerk to the Council regarding the above had been circulated. Councillors were reminded that under the Local Government Act 1972 section 85(1), a Councillor can cease to be a member of the Council if they do not attend a meeting of the Council or any of its committees or sub-committees, joint boards or other body to which any of the Council's powers have been transferred for a consecutive period of 6 months. The period begins with the last meeting attended.

It was recommended that parish and town councils grant a leave of absence to all Councillors until May 2021.

RESOLVED – A leave of absence be granted to all Ponteland Town Councillors until May 2021.

9. ANNUAL AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS 2019-20

A report by the Clerk had been circulated. Members were informed that the Annual Audit Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) had to be sent to the Town Council's external auditors, PKF Littlejohn by 31st August 2020. This related to the annual audit of accounts for 2019-20. The deadline had been extended due to the Covid-19 crisis.

This meant that the period for the exercise of public rights could be held at any time after the approval of the accounts and AGAR as long as it commenced on or before 1st September at the latest.

A copy of the relevant sections of the AGAR form had been circulated with the report.

The annual internal audit report (page 3) had been completed by the Council's Internal Auditor, Mr Peter Basnett. A copy of his separate internal audit report was also circulated. He had not raised any issues of concern to the Council.

A copy of the Annual Governance Statement (page 4 of the AGAR) had been circulated and Councillors reviewed the information and responded to the various questions included in the Statement.

The Accounting Statement (page 5) was approved and was signed by the Mayor at the meeting. The Clerk had already signed the Accounting Statement prior to circulation to the Council. The Council also reviewed the explanation of variances from 2018-19 to 2019-20 and the draft annual accounts.

As stated above, the process for the exercise of public rights had been altered for this year due to the Pandemic It was suggested that the process would start from Monday 17th August and end on 28th September 2020.

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CHAIRMAN

9. ANNUAL AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS 2019-20(continued)

- (i) The Council approved the Annual Internal Audit report (page 3 of the AGAR) and the separate internal audit report as presented.
- (ii) Following a review of the Annual Governance Statement set out on page 4 of the AGAR, the Council approved the Statement.
- (iii) The Council approved the draft final accounts as presented.
- (iv) The Council approved the Accounting Statements set out on page 5 of the AGAR which was signed by the Mayor at the meeting.
- (v) Members approved the explanation of variances as circulated for submission to the Council’s external auditors although it was noted that there were no variances that required an explanation for 2019-20.
- (vi) The Council noted the process for the exercise of public rights starting from Monday 17th August until Monday 28th September 2020. It was noted that the relevant information would be posted on the Council’s website on 13th August.

10. PTC WEBSITE

A report by the Clerk had been circulated. Members were advised that the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications no. 2) Accessibility Regulations came into force in late 2018. The aim was to ensure that all public sector websites and mobile applications (apps) were accessible to all users especially those with disabilities. This placed an obligation on all local authorities including parish and town councils to have a website that complied with the Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1AA rating as a minimum standard.

Following a recent accessibility audit, it had been found that the PTC website was not accessible, and a new format was required. The existing content could be moved across. All local councils must be compliant by 23rd September.

The Clerk had contacted a company called Aubergine who were recommended by the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and a proposal had been received at a discounted price.

Details of the costs involved for the first year and years 2 and 3 were set out within the report. It was likely that the final cost would be no more than £2500 which would include transferring data across from the existing website to the new format. It was noted that this expenditure would be met from the projects heading of the current budget.

It was noted that it had not been possible to obtain other quotes for this service in view of the timescale and the specialist nature of the work involved. Financial Regulations 4.4 and 11.1(h) refer.

RESOLVED – In view of the urgency of this work, the Council agreed to proceed with the proposal for a new and compliant website and that the final cost be delegated to the Clerk in consultation with the Mayor which would then be reported to Councillors. The costs would be met from the projects fund within the current budget.

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11. REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADE – SUNDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2020

A report by Councillor Mrs Overbury re the above had been circulated to Councillors for consideration.

There was a need for a discussion on this subject due to the uncertainty around the situation regarding Covid-19 and the possible impact on the arrangements for the parade and service.

The Royal British Legion had said that it would communicate its plans in the early autumn. Letters were usually sent out to all local organisations advising them of the arrangements for the event in mid-September.

The report contained four options for consideration by Councillors. Option 1 was similar to previous years but with some slight alterations including a new starting point for the parade. Option 2 was for a scaled down parade with members of the public being asked to line the route.

Option 3 comprised of the minimum asking members of the public not to attend the parade although they could stand on the route if they were socially distanced from each other. The parade would be socially distanced with one representative from a selected number of organisations. Those not taking part would be asked to lay wreaths at some stage over the next week and a photograph of all the wreaths would be taken a week after Remembrance Sunday.

Finally, option 4 was for no parade in Ponteland although Remembrance Day would still be commemorated with its poppy displays and a wreath from the Town Council laid informally on the morning of November 8th. Other organisations would be asked to lay their wreath at some stage over the next week and a photograph would be taken of all wreaths at the end of the week of Remembrance. Wreaths would be laid on the three Commonwealth War Graves in St Mary's churchyard.

Councillors discussed the various options in detail and quickly discounted options 1 and 2.

Various concerns were raised in relation to holding a parade and service and these related mainly to insurance and public safety.

It was eventually agreed by a vote of 5 to 3 to accept option 4 as the way forward.

RESOLVED – The Council agree to option 4 as set out in the report which was set out above. The Clerk and Councillor Mrs Overbury would put an article in PNV setting out the reasons for the decision.

11. REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADE – SUNDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2020
(Continued)

Note – Councillor Shanley asked that it be noted in the minutes that he voted for option 3 in the report.

12. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Councillor Mrs Veronica Jones was in attendance and provided an update on the current Covid-19 situation. She reported that numbers of cases in Northumberland continued to be low.

The County Council has a Covid-19 protection plan in place that included protection of high-risk areas such as schools, care homes, workplaces and prisons.

It was hoped there would be more input locally about where testing should take place to ensure the right areas were able to access the facility.

The County Council had a full recovery plan in place in relation to Coronavirus which can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/coronavirus/Road-to-recovery.aspx>

The County Council had been holding their meetings remotely since lockdown. All of the Scrutiny and Strategic Planning meetings had taken place by this method and it was the intention to try and get the Local Area Council meetings arranged as well as looking at the possibility of holding a full Council meeting either remotely or arranging a physical meeting.

The Local Transport Plan was operational again and details of what had been agreed for Ponteland had recently been sent out to the Town Council and circulated to Councillors.

13. MAYOR'S REPORT

Due to the current situation with the Covid-19 crisis the Mayor had not been required to attend any events. He had however visited the Town Council offices on numerous occasions when required.

14. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET REPORT/ YEAR-END BUDGET REVISIONS

The Accounts Committee approved payments totalling £25,272.87. A copy of the monthly budget report was also circulated, as well as the Bank reconciliation document for July 2020. A report relating to year-end budget revisions had also been circulated and was approved.

RESOLVED – The reports be accepted.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – TO BE AGREED.