

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD VIA ZOOM ON 9 DECEMBER 2020

Present: Councillor A Varley (in the Chair)

Councillors S Ahmed, Mrs C Caisley, R Dodd, Mrs C Greenwell, A Hall, Mrs S Johnson, Mrs K Overbury and Mrs K Woodrow.

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the remote meeting of the Town Council.

Note due to technical issues Councillor Dodd chaired the meeting up to Minute 35.

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Darwin and A Shanley.

32. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD 11 NOVEMBER 2020

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 11 November 2020 were submitted for approval. It was noted that the wrong date, March instead of August, appeared in the title for Minute 16, Minutes of the last meeting. The Minutes would be amended.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved subject to the amendment to Minute 16 as outlined above.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

34. MATTERS ARISING

Minute 20(ii) – Grant application – Northumberland Community Bank

Councillor Dodd was asked if there was any update regarding discussions between the County Council and the Community Bank. Councillor Dodd stated that a grant had been given to the organisation and that this should be discussed by the Town Council at a later date.

Minute 21 – Ponteland Memorial Hall, Request for financial assistance

The Clerk was asked to update Councillors re the above.

The Clerk reported that she had had discussions with the Chairman of the Memorial Hall and there was a possibility that they were going to seek some professional advice from Community Action Northumberland.

35. PLANNING

Minutes of meetings held on 27th October and 10th November 2020 had been circulated for information.

36. NOTICE OF CONCLUSION OF AUDIT

A report by the Clerk in relation to the above had been circulated. The report stated that the External Auditors Report and Certificate had been received on 20th November and this was circulated to Councillors together with a copy of sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Annual Return (AGAR). The auditors, PKF Littlejohn had not raised any issues with the Town Council.

The information was displayed on notice boards and on the Town Council’s website on 23rd November. The information had to be published by the 30th November.

RESOLVED – The Council approve and accept the External Auditors Report and Certificate for 2019-20 and sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR.

37. NEW PLAY AREA – CALLERTON LANE

The Clerk had been asked to provide a report relating to the recent opening of the new play area at Callerton Lane.

The facility had opened on 16th November. Despite the provision of a brand-new facility there had been some negative publicity in PNV and on social media. There had been excessive numbers using the facility and a problem with older pupils using the area before and after school. After discussions with the schools, it had been agreed to lock the play area before and after school pick up and drop off to assist with this issue.

An approach had been made from the High School asking if the age range could be lowered to stop older children from using the facility. If it was lowered to age 12, this would still allow first year pupils at the High School to use the play area.

Various other suggestions had been made in relation to the play area such as the provision of CCTV and the replacement of the fence at some point with a metal product. This would require examination.

The facility had only been open for a short time and the issues appeared to be settling down. However, the Council would continue to monitor the situation and they agreed that the age range should be lowered.

An approach had been made to NE Youth who currently provide outreach services on two evenings a week in Ponteland to engage with young people. They had been asked if they could alter one of their days to attend the play area at school closure time and engage with the children regarding socials distancing etc. Councillors were asked if they were agreeable to this suggestion for an initial period of three months.

They had also expressed an interest in using the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at the Ponteland Community Primary School (formerly the Middle School) and they had asked if the Council could approach the school on their behalf. This would be at no cost to the Council and any sessions would be fully supervised. It was agreed that the Clerk would make an approach.

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CHAIRMAN

37. NEW PLAY AREA – CALLERTON LANE (Continued)

It was interesting that a number of young people had engaged with NE Youth during this difficult period and asked to keep in touch with them via email as some were clearly struggling with the current situation. The Clerk was asked to obtain numbers from NE Youth if possible and circulate them to Councillors.

In email discussions regarding the play area, it had been suggested that the Town Council should examine the possibility of providing something or somewhere for the older teenagers of Ponteland such as a youth shelter or some other idea. There was some discussion on the siting of this as some Members felt it needed to be away from the play area site. The Clerk reported that this could be a problem as land would have to be leased from another landowner which took time and was in short supply. It was agreed that further discussions on this would take place in the New Year. The Clerk agreed to send out examples of youth shelters to Members.

RESOLVED –

- (i) The Council agreed to lower the age range for use of the play area to 12 and the signage be amended.
- (ii) The Council agreed to take up the offer from NE Youth to bring forward their Thursday sessions to school closure time at the play area for an initial period of three months. This was at no additional cost to the Council.
- (iii) The Council agreed to continue to monitor the situation with the play area and discuss any issues at subsequent meetings.
- (iv) The Council agreed to examine the various options available in relation to the provision of a facility for older teenagers.

38. OFFICE CLOSURE – CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR

A report by the Clerk was circulated for consideration. Councillors were reminded that the office was currently closed due to the Covid-19 restrictions. The office usually closed on the 23rd December and remained closed until the New Year.

Staff had been unable to take any reasonable amounts of leave this year for various reasons which were outlined at the meeting. Some staff were hoping to take leave from the Thursday 17th December until Monday 4th January although emails etc would still be monitored during that time. The phones would be manned between office hours of 9.30 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. on 21st – 23rd December.

Councillors queried the situation with regard to unused leave. The Clerk reported that staff were currently allowed to carry forward 5 days leave per year if necessary. The situation would need to be reviewed next year to see how much remaining leave office staff had left.

RESOLVED – The Council agree the request for leave to be taken from 17th December until 4th January with the proviso that the phones were manned remotely as set out above.

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CHAIRMAN

39. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Councillor Dodd reported that the work of the County Council was dominated by the current Covid-19 situation. He was unsure whether the restrictions would be altered before Christmas as numbers were still rising in some parts of the county.

In reply to a query, Councillor Dodd reported that the school and leisure complex should be completed by the Spring.

A query was made regarding the provision of car parking for the complex. Users of the Leisure Centre were finding it difficult to park and this could get worse when exercise classes re-started. It was suggested that more car parking was to become available which may help with the situation, but Councillor Dodd agreed to request that this situation be monitored.

Queries were also raised regarding the lighting levels on parts of Callerton Lane and Councillor Dodd agreed to discuss this and other issues with the Councillor involved.

40. MAYOR'S REPORT

The Mayor had circulated details of his limited diary engagements for November and December for the information of Councillors. He informed Councillors that he did have regular meetings with the Clerk.

41. REPORTS BY TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

(i) Richard Coates Educational Foundation

The Minutes of a meeting of the above Foundation held on 29th October had been circulated for information.

42. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET REPORTS

Details of payments approved by the Accounts Committee in November in the sums of £33,107.93 had been circulated. A copy of monthly budget reports for November were also circulated, as well as the Bank reconciliation document for the same month.

RESOLVED – The reports be accepted.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – IT WAS AGREED THAT MONTHLY REMOTE MEETINGS WOULD NOW BE HELD VIA ZOOM. THE NEXT MEETING WOULD BE ON WEDNESDAY 13TH JANUARY AT 3.00 P.M. (2.45p.m. for public questions)