

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD AT MERTON HALL ON 10th NOVEMBER 2021

Present: Councillor C Greenwell (in the Chair)

Councillors C Caisley, L Darwin, R Dodd, J Ford, A Hall, S Johnson, K Overbury, N Sehgal, A Varley and K Woodrow.
County Councillor Veronica Jones was also in attendance.

76. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Ahmed.

77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Darwin and Dodd declared an interest in Minute 87 and Councillor Greenwell declared an interest in Minute 92.

78. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD 13th OCTOBER 2021

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 13th October 2021 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

79. MATTERS ARISING

Minute 69- Ponteland Rotary Club – Santa’s Sleigh event

Councillor Hall had provided details of the routes for the above event which was being held on 3rd and 4th December and these had been circulated to Councillors for information. Councillor Varley asked about timings and was informed the approximate times were between 5 and 7.00 p.m.

80. PLANNING

(i) Planning Committee

Minutes of meetings held on 31st August and 14th September 2021 were circulated for information.

(ii) Report on recent planning decisions

There were no reports.

81. GRANT APPLICATIONS

A report by the Clerk relating to two grant applications that had been received from Rialto and the Memorial Hall was circulated for consideration.

81. GRANT APPLICATIONS(Continued)

(i) Grant from Rialto Restaurant for provision of fireworks for New Year's Eve display

A grant application form had been received from the proprietor of the above premises for a donation towards the cost of providing fireworks for the New Year's Eve display.

In view of some concerns re anti-social behaviour in the past, the Clerk was asked to write out to all licensed premises in the vicinity to request that they consider the use of security on the evening of 31st December and provide plastic glasses to those attending the event.

Councillor Caisley also asked if the organiser could be asked to consider the use of silent fireworks due to the adverse effect on animals and wildlife.

RESOLVED – A grant of £500 be approved and the Clerk be requested to carry out the actions outlined above.

(ii) Ponteland Memorial Hall

A grant application had been received from the Memorial Hall in the sum of £6,600.

The Clerk reminded Councillors that they had agreed to include the grant in the budget for 2021-22 although it was also mentioned that the future payment of the grant might be considered further in future years. She advised members that as the sum had been raised via the precept for the grant, she felt that it should be paid this year. The Clerk stated that she was in the process of compiling the budget for 2022-23 and asked Councillors to give some thought as to whether they wished to provide the grant next year.

There was a suggestion that the Council should reconsider the grant for this year in view of the level of balances held by the Hall.

Councillor Caisley asked if it was illegal not to provide the grant this year when it was included in the budget. The Clerk stated that it was not illegal but reiterated what she had said earlier in the debate about the funds being raised for this purpose locally.

RESOLVED – A grant of £6,600 be approved and provision of future grants to the hall would be considered during the budget process.

82. RISK MANAGEMENT/INTERNAL CONTROLS REPORTS

The Town Council was asked to consider the following three reports which had to be prepared and agreed on an annual basis.

(i) Risk Management report

The Clerk had circulated the risk management report to the Council for consideration together with a table which covered financial risks.

RESOLVED – The report be approved.

82. RISK MANAGEMENT/INTERNAL CONTROLS REPORTS(Continued)

(ii) Review of Internal Audit 2021-22

A report by the Clerk had been circulated.

Councillors were reminded that the Town Council was currently without an internal auditor following the resignation of the postholder at the end of the 2020-21 audit. A separate report would be considered later in the meeting on this subject.

RESOLVED – The report be accepted.

(iii) Statement of Internal Control for the year ending March 2022

Councillors considered the above report.

RESOLVED – The report be approved.

83. REPORT RE CCTV

A report by the Clerk in relation to the recent installation and renewal of CCTV had been circulated for consideration.

Councillors were advised that the main CCTV system had been replaced last month and the installation of a new camera at the play area had also been completed.

The Clerk had agreed to the installation of three more cameras at certain locations to improve the coverage. The costs were moderate and were reported to members.

The three additional cameras and the play area camera were not yet covered by the maintenance agreements the Council had with the provider of the equipment and the Clerk asked if these could be included at a total cost of £375.60 which included the play area camera.

The company had made further suggestions to improve the coverage in Ponteland. The first related to the installation of a camera at the One Stop shop on Thornhill Road. This was a blind spot for CCTV at present and the area did suffer from anti-social behaviour on a regular basis. The costs provided were £1029.38 including the pro-rata maintenance cover cost of £102.66.

Councillors felt this was a good suggestion and asked if it would be possible to provide two cameras on the pole to improve coverage. A Councillor asked the Clerk to check if there were any better cameras that could be used in that area. She agreed to investigate both suggestions.

The second proposal related to replacing the three cameras at Merton Hall. The Town Council had met the costs of installing the cameras in 2018 to improve the coverage in that area and on condition that Merton Hall paid the

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83. REPORT RE CCTV(Continued)

costs of providing electricity and provision of the wi-fi signal back to the PTC office. The costs of the three new cameras were £896.25.

The Clerk advised members of the sums available for the provision of the cameras from both asset replacement and carry forwards from the play area budget, which were sufficient to include the additional items reported.

RESOLVED –

- (i) The Council note the expenditure that had already been incurred in respect of the replacement of the main CCTV system and the play area installation.
- (ii) The Council approved the additional items that had been outlined at the meeting which are set out below:
 - a) Pro-rata payments for maintenance agreements for the three additional cameras on the main system and for the new camera at the play area at a total cost of £375.60.
 - b) The installation of a new camera at the One-stop on Thornhill Road in the sum of £1029.38 which included a pro-rata payment for the maintenance agreement.
 - c) Replacement of the cameras at Merton Hall at a total cost of £896.25.
- (iii) The Clerk be asked to check with the provider to see if either two cameras should be provided at the One Stop shop and/or whether there were better cameras available to improve coverage.

85. REPORT RE MEMBERSHIP OF PNV EDITORIAL GROUP

A report by the Clerk had been circulated for consideration. Councillors were reminded that a new editorial group had recently been established following the winding up of the PCP in April of this year. The Council had used PNV to seek four members of the community to become members and as the group was an outside body, the Council were asked to ratify the membership which was set out within the report. A first meeting of the group had been held on 20th October and new members were advised of the background to the publication, their role and how the finances of the magazine were handled.

RESOLVED – The external membership of the group as outlined within the report be approved.

85. APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR

A report by the Clerk relating to the problems with recruiting an internal auditor for the Town Council had been circulated.

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85. APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR(Continued)

Details of the various contacts that had been made to find a suitable replacement were outlined within the report.

There was one candidate who was willing to provide the service and details of his background and experience were reported to members.

The Clerk also mentioned a Newcastle based firm who provided internal audit services to local authorities.

RESOLVED – The Clerk be given delegated authority to make further contact with the Newcastle based firm and to then make a final decision regarding the appointment of the auditor on condition that Councillors were kept informed of the outcome.

86. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Councillors were reminded that a small Working Party was needed to carry out the annual review of the above documents.

RESOLVED – That Councillors Greenwell, Hall, Overbury and Varley be appointed to the Working Party to review the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

87. CONSULTATION RE PROPOSAL FOR ATKINSON HOUSE

Councillors were reminded that the County Council was currently consulting on a proposal to relocate and change the designation of the Atkinson House school which was presently based in Seghill. The proposal was to move the school pupils to the former Richard Coates building in Ponteland and to make this co-educational. The consultation period ended on 1 December 2021.

A copy of the consultation document together with a report by the Clerk and a summary of a meeting held with NCC on 18th October produced by the Mayor had been circulated.

Councillors felt that it was important to consider this issue carefully and to respond to the consultation.

Some concerns were raised in relation to the condition of the Richard Coates school that the pupils would be moved to. The views of the Pele Trust would also be useful to know. Other concerns related to the impact on the neighbouring school, increased traffic on Thornhill Road and security issues.

The Mayor reported that she would be attending a meeting with the Richard Coates Educational Trust on the 18th November, and she agreed to ask for the views of the headteacher then. She also knew that discussions had been held with the Pele Trust regarding this proposal.

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87. CONSULTATION RE PROPOSAL FOR ATKINSON HOUSE(Continued)

The Mayor indicated that she had asked several questions at the remote meeting with NCC on the 18th October which were included within her report and the responses received had allayed her concerns about the proposals. Councillor Varley queried how many children were from outside of the county and what were the costs to NCC. He also asked what would happen to the current school in Seghill if the move to Ponteland went ahead. He was advised that the cost to the County Council was significant and Councillor Dodd stated that he would report back on the plans for the school in Seghill.

Councillors queried what would happen to the Richard Coates school land if this proposal did not proceed, would it be used for affordable housing?

It was stated that the site was relatively small, and it may be that any housing built on the site would be multi-storey. The site was earmarked as brownfield. The site of the former High school had also been mentioned as suitable for potential housing.

Councillors were reminded of a further remote meeting with NCC to be held on Tuesday 16th November at 4.00 p.m. Councillors were asked to make their views known to the Clerk as soon as possible and a suitable response would be compiled and approved prior to the 1st December deadline.

RESOLVED – It was agreed that the Council should submit a response to the consultation by 1st December and Councillors be asked to send their views to the Clerk who, in consultation with the Mayor would compile a response from PTC for approval prior to the deadline.

Note – Councillors Darwin and Dodd declared an interest in the above and took no part in the discussion or voting other than to provide information if requested.

88. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Councillor Dodd reported that the Covid-19 numbers were still high in the area and he urged people to still be cautious.

He reported that the installation of double yellow lines at Riverside were still awaited.

Councillor Darwin reported that booster jabs could now be booked without having to wait 6 months. He urged everyone who was eligible to get the jabs to keep themselves safe.

He stated that he had submitted his LTP requests to NCC which were currently being reviewed.

Councillor Jones reported that the NCC winter readiness plan had been put forward. There were plentiful supplies of grit and the routes had been confirmed.

88. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT(Continued)

A query was raised about the availability of drivers to drive the grit wagons as there had been reports of nationwide shortages. Councillors were assured that this was not a problem in Northumberland.

NCC were currently carrying out their programme of gully cleansing.

Councillor Jones reported that the Atkinson House school had had poor publicity. She pointed out that the pupils also had problems with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) issues. Schools that dealt with these issues were needed and she reminded members that the proposals for Richard Coates were co-educational as there was little provision for female pupils. She reported that she had personal experience of a pupil attending such a school outside of the county. The school was located next to a mainstream school and no problems had occurred.

89. MAYOR’S REPORT

A report by the Mayor had been circulated. The report related to five events she had attended remotely, and a summary of those meetings was included within the document.

RESOLVED – The report be accepted.

90. REPORTS BY TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

The Mayor reported that she would be attending a remote meeting of the Richard Coates Educational Foundation on 18th November. The last meeting was due to be held in person on 21st October but had been cancelled due to an increase in Covid-19 cases in the school.

91. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET REPORT

The Accounts Committee approved payments totalling £41,318.90
A copy of the monthly budget report was also circulated, as well as the Bank reconciliation for October 2021.

RESOLVED – The reports be accepted.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the disclosure of the following item as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of schedule 12A in the 1972 Act as indicated below:

92. STAFFING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the above Committee held on 27th October 2021 were circulated for information.

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92. STAFFING COMMITTEE(Continued)

It was stated that the Committee had discussed having a budget available to them if they needed to engage outside consultants and Councillors agreed that a budget of £5000 should be made available for them to spend using their delegated authority. That amount would also be included in the budget for 2022-23.

The Committee had also discussed the possible provision of equipment such as mobile phones for the staff. At present, staff used their own mobile phones, and it was felt that these should be provided by the Town Council or some recompense for the use of personal phones should be made.

RESOLVED –

- (i) The Minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2021 be noted.
- (ii) The Council agree to provide a budget of £5000 for the Staffing Committee to utilise using their delegated authority. The same amount would be included in the budget for 2022-23.
- (iii) The provision of mobile phones for staff be delegated to the Clerk.

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

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING – WEDNESDAY 8TH DECEMBER 2021 AT 6.15 P.M.
AT MERTON HALL**

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