

PONTELAND TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD AT MERTON HALL ON 9TH NOVEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor C Greenwell (in the Chair)

Councillors S Ahmed, C Caisley, R Dodd,, A Hall, K Overbury, N Sehgal, and K Woodrow.

67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Johnson and A Varley.

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hall submitted a declaration of interest in respect of a planning application which was included in the Planning Minutes dated 25 October 2022.

69. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 12TH OCTOBER 2022

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 12th October 2022 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

70. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

71. PLANNING

(i) Planning Committee

Minutes of meetings held on 27th September 11th & 25th October 2022 were circulated for information.

There was some discussion relating to a recent permitted development approval for an agricultural building at Medburn. The Planning Committee had expressed concern at the appearance of the building which looked like a large domestic dwelling. County Councillor Dodd had also raised this with the Planning department and he asked if an email could be sent to him and the other County members for Ponteland setting out their concerns.

Note – Councillor Hall declared an interest in a planning application included in the minutes of 25 October.

(ii) Report on recent planning decisions

There were no reports.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

72. 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. Councillor Hall raised an issue regarding current staffing levels which he felt left the organisation exposed if both members of staff fell ill or left the authority.

The Clerk stated that as part of the Council's insurance they did have critical cover insurance in respect of the Clerk's position which would meet the cost of bringing in staff to cover periods of sickness etc.

She appreciated that the current staffing levels were unsustainable in the long term and she was hopeful that another temporary member of staff would be in place in the next few weeks.

The Clerk agreed to include this issue in the risk management report.

Councillor Caisley asked if staff ever worked alone and if so, was there a lone-working policy in place.

The Clerk stated that staff did work alone usually for one day per week, but appropriate measures were taken to ensure the safety of officers. She agreed to include this in the report and produce a lone working policy.

RESOLVED – The report be agreed subject to the two items raised above being included in the document.

(ii) Review of Internal Audit 2022-23

A report by the Clerk had been circulated.

The report included details of the work carried out by the internal auditor employed by the Town Council including a checklist of work undertaken.

The current appointment was Mr Gary Kennedy, and the Council were asked to re-appoint him to this position for 2022-23.

RESOLVED –

(i) The report and checklist be approved.

(ii) The Council agree the reappointment of Mr Kennedy to the position of internal auditor for 2022-23.

(iii) Internal controls report

Members considered the above report.

RESOLVED – The report be accepted.

73. COST OF LIVING AND ENERGY CRISIS

Following on from discussions held at the October meeting, the Mayor had produced a report relating to further information regarding need for help with food provision to those in need in Ponteland.

73. COST OF LIVING AND ENERGY CRISIS (Continued)

The Mayor and the Clerk had had two meetings. One with an officer of Northumberland Communities Together (NCT) and also with a member of staff for 'Thriving Together' which was part of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). The report included various initiatives that were operating in the county but most of these required a community facility with paid staff which Ponteland did not have. The Mayor had been advised that requests were being made by residents of Ponteland for food. Four were made in the preceding week. It had been suggested that the issue of need in Ponteland should be established. A survey had been set up on social media asking two simple questions about need and support. The responses to the survey were circulated to members.

The officers from NCT and CAB had said that the food shed idea was worth trying as it was a low-cost option. The Mayor stated that she was willing to give the idea a try and if it didn't work out it would be removed. She felt that the Town Council needed to do something to help residents who may be in need. If the Council did not agree to the idea, she stated that she would do it as an individual.

Some Councillors raised concerns about insurance, lack of evidence of need, potential vandalism and adverse publicity. Councillors agreed that further information should be sought in relation to numbers of those in need in Ponteland. Councillor Dodd agreed to take this up with Northumberland Communities Together.

The Clerk mentioned that as part of the discussions held in the last week, a suggestion to hold an event in Merton Hall before Christmas had been discussed. This would involve the Town Council asking for donations for food in the lead up to Christmas and agreeing to a date when Merton Hall could be open for people to come and take what they required. There was discussion about drop off points for food and storage. After some debate it was agreed that the Clerk would look into this idea and circulate information to Councillors.

RESOLVED –

- (i) The Clerk be asked to look into the idea for a Christmas food distribution event and circulate this to Councillors.
- (ii) Councillor Dodd be asked to seek information regarding numbers of those using the services of Northumberland Communities Together in Ponteland.

74. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS/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.

75. CEMETERY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Cemetery Committee held on 25 October had been circulated.

The Mayor who chaired the meeting stated that there was a lot of discussion regarding possible improvements to the woodland burial site. A site visit would take place in the New Year to discuss this in more detail.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved including the recommendation to replace the memorial seats in the cemetery which were in a poor state of repair.

76. HIGHWAYS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a meeting of the Highways Working Party held on 2 November had been circulated. There were no recommendations. In relation to Minute number 5 it was reported that a site meeting was to be held in the following week with the resident who had complained about the A696, the Highways manager at NCC and the Chair of the Working Party.

The Chair also referred to item 9(i) on page 4 which related to the proposed walking and cycling improvements between Callerton Lane and Prestwick Road ends.

Some views had already been expressed by Councillors. All members were urged to attend the drop-in session being held on Monday 14 November between 10 and 3pm so that a response from the Town Council could be formulated.

RESOLVED – The minutes be approved.

77. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Councillor Dodd reminded members that he hoped some Councillors would be able to assist with a traffic survey. Some dates would be circulated.

78. MAYOR’S REPORT

There was no report for November.

79. REPORTS BY TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

There were no reports.

80. ACCOUNTS/ BANK RECONCILIATION/ BUDGET REPORT

The Accounts Committee approved payments totalling £30,576 for October and a copy of the monthly budget reports were also circulated, as well as the Bank reconciliation for October 2022.

..... DATE

CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED – The reports be accepted.

81. ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN PONTELAND

This item had been added to the agenda following various issues relating to anti-social behaviour in Ponteland at Halloween and also on 5th November. It was reported that the Police had viewed the CCTV for both evenings. A report had been received by the Clerk regarding an incident on Saturday 5 November in Merton Way.

The Clerk was asked to contact the Police and Crime Commissioner for the area and invite her to attend a future meeting of the Town Council to discuss this issue and what could be done to help with the situation.

RESOLVED – The Clerk be requested to contact the Police and Crime Commissioner for the area as outlined above.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – THE NEXT MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL WOULD BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 14TH DECEMBER 2022 AT 6.15 P.M. AT MERTON HALL

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CHAIRMAN

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DATE