

**MINUTES of the FULL COUNCIL of STANLEY TOWN COUNCIL held at
The Greenhouse, Greencroft Business Park, Stanley, DH9 7XN on Tuesday 26th March
2024 at 6.30pm**

O Milburn*	L Ferry	D Tully	H Clark	G Binney
A Clegg§	C Hampson	J Stephenson	A Hanson	A Jones
J Kane	M Thompson			

* Chairman § Vice-Chairman

OFFICERS: Ann Barry (RFO & Acting Team Leader)
James Harper (Environment Services Team Leader - ESTL)
Anna Marshall (Events & Administration Support Officer)
Alex Ferry (Events & Administration Support Officer)

GUESTS: Sam Scotchbrook (Stanley Advice service)
Peter Maclellan (Christian Partnership)

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

167/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED: That apologies were **RECEIVED** and **ACCEPTED** from Cllrs. J McMahon, S McMahon, and J Nicholson. Cllr. D Fall, C Marshall, M Martin and C Bell were absent.

168/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any items of business on the agenda.

169/23 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Mayor attended a charity event organised by an STC Town Warden held to raise funds for CHUFF, it was a very good evening.

170/23 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The leader of the council welcomed everyone to tonight's meeting.

Welcome to Stuart Wardle who has returned to support the senior leadership team with legal and strategic matters to ensure we as the town council are adhering to all our statutory requirements.

I would like to draw your attention to current comments on face book. This has had a significant impact on the moral of the team, who work so hard to keep the council going and every member of the team has been affected and so as Councillors it is our job to support our staff, we have a duty of care for their health and wellbeing which has been affected by what has played out on social media. Social media can be a very difficult medium, but I do welcome the fact that this situation has led to members of the public in attendance tonight.

Public engagement and communication within our community is something that we as a town council are aware we need to improve on. All the questions we have received will be answered in the public participation section on the agenda. This has been done quite deliberately so all questions can be asked and answered in a transparent way and on public record. Following the meeting all individual residents will be provided with answers to their questions.

Our team have searched our paper records and our online records in order to be able to provide the answer for the questions that have been posed and the answers that are going to be provided tonight have been evidenced by these records and by information received by our partners and are all correct, actual and unbiased.

Thank you very much everyone.

171/23 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Several members of the public are present, and questions have been received in advance of the meeting.

The Chair informed council members that to answer all questions presented to members, a motion without notice to waive standing orders to allow for the extension of the usual 15 minutes for the agenda item.

RESOLVED: That standing orders be waived to allow for the extension should it go beyond 15 minutes.

Question

Who signed the lease when the Civic Hall was taken over in 2013? – Sarah Kenna.

Answer

The lease was signed on 30/6/2015 by Councillor Ron Harrison.

Question

Could you confirm the Town Council Councillors make-up for the years the Town Council had the lease for the Civic Hall 2013 – present day? E.g. Labour, Independent etc. – Sarah Kenna

Answer

After the May 2013 election 8 Labour Councillors resigned from the Labour Party becoming Independent Councillors this means the political control for STC passed from Labour to the Independents for the year 2013 until the 2017 election results led to a Labour majority which it has been from then until present day.

Question

Could you confirm the date the 1st 70 pages structural quote (D3) was commissioned and highlight the maintenance needed to keep the Civic Hall in an acceptable condition?

Answer

The report was produced in July 2013 it set out a number of areas of improvement with regards to potential functions within the Civic. The commissioning and the implementation of this report was the responsibility of the Town Council.

Question

Could you confirm who was responsible for the maintenance of the Civic Hall during the leasehold of the Civic Hall?

Answer

Stanley Town Council – All Councillors and Officers.

Questions

Can you summarise the purpose of Stanley Town Council? – Sarah Kenna

What does STC do? – Billy Johnson

Can I ask what does Stanley Town Council actually do? – Laura Pitt

What is the full list of benefits you provide Stanley – A Smith

Answer

Town Councils are Statutory Bodies, having powers under a number of different Acts, such as the Local Government Act 1972. Only a few Councils need to use all their available powers and it is up to each Council to choose what is appropriate for the community they serve. Stanley Town Council has legal responsibilities as an employer, and as an owner of public land and buildings.

The manner in which Stanley Town Council operates, including powers and duties, are defined in local government statute and regulations, and is a level below national government and below district and borough councils. All Stanley Town Councillors are elected and can help on a number of local issues, such as environmental issues and services, managing local recreation areas, allotments, events, local community safety etc.

Stanley Town Council raises funds by the annual Precept which is set in January of each year. The amount required is guided by the setting of the annual budget in November of the preceding year. This is added to the County Council Tax bill and collected by Durham County Council on behalf of the Town Council.

Stanley Town Council has 19 members or Councillors. The Town Council exists to help residents and to support improvements in the town and surrounding area.

Membership of the Council is voluntary, and the members give their time freely to help enhance the town and support the town for the benefit of all residents.

Question

What is the reason for the 12.5 percent increase to STC tax? – Billy Johnson

Could someone from the Parish Council please explain to me what justification there is for a 12% increase in funding via the council tax? – John Malpass

Seeing as the increase in the council tax this year is 12.5% for Stanley Town Council. Can you tell me what you do for me and why do we need a Town Council, and what are you going to do with the money? – Mark Howard
Why has there been an increase in council tax? – A Smith

Answer

The town council precept is the portion of the council tax that funds local services, improves facilities, supports local organisations activities, and influences development.

The budget for 2024-2025 was agreed on January 9 in response to Durham County Council decision to legally hand over the Allotment Service to Stanley Town Council, who have a duty under the Local Government Act. No funding was included as part of the transfer and Stanley Town Council has no alternative to raise the precept in order to deliver this beneficial frontline service, to continue the face-to-face availability for advice services including debt, housing, and food bank as well. As well as continuing to offer events, environmental services and support to our community groups and charities.

This was not an easy decision due to the current cost of living increases, and it was for this reason last year Councillors agreed not to raise the precept; however, this is not a financially viable option year on year and this year given the additional services and cuts we have received we needed to unfortunately raise the precept. The monthly cost to the public is 0.79p for a Band A and £1.05 for a Band D.

Question

I am unable to find all the financial figures for the time period of the lease of the Civic Hall – could I see a breakdown on what was spent where in Stanley? With particular interest in money spent on the Civic Hall. – Sarah Kenna

Answer

There are only paper records before 2015 from then all financial documents can be viewed on the Stanley Town Council website All finances come every month to Full Council meetings to be agreed and signed off by all councilors, there is an annual internal audit, then an external audit. All council finances are sent to the Government through the AGAR report.

Question

Could you indicate why £500,000 was spent on Stanley Front Street, where it is

apparent that Durham County Council are responsible for the Front Street? – Sarah Kenna

Answer

The actual costs were £425,000, this was spent across a period of a number of years and was work undertaken in partnership with Durham County Council for the Public Realm refurbishment of Stanley Front Street.

The first £200k was spent in 2013-14, the second tranche was agreed at the Full Council on 22/9/2015 minute 297. There was extensive public consultation before this took place and the community welcomed the improvements. The scheme was broader than a paving project, it included shop front improvements and street furniture renewal. This is the type of thing that Stanley Town Council regularly do with a number of partners; AAP, Karbon Homes etc. as money has become tighter in all sectors - by all putting in an amount of cash then a much bigger project can be achieved for the benefit of the community.

Question

Can you confirm or deny that a profit-making business is housed in the Just for Women building that has been purchased by Stanley Town Council and currently pays no rent? – Sarah Kenna

Answer

I can confirm that there is no profit-making business within St Joseph's House, Just for Women is a CIC and as such all the money from a café and shop is ploughed back into the service they provide so well. They have asked that any questions about governance, finances and operations should be directed to them.

Question

Is there a declaration of interest which details the conflict of interest between Stanley Town Council and the profit-making company "Stanley Events" if so, where might I view this document? – Sarah Kenna

Do all of your Councillors have a declaration of interest published? – A Smith

Answer

Both Durham and Stanley Town Council keep their declaration of interest for Councillors on their website. In general declarations of interest are a matter of note at every meeting as they are on the agenda. If any members have any sort of pecuniary conflict of interest in the decisions being made members declare that at correct point on the agenda and then leave the room when any discussions are had, and decisions are made. All declarations are to be found on our website under each Councillor's information.

Stanley Events is a not-for-profit social enterprise and a not-for-profit making business as suggested in this question and that all questions about governance, finances and operations be directed to them.

Question

Where does my money go? – Laura Pitt

What does the money get spent on? – Billy Johnson

What is the loan for on the transaction list you published? – A Smith

Answer

Stanley Town Council delivers services such as:

Events:

- Play in the Park
- Miners Sunday
- Fireworks
- Remembrance and Memorials

Environmental Services:

- Community Safety – Neighbourhood Warden
- Dog Fouling/Empty yards/Litterpicks
- Winter maintenance
Environmental and public Realm improvements
- In Bloom
- Blooming Good Fun
- Working with schools on education around litter, dog fouling
- Working with schools on tree planting, bulb planting

Supporting Community and Voluntary Groups

- Grant funding
- Partnership working/Community Development.
- Advice surgeries

Loan

Stanley Town Council currently has 2 PWLB loans (The Public Works Loan Board)

- £200,00 Civic Hall Upgrade
- £190,000 Purchase of St Joseph's House

Question

Why can't the general public see where our money is being spent? – Jane Atkinson

Answer

Full breakdown of annual expenditure for 2014 - 2023 can be viewed on the Stanley Town Council website under – Finance & Budgets.

The most current budget is 2023-24.

2024-25 budget will be added to the website this week as it will then become the current year's budget.

Question

Why did the County Council accuse Stanley Town Council of being incompetent

when it comes to managing finances? – A Smith

Answer

The comments made by Durham County Council can only be evidenced and verified by them. We undertake an annual audit and have been given full finance assurances by the internal and external auditors, our finances also are sent to the Government through the annual AGAR report.

Question

What rules do you have in place for running tenders? – A Smith

How do you choose which companies and charities receive funding? - A Smith

Answer

Our procurement guidelines are statutory, and the Policy document is available online and can be found on our website.

Stanley Town Council contributes to a fund which focuses on grant funding projects throughout the Stanley area called the Stanley Fund.

This is a tendering process, and groups can apply online.

Question

How do you assess value for money to renew services? – A Smith

How many residents are impacted by your regular services and what evidence do you have for this? – A Smith

Answer

All services that are supported by Stanley Town Council attend Full Council meetings in order to update Councillors on the benefits of the service provided for the community. Those updates include numbers of beneficiaries, and dependent upon the service the benefits they have received. As an example, the Money Advice Service for Stanley, who are in attendance this evening to give us an update:

July 2018 –2023:

Overall, Clients **7,905**, includes the Food Bank.

Debt Advice clients **2,985**

Debt managed/Written Off - **£7,013,931.48.**

Total Financial gains - **£9,562,017.48**

Stanley Town Council pays £26,000 per year for this service, demonstrating excellent value for money.

Members received a presentation from Money Advice service.

RESOLVED: Members **APPROVED** funding required for the continued Money Advice Service in Stanley.

173/23 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

It was proposed by Cllr A Clegg and seconded by Cllr A Hanson that the Minutes of the Ordinary Full Meeting of 26th March 2024 be **APPROVED** as a true record and signed by Town Mayor Cllr. O Milburn.

174/23 CLARIFICATION OF PROPER OFFICER ROLES AND DELEGATION ARRANGEMENTS

- i. RESOLVED: Members **CONFIRMED** Mrs. A Barry be the Councils nominated Proper Officer for the interim period pending the appointment of a new Chief Officer in accordance with Council Standing Order 15(a).
- ii. RESOLVED: Members **NOTED** that in accordance with Standing Order 15(a) that Mr. J Harper will become the nominated Proper Officer in the absence of Mrs. A Barry.
- iii. RESOLVED: That all previous and current delegations granted to the former Town Clerk/Locum Town Clerk would continue to be undertaken by the interim Proper Officer.

175/23 ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT & BANK RECONCILIATION

RESOLVED: It was proposed by Cllr. A Clegg and seconded by Cllr. L Ferry to **APPROVE** the Schedule of Payments and Receipts and **NOTE** the Bank Reconciliation & Bank Balances for February 2024.

176/23 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

RESOLVED: Council have **NOTED** the applications and no objections received.

177/23 UPDATE FROM DURHAM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

- County Councilors confirm the County Council had agreed their budget since last meeting.
- Issues at Margaret Terrace are ongoing.
- Meetings have been well received and progress is being made for the War Memorial at Tanfield Lea.

178/23 TOWN CLERK UPDATE

Members **NOTED** an update provided to members relating to a Freedom of Information request from one of our Councillors.

Environmental Services Team Leader gave an Allotment update.

As members will be aware the allotment group is now a committee. We have held a committee meeting since the last full council meeting, some progress has been made. Stuart in his advising capacity has been helping with a transition plan, for the next year of working with DCC to see what that looks like there are lots of different tech issues that need to be investigated. The committee have identified

that we do need to increase the committee from 4 members to 7. That would be in the political balance the town council have in place. A request was made to members who may want to join the committee.

RESOLVED: Councillors L Ferry, A Clegg and A Hanson have joined the Allotment Committee.

179/23 EVENTS WORKING GROUP REPORT

Members received an update from the Events Officers detailing preparations for the 80th anniversary of D Day.

Proposal for a memorial installation in the town center at the current beacon site, along with a service to commemorate the anniversary.

180/23 WEBSITE COMPARISON REPORT

Members received an update on the status of the website condition. Quotes provided for a new website from 3 companies for comparison.

AGREED Officers will research user friendly options and potential content which should be available on Stanley Town Councils website, which will then be presented to council at a future meeting.

181/23 COMMUNITY PUBLIC ACCESS DEFIBRILLATOR

Council members **CONSIDERED** the request from Red Sky Foundation to be guardians of the public access defibrillator placed at Oakies Park, Stanley.

Officers agreed to clarify the responsibilities for Stanley Town Council and report back to the council.

182/23 DATE & TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday **23rd April 2024 at 6.30pm**; Annfield Plain Community Centre, Stanley, DH9 8HY.

SIGNED



Cllr Olga Milburn
STC Town Mayor

