

Minutes of a Meeting of Cockermouth Town Council held in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Cockermouth on Wednesday 18 October 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor J Laidlow (Mayor)
Councillor H Beanland
Councillor I Burns
Councillor S Barnes
Councillor M Bowman
Councillor C Bell
Councillor C Bridgman
Councillor D Malloy
Councillor G Telford
Councillor J Samson
Councillor H Tucker
Councillor R Watson

Also present: 1 member of the press, 7 members of the public & Councillor Mark Fryer, Leader of Cumberland Council.

The Town Clerk was presented with a beautiful bouquet by the Mayor and thanked for her many years of service.

128 Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 20 September 2023 be signed as a correct record.

129 Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of Special Council held on 28 September 2023 be signed as a correct record.

130 Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the last Special Planning Meeting held on 5 October 2023 be signed as a correct record.

131 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Tucker declared that she was a substitute member of the Planning Committee of Cumberland Council.

132 Mayors Announcements

The Mayor had attended the following events since the last meeting:-

Mayor of Workington's Civic Service
Annual Garden Presentation Night

133 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

134 Leader of Cumberland Council

Councillor Fryer informed those present that a full Traffic Regulation Order was to be carried out in each Town and that the Town Council should start thinking about any changes it wished to incorporate.

He stated that issues around the Cumberland App and Cumberland website were to be fully reviewed.

Cumberland staff were being encouraged back to work and the opening hours at Allerdale House were being reviewed.

He acknowledged that in merging four authorities it was still difficult at times to find out who in the system needed to be accessed.

He explained that he was unable to discuss in detail the partial collapse of the Old Court House Building in the town as it was likely that Cumberland Council would have to go down a legal route. With storms due over the next few days officers were on alert.

Councillor Telford stated that traders wanted road access as soon as practicable.

Councillor Laidlow explained that trade in her shop was down 25% in the last week.

Councillor Malloy asked how long the bridge would be closed and why the bridge was closed?

Councillor Fryer answered that it was shut due to the fact that the walkway was part of the bridge and for health and safety reasons incase the façade fell.

Councillor Malloy reiterated that if half of the bridge could be open to traffic that would help reduce additional travel time for emergency services getting to the side of the town affected by the bridge closure.

Councillor Malloy asked that the traffic lights on Kirkgate be relocated. They were placed at the narrowest point. He asked if it was possible to bag over the traffic lights and see how the traffic flowed.

Councillor Fryer stated that some on street parking had been suspended.

Councillor Bell stated that traders had been affected and that some thought Cockermouth was closed for business.

Councillor Fryer stated that Cumberland Council could not control facebook and that local organisations had a part to play in reinforcing positive messages.

Councillor Tucker had asked Mr Melville to put out diversion signs for routes onto the A66 in the hope that some vehicles would go up Gallowbarrow. She had also asked for car parks to be signed. Neither of these actions had been carried out as yet. She also felt that the better positioning of Road closed signs would drive more traffic up Gallowbarrow.

Councillor Fryer stated that you still needed cars to go to Main Street. Traffic wardens were enforcing parking on double yellow lines on the right hand side of Station Street.

Councillor Tucker stated that everyone needed to use their social media sites to comment that the Town was still open for business.

Councillor Barnes felt that the pedestrian crossing at the bottom of Station Street should be a traffic light controlled.

Councillor Fryer suggested that this be incorporated into any new TRO to be assessed.

Councillor Bowman asked if a full structural engineers report had been undertaken on the Old Courthouse and if enforcement powers could be used. Councillor Fryer replied that both legal routes included Cumberland taking control of the building.

Councillor Malloy had observed kids on scooters and bikes flying through the walkway. He asked for a traffic survey in the town so that residents would be assured that all was being done.

Councillor Fryer stated that dispersal orders and anti-social behaviour orders were being completed across Cumberland. These included scooter use.

Councillor Watson mentioned our new Community Beat Officer and the active Bike

and Skate Park Group in Cockermouth. He informed Councillor Fryer that the Bike and Skate Park Group may wish to use a Cumberland owned site or seek financial support. He added that there was a lack of stuff for teenagers to do in Cockermouth.

Councillor Beanland stated that he had been investigating accessing sources of funding e.g. S106 funding and SIF money for the new skate park and to carry out path improvements.

Councillor Fryer explained that the SIF money was earmarked for Economic Development. Councillor Burns stated that the S106 money from Strawberry How had been spent and that all that was outstanding was the new walkway at All Saints School.

Councillor Beanland asked if Cumberland would be prepared to revisit the current arrangement at Cockermouth Library. Councillor Fryer replied yes.

Councillor Telford expressed her concern regarding a change to the protocol at Planning Committee. Planning Committee members were unable to discuss the main issue and could only ask questions. Councillor Fryer agreed to look into this.

Councillor Watson asked if the new TRO would include traffic calming measures and 20 mph zones. Councillor Fryer replied that the TRO would include them but that the impact would have to be looked at in depth.

Councillor Malloy enquired if officers at Cumberland were actively seeking a new tenant for the former Wilkinsons Store in the Town Centre. Councillor Fryer replied that the former Wilkinsons Store was privately owned and that he was sure that the owner would be trying their best to find a new tenant.

Councillor Burns enquired about the transfer of Harris Park to the Town Council. Councillor Fryer stated that if the Town Council wanted Harris Park he would ensure that any outstanding information was given to us. Councillor Burns enquired if the trees and footpaths would be given attention prior to transfer. He replied that the Park would not be gold plated.

Councillor Fryer asked if the Town Council owned any allotments as Cumberland were hoping to transfer small parcels of land for this purpose. The Town Clerk informed him that we owned 77 allotments and had a large waiting list.

Councillor Burns enquired about the future of the Coroners Building. Councillor Fryer confirmed that the Coroner was moving to Allerdale House. but that he did not know when this would happen.

Councillor Burns asked about potholes. Councillor Fryer replied that the number of potholes was being drastically reduced and would soon be down to double figure.

Councillor Burns also pointed out that Market Place was sinking again.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Fryer for his attendance.

135 Planning Applications

HOU/2023/0169

Summer House in garden (retrospective)

24, Lowscapes Drive

Recommended – Approval

HOU/2023/0171

Single storey side extension

157, The Parklands

Recommended – Approval

136 Application for Tree Works

CAT/2023/0031

Pollarding of a multi-stemmed willow tree

The Studio, St. Helens Street

Recommended - Approval

137 Finance

Resolved – (a) That payments in the amount of £24,885.47 be authorised.

138 Financial Budget Comparison

Resolved – That the financial budget comparison and revised budget

to 30/9/23 be agreed and noted.

139 Interim Half Yearly Report by our Internal Auditor

Those present considered the interim half yearly report by our Internal Auditor.

There were no matters arising.

She expressed her appreciation of the assistance shown by the Town Clerk and her team.

Resolved – That the report be agreed and noted.

140 External Auditor Report and Certificate 2022/23 – Interim

Moore had not yet completed their review work on our AGAR and supporting documentation.

A final report detailing any qualifications and other matters will be provided with the certificate of completion following finalisation of the review.

Agreed – That the External Auditor Report and Certificate 2022/23 – Interim be noted.

141 Grant Tarn Close Sports Ground

Cockermouth Junior Football Club had asked the Town Council to take on the role of lead partner to enable them to claim back the VAT which would essentially equate to a 100k contribution on a £500k project to develop Tarn Close Sports Ground without any direct cost to the Town Council itself.

Due to the imminent retirement of the existing Clerk and the lack of appointment of a new clerk, the Town Council had advised the Club that it was not in a position to undertake a lead partner role currently.

Cockermouth Junior Football Club had requested that if lead partner role was not feasible whether the Town Council were amenable to support this project with direct financial contribution and if so to what value?

Councillor Bowman stated that once a new Town Clerk was settled there may be a possibility of the Town Council acting as Lead Partner.

She felt that more information was needed on the totality of the scheme and

proportion of contribution sought. She felt that without this information, the Town Council was not in a position to give a definitive answer.

Those present agreed that the issue be revisited later on.

Resolved – That Cockermouth Junior Football Club be advised that the Town Council would revisit either acting as lead partner and/or supporting the project with a direct financial contribution at a later date.

142 Budget and Precept for 2024/25

Resolved – That the draft budget/precept of £309,751 be agreed.

143 LGR Newsletters

Agreed – That the content of the 18 & 24 September 2023 & 1 & 9 October 2023 Cumberland Council newsletters be noted.

144 Calc News

Agreed – That the contents of the July & August 2023 Calc News be noted.

145 Lakes to Sea Community Panel

Councillor Semple had distributed a presentation regarding the Lakes to Sea Community Panel.

The first Community Network launch was planned to take place on 26 October 2023 at 6pm in the Kirkgate Centre in Cockermouth.

Agreed – That the presentation sent by Councillor Semple, Chair of the Lakes to Sea Community Panel be noted.

146 Fire Station, Cockermouth

Further to minute number 93 (2023/24), Mr McCall, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner advised that discussions were underway regarding a refurbishment of the current Fire Station in Cockermouth. He assured Councillors that the service provided in Cockermouth would not be affected.

Agreed – That Mr McCall's response be welcomed and noted.

147 Clerks Report

Those present considered the content of the Clerk's report.

Agreed - That the contents be noted.

148 Climate Emergency Action

Zero Hour were seeking the Town Councils support for the Climate and Ecology Bill which was due for its second reading on 24 November 2023.

If made law, the Climate and Ecology Bill would ensure that:-

The threat facing nature is tackled shoulder to shoulder with the climate crisis in a joined-up approach.

The Paris Agreement is enshrined into law to ensure that the UK does its real fair share to limit global temperature rise to the most stringent end of the Paris agreement -1.5 degrees celsius.

The UK takes full responsibility for our entire greenhouse gas footprint by accounting for all of the emissions that take place overseas to manufacture, transport and dispose of the goods and services we import and consume.

The Government deliver a climate and nature assembly that is representative of the UK population, working directly with the Government and Parliament to ensure that all voices are heard and that no-one is left behind.

Resolved – a) That Cockermonth Town Council supports the Climate and Ecology Bill.

b) That local residents and local press/media be informed of this decision.

c) That we write to our local M.P. informing them that this motion has been passed, urging them to support the Bill.

d) That we write to Zero Hour, the organisers of the cross-party campaign for the Bill expressing our support.

149 RFO/Proper Officer

Resolved – That Kirstie Goodger be appointed RFO/Proper Officer on a temporary basis until the position of Town Clerk is filled.

150 New Standing Item

Resolved – That a new standing item entitled ‘Report from Cumberland Councillors be added to the agenda of town council ordinary meetings.

151 Partial Collapse of the Old Court House Building and closure of the Bridge

Councillor Telford advised those present that discussions have been taking place with traders and Cumberland Council regarding a new layout for Taste Christmas.

The Town Clerk outlined the changes proposed. Stalls and entertainment would be sited from the junction of Station Street to the bridge closure. From the other side of the bridge closure down to the junction of Bitterbeck Car Park on Market Place will be closed. Market Place will be open from Kirkgate to St Helens Street but only to access Bitterbeck Car Park. Station Street would be left one way.

Traders in Market Place were keen to organise a Winter Festival to increase footfall due to the closure of the Bridge.

Town Councillors were keen to help and support all traders where they could.

Councillor Tucker suggested that the Lakes to Sea Panel may be able to assist with funding.

Resolved – a) That support for all traders be acknowledged.

b) That the Town Council would provide assistance to facilitate sources of funding.

c) That the Town Council assist with communication of any planned events.

Resolved –

That under the (Public Bodies Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be removed for the following items of business due to contractual and/or personal information relating to staff being discussed

152 Review of Town Clerk Assistants’ job description & salary

Those present reviewed the job description and salary of the Town Clerk Assistant.

Resolved – a) That her revised job description be agreed.

b) That her pay be increased from scp 3, £20,812 per annum to scp 5, £21,575 per annum (pay rise pending) with immediate effect.

153 Review of Town Clerk Admin Assistants' job description & salary

Those present reviewed the job description and salary of the Town Clerk Admin Assistant.

Resolved – a) That her revised job description be agreed.

b) That her pay be increased from scp 9, £23,191 per annum to scp 11, £24,054 per annum (pay rise pending) with immediate effect.

154 Non Payment of Rental Instalment Plan

Further to Minute Number 122 (2023/24), the tenant had failed to pay the first installment of his payment plan by the agreed date.

Resolved – That his £1099.98 debt be written off.

155 Letting of Upstairs Office

An existing tenant wished to lease the now vacant upstairs office.

Resolved – That the office be let at a rent of £1500 per annum and include an additional car parking space.

156 Temporary Acting up salary for Town Clerk Admin Assistant

Those present discussed the temporary acting up salary for the Town Clerk Admin Assistant in the absence of a Town Clerk.

Resolved – That whilst temporarily acting up the salary of the Town Clerk Admin Assistant be increase from scp 11 £24,054 to scp 28, £34,723.

The meeting closed at 9.53 pm