

Seaton Valley Council

A Community Council

Minutes of a Meeting held on Wednesday 18 January 2023 at 7.00 pm at Seaton Sluice Community Centre

The meeting started at 7.05 p.m.

PRESENT: Councilors:	S Dungworth (Chair), G Eastwood, E Coulson, S Bowman, L Bowman, A Stanners, D Ferguson and J Henderson
IN ATTENDANCE:	S Potts – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer
CO001/23	1. Apologies for absence Cllr E Chicken had submitted her apologies for missing the meeting.
CO002/23	2. Disclosure of interests There were no declarations of interest.
CO003/23	3. Chair's Welcome and Civic Announcements The Chair welcomed everyone to the Council's first meeting of the new calendar year and wished everyone a Happy New Year. The Chair then referred to King Charles' Coronation which takes place on Saturday 6 th May 2023. She said that whilst no firm proposals have been made, she felt sure that a number of celebration events will be held in Seaton Valley, perhaps including a Beacon Lighting event in Seaton Sluice – further details will be announced as and when such events are arranged. The Chair then announced that the Clerk had resigned and would be retiring from his duties on 31 March 2023. Recruitment of a new Clerk (part time 18.50 hours per week) will begin as a matter of urgency. There were no further civic announcements.
CO004/23	4. Presentation by Kim McGuinness – and update from the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner. Kim gave a short but informative presentation on the six priorities contained in the Northumbria Police and Crime Plan. Those priorities are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour. • Reducing crime. • Preventing violent crime. • Neighbourhood policing. • Support for victims. • Tackling domestic abuse and sexual violence. • She expanded on each of the priorities before answering questions from the floor.

	<p>A couple of questions were asked about the problems of tackling priorities in a period of financial uncertainty and how difficult it is to seek an increase in Council Tax when the perception of a number of services, is that service levels are deteriorating – 101 response times for example. Kim agreed that it is very difficult to strike the right balance especially when staffing and funding levels have been cut, however, she accepted the reality of the situation and stressed the importance of directing scarce resources to the correct priorities.</p> <p>A number of residents asked questions about what has and what can be done, to stop speeding motorists using the main road through the village as a racing circuit. In response, both Kim and the local neighbourhood police representative suggested that speed reduction platforms, average speed cameras and appropriate signage were the best ways to tackle this ongoing issue. The Crime Commissioner agreed to write to the County Council about the matter to urge it (NCC) to look at installing more effective speed reduction infrastructure on the main A193.</p> <p>A further question was asked about how reliable employee vetting procedures were in Northumbria Police. The Crime Commissioner responded by saying that the recent case of the Met Officer convicted of rape and assault was very regrettable and has damaged the reputation of both the Met and all other Police forces in the UK, however, she went onto say that she is confident that Northumbria's vetting procedures are fit for purpose and confirmed that all Police officers will be re vetted over the coming months.</p> <p>The Crime Commissioner answered a number of other questions on local issues before leaving the meeting at 8.15 pm after receiving thanks from both the audience and councilors for attending the meeting.</p>
CO005/23	<p>5. Public Question Time</p> <p>A resident had submitted a written question about the amount of borrowing the Council has. The Chair summarised the response given to the resident who had been provided with a more detailed response. The Council borrowed £350,000 to fund the acquisition and upgrade of its offices in 2011 and is repaying this loan over 25 years. The Council receives income from the two flats it owns to offset the costs associated with this borrowing. The Council does not have any other borrowing.</p> <p>There were no other questions.</p>
CO006/23	<p>6. County Councillor Update</p> <p>Cllr L Bowman reported that planning permission for the new High/Middle School in Seaton Delaval has now been granted which should mean that residents can look forward to the new school becoming operational in September 2025.</p>
CO007/23	<p>7. Minutes of the Council's last meeting.</p> <p>The minutes of the Council's Meeting held on 23 Nov 2022 were agreed and accepted as a true record of that meeting.</p>
CO008/23	<p>8. Minutes of Finance and General Purposes Committee</p> <p>Members agreed to receive and note the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 07 December 2022.</p>
CO009/23	<p>9. Services and Partnership Update</p>

	<p>In reviewing the Service Officer's report the Chair highlighted the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans are being drawn up to re-paint some of the equipment in the Dunes play area, Seaton Sluice, • The boundary fence for the new play at Northside Place is on order, • The Christmas tree lights at Seaton Sluice were targeted by vandals in early December, however, the broken lights were replaced within a short timescale by NCC's Street Lighting team, and • The procedures followed to distribute Christmas Presents to residents in financial hardship proved very successful this year. A similar process will be followed in 2023, using referrals from First Schools and local Social Workers to distribute presents in the first instance.
CO010/23	<p>10. Floral Planting Contract</p> <p>The Service Officers' report presented details of NCC's performance in delivering the Floral Planting Contract over the last three years. Performance has been relatively good and the Team has worked with the Council to deliver a number of positive changes to the layout of some of our floral beds over the same period.</p> <p>In accepting the Services Officer's comments and recommendation, the Council RESOLVED TO: extend the current Floral Bedding Contract with NCC for an additional year (to 31 March 2024), in accordance with the terms of said contract.</p>
CO011/23	<p>11. Community Grant Application</p> <p>Loud Arts, a Community Interest Company based in Blyth had applied for a grant of £500 to help them extend the delivery of their Makaton taster sessions in Seaton Valley. Makaton is a language programme that combines signs, symbols and speech to give different options for people to communicate with adults and children with learning disabilities.</p> <p>The company has already been working with Seaton Sluice First School to deliver taster sessions and now hopes to give the wider community in Seaton Valley access to the sessions too.</p> <p>After considering the Engagement and Development Officers report, Council RESOLVED TO: award a grant of £500 to Loud Arts to enable it to deliver additional Makaton taster sessions in Seaton Valley.</p>
CO012/23	<p>12. Bank Reconciliation as at 11 January 2023</p> <p>Council agreed to receive the Clerk's report and noted that the balances on the Council's bank accounts had been reconciled to its financial records.</p>
CO013/23	<p>13. Budgetary Control Update</p> <p>The Clerk's report showed the latest income and expenditure projections for the current year and highlighted any expected variances from budget. The updated net under spend in 2022/23 is expected to be in the region of £60,000, due mainly to under spends on the partnership, bus shelter and youth services budgets.</p>
CO014/23	<p>14. Budget Proposals 2023/24</p> <p>The Chair introduced the item and asked Cllr Henderson to present the Conservative Groups' budget proposals. The proposals, reproduced below, were seconded by Cllr Ferguson.</p>

Conservative Group 2023/24 Budget Proposals

1. The group proposes that the Council's element of the Council Tax is increased by 3% in 2023/24
2. The group would also recommend one or two measures to balance the 2023/24 budget which prior to Christmas showed an estimated deficit of £9,000
 - Rather than producing our Futures Magazine four times per year the group would like to see a system whereby there would be only one issue (Christmas) produced for all residents. The remaining three issues would only be delivered to those residents who express a wish to receive a copy,
 - The Group would like to see more perennials and evergreens planted instead of the present over reliance on annual bedding plants and would also like to see used daffodil and tulip bulbs distributed more widely to the in-bloom groups, and
 - The group would like to see savings being made on printing and paper costs by only producing Council committee meeting papers for councillors who opt to have them printed and by carrying out printing for Council purposes only.

Following the presentation of the Conservative Group proposals, the Chair presented the Labour Groups' 2023/24 budget proposals. Those proposals, reproduced below, were seconded by Cllr Eastwood.

Labour Group 2023/24 Budget Proposals

1. The group's main concern in proposing its 2023/24 budget is to balance the requirement to maintain (as far as possible) the Council's resources at existing levels whilst at the same time keeping Council Tax increases to a minimum. This has proved more difficult this year as actual inflation has significantly exceeded original expectations.
2. Bearing this in mind the Group is recommending a Council Tax increase of 2% which keeps both the effect on the Council's resources to manageable levels and is significantly below the current rate of inflation. The Group is again reluctant to recommend a Council Tax increase in line with the rate of inflation as it is conscious that residents are facing large increases in other essential bills in the coming months.
3. In terms of new expenditure, the Group has used the newly agreed Area Plan to guide its thinking on this matter; and whilst accepting that many of the items raised in the Plan are both long term goals and require joint working with partner organisations, the Group is proposing the following immediate actions in response to the Plan:

New Expenditure Proposals 2023/24

	£
Create a Youth Action Fund to earmark funding for a newly established forum so that the forum has easy and ready	10,000

access to that funding on an annual basis.	
Community Skateboarding Programme – fund three community taster session events to gauge the level of support for this activity	1,500
Older Adults Activities – fund a number Community Engagement Events to identify what additional activities older people would like to see provided in their areas.	1,500
	13,000

4. The Group has reviewed the Council’s base budget and is proposing to make savings in three main areas so that Council Tax increases can be kept to a minimum. The Group feels that the Council now provides bus shelters in all appropriate locations where it is feasible to do so and feels that its play park provision is also at an adequate level. Consequently, the Group considers that these budgets should be reduced to levels that provide for ongoing maintenance only. The Group is also proposing to reduce the Youth Services budget by £10,000 as this budget has been underspent by a similar amount in each of the last two years due to NCC finding it difficult to fill the vacant half time post the funding is provided for. The Group’s full savings proposals are summarised in the table below.

Savings Proposals 2023/24

	£
Bus Shelters – reduce to maintenance only budget	7,000
Play Areas – reduce to maintenance only budget	9,000
Youth Services – remove funding for half time post	10,000
Youth Council – transfer funding to Youth Action Plan	1,000
Village Events – budget represents support of £1,000 per village	500
	27,500

5. The Council’s Play Park Repairs and Renewals Fund can be used to top up any additional funding requirements should the play park revenue budget prove insufficient to cover actual repairs and maintenance costs.
6. With regard to allotment rents, the Labour Group suggests a similar approach to that taken on Council Tax; a below inflation increase of 2% to ensure that income levels are sufficient to meet rising costs, whilst at the same time keeping the increase to a minimum.

Debate

There then followed a short debate on both proposals which concentrated on the level

of Council Tax increase to be agreed upon for 2023/24 and the possibility of installing more specialist disabled equipment in play parks. In response to the second of the two debating points, the Chair said that the Council works hard with its partner suppliers to include disabled friendly equipment in all of its play parks, however, she said officers would review its play area again to see if affordable improvements can be made, where space allows.

At the end of the debate and prior to a vote being taken the conservative representatives (Cllrs Henderson and Ferguson) withdrew the Conservative Group proposals and, therefore, the Labour Groups' proposals were carried.

Resolution

Council **RESOLVED TO:**

- a) **Approve the build-up of the 2023/24 budgets as shown at Appendix 8A of the Clerk's report,**
- b) **Agree to set a Council Tax Precept of £604,410**
- c) **Note that in agreeing to set a Council Tax Precept of £604,410, Seaton Valley Council's element of the Council Tax will increase from £123.52 in 2022/23 to £125.99 for 2023/24, an increase of 2% (Band D equivalents),**
- d) **Note that Seaton Valley Council's Band 'D' Equivalent Council Tax base has increased from 4,724.77 to 4,797.27,**
- e) **Further note that in setting a Council Tax precept of £604,410 the amounts of annual Council Tax payable in respect of Seaton Valley Council will be:**
 - **Band A £83.98**
 - **Band B £98.00**
 - **Band C £112.00**
 - **Band D £125.99**
 - **Band E £154.00**
 - **Band F £182.00**
 - **Band G £210.00**
 - **Band H £252.20**
- f) **Increase Allotment Rents by 2% across the board,**
- g) **Agree to continue to subscribe to the Society of Local Council Clerks, the Co Operative Council's Innovation Network and to the Northumberland branch of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) ,**
- h) **Agree to maintain current rent levels for the two flats it owns,**
- i) **Agree to maintain the Council's minimum level of non-earmarked reserves at its current level of £90,000.**

CO015/24	15. Dates of Future Scheduled Meetings			
	2022	Committee/Council	Time	Venue

	Wednesday 22 March	Full Council	7pm	Seaton Delaval Community Centre
	Wednesday 26 April	Full Council	7pm	Seaton Delaval Council Offices
	Wednesday 24 May	Annual Meeting and Annual Parish Meeting	6.30pm	New Hartley Memorial Hall

There being no other business on the Agenda, the meeting closed at 8.40pm

Signed by the Chair: _____

Dated: _____