

## **MINUTES OF THE ARTS AND INFORMATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 27<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2018**

Present: Councillor S Cudlip (Chair) and Councillors R Arthur, Mrs G Bleasdale, K Brace, S P Colborn, S Cudlip, Mrs S Forster, Ms R M Gratton, G N Hepworth, Mrs L Kennedy, D McKenna, K Shaw, T Shepherd, Miss L Willis

Apologies: Councillors Mrs B E Allen, E Bell, Mrs J Bell, D Cummings, Mrs V Cummings, B Taylor.

*Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chair advised members of this Committee and members of the public that in line with the amendment to 'the public bodies (admission to meetings) act 1960', which came into force in August, 2014, parts of this meeting may be recorded by photographic, video and audio means.*

### **1. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Members were reminded prior to the start of the meeting of the need to disclose any interests prejudicial or personal, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

### **2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 27TH FEBRUARY, 2018**

RECOMMENDED the Minutes of this meeting, a copy of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, be approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

### **3. CONFERENCE APPOINTMENTS**

RECOMMENDED that the Committee note the information.

### **3. CONFERENCES, COURSES AND SEMINARS**

#### **a) NAC Conference – Austerity & The Future for Local Government Finance, is Local Democracy Threatened**

A Member stated that they felt this was totally relevant for all Local Councils especially over the last few years. The County Council have been hit hard by austerity measures that have been put in place and in turn this causes problems for larger Town Councils like Seaham. It was suggested that the next two Members on the rota should attend this conference.

A Member stated that this conference is about austerity and this Council should start with austerity measures by not sending representatives to the conference as there are far better things that the Town Council could spend their money on. A Member stated that she disagreed with the Members comments as basically the Town Council are going to have to budget very strictly which the speakers are referring to on the programme and also the cuts from Local Government are massive. There are speakers discussing

ring fencing on Council Tax Increases and these are things that the Town Council will need to know about in the future. A further Member stated that the Town Council need to know how to protect residents by knowing how to handle these issues.

A Member stated that just because there is a conference coming up around austerity doesn't automatically mean the Council should send a representative. As far as the Member is concerned there are better things to spend money on and everyone has a grasp on what is happening with austerity since 2010 and the coalition government coming in and it's an ongoing thing and if Members don't know about it by now then the Council are being remiss as individual people and members of the community. The Council went through a budgeting process and things were taken into consideration one of the things being the possibility in the future of funding being reduced and responsible action was taken at that time. This will be monitored next year when the budget comes up again and to spend money on an austerity meeting in Lytham St Anne's is a total waste of tax payer's money that could be better spent in the community. The Council should find a local project that needs money and give it to them.

A Member stated that the whole purpose of the seminar is how Local Councils are going to have to budget with less finances. This is not a history lesson this is about how the Council are going to have to make some very difficult decisions and if Councillors don't have the right training to be able to understand what they are facing and to understand the impact going forward then the Council are putting themselves in a very dangerous position.

A Member stated that with regards to the comment about giving the money to local projects the money is ring fenced to conferences for training. A Member stated that the money would go back into the general pot if it wasn't used.

A Member stated that you need to go on these courses to learn but maybe there should be a limit on the number of attendees. It was noted that there is a maximum of two places and this has been reduced from three previously.

A Member stated that he doesn't always agree that someone should represent the Council at all conferences but felt this conference was aimed to help larger Town Councils like Seaham and this conference is specifically aimed at helping to manage money and to make difficult decisions in the years to come. Ring fencing Council Tax Increases, targeting local spending needs, participatory budgeting for Parish and Town Councils these are specific topics that are bound to be helpful to the Town Council. The Member noted that the Town Council have gone through a very rigorous process in setting the budget for this year but the Council are still faced with austerity measures which are impacting on all Councils and can see the benefit in Councillors attending this particular conference.

A Member stated that if two people attend this conference they need to learn and bring the knowledge back to the other Councillors so a lot of people benefit from it.

A Member proposed that no Members attend the conference which was seconded.

A Member stated that the austerity is due to this government and Councils are getting less and less money but through Durham County Council it is the best excuse in the world for them to get away with things and the Member knows this from his personal experience of being a Member of the County Council 5 years ago. A Member stated for a point of order that Durham County Council have lost 40% of its funding. A Member asked whether the Park and Ride is still running at a loss. A Member stated that this was irrelevant to this discussion.

A Member proposed an amendment for Members to attend the conference which was seconded. This item then went to a vote which a Member requested be a named vote.

Vote for Members to attend the conference.

For – (7) – Councillors, Mrs G Bleasdale, S Cudlip, Mrs S Forster, Mrs L Kennedy, D McKenna, K Shaw, T Shepherd.

Vote for Members not to attend the conference.

Against – (6) – Councillors R Arthur, Mrs K Brace, S P Colborn, Mrs R M Gratton, G N Hepworth, Miss L Willis.

A Member questioned why two Members attend conferences. It was noted that 3 Members previously would have attended but it was reduced to two as an economy measure. It is an opportunity for two Members to gain additional knowledge via speaking to other Members in attendance at the conferences and usually the two Members report back with different information which they have picked up from other Councillors.

RECOMMENDED that two Councillors should attend the conference.

**b) NAC Meeting Dates 2018**

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information.

**c) NEREO – Trading and Marketing Public Services**

RECOMMENDED that one appropriate Officer to attend the training day on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2018.

**4. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES**

RECOMMENDED the Council note that no press opportunities existed from this meeting.