

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 23rd FEBRUARY, 2021

Present: The Mayor, Councillor B Taylor (Presiding) and Councillors R Arthur, E Bell, Mrs J Bell, Mrs K Brace, S P Colborn, S Cudlip, Mrs S Forster, Ms R M Gratton, G N Hepworth, Mrs L Kennedy, D McKenna, Miss L Willis.

Apologies: Mrs G Bleasdale, K Shaw, T Shepherd.

Officers: P Fletcher (Town Clerk)
Mrs J Knight (Finance Officer)
Miss A Rountree (Minute Taker)

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.

FC12/21 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. Such interests must be submitted to the Town Clerk prior to the meeting.

FC13/21 ACCEPTANCE OF AMENDMENT

RECOMMENDED that Members accept the amendment to the standing orders to incorporate the new regulations from the Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, to conduct virtual Council meetings.

FC14/21 OPEN SESSION

In accordance with established policy the Council provided a fifteen minute opportunity for any members of the public to raise questions. During this period no issues were raised.

FC15/21 POLICE PRESENTATION – NEW CUSTODY SUITE

The Acting Police Crime Commissioner, Mr Steve White gave Members an overview of the rationale behind the construction of a new custody suite. Mr White stated that in 2019 the Police Force were inspected in relation to the custody function and it was found to be not fit for purpose. He noted that the estate was found to be ageing and sub-standard and needed to be reviewed. Following the review, it was authorised for the plans in July 2020 to be moved to the next phase which included applying for planning permission from Durham County Council and it is expected that a response from Durham County Council is due in March 2021.

Mr White explained the issues with the current stations which included safety, privacy, inefficient processes and that it would be difficult and expensive to adapt any of the current buildings.

The proposed new custody suite will have 48 new cells and will be a centralised function with an estimated building cost of £21m. The suite will provide a legal, safe and compliant facility with co-located functions such as crime investigations, assets and forensics. There will be lower Officer/staff costs, lower ICT costs, lower medical provision costs and improved medical facilities with a Nurse led provision based at the suite, court digitalisation (the Police can work remotely with the Courts). It was also noted that there will be a more efficient handover process to offset Police Officer travelling time.

Mr Ridley the Police's Finance Officer noted that some of the current buildings date back to the 1800's and the Police spend a lot of their budget on building repairs and heating costs. A lot of the estate that the Police own, the market value of the properties are quite low, and they do not provide much income as the buildings are not useful in their current state to other organisations.

The presentation was then opened up for a question and answer session for Members.

1. A Member questioned whether there would be more or less Police Officers on the streets as the local Police Officers would be driving further away to take criminals to the new custody suite at Spennymoor.

Ms Farrell stated that the Police are part way through the recruitment of 20k new Officers. The allocation for Durham is 260 Officers over 2.5 years and the Police are already a year into this recruitment drive. The new Officers will mostly be based in response teams. There will also be additional PCSO's working across neighbourhood teams.

The Member stated that one of the biggest fears from the elderly is that they are not protected by the Police.

Ms Farrell noted that Durham Constabulary are one of the most efficient across the country and the Police are working hard and are committed to Policing. They have the best performance figures in relation to crime and response. Ms Farrell stated that the public do see the neighbourhood function as important and the force would always like to have more Officers, but they have to work with what they have.

Ms Farrell also noted that it does not always follow at this point in time that if criminals are arrested in Seaham that they would be taken to Peterlee station.

2. A Member stated that the Police Force are getting 260 new Officers over the next 3 years, but will these Officers be compensating for the Officers who are retiring or have retired?

Ms Farrell responded to say that all retired Officers will be replaced and then there will be an additional 260 employed on top of this.

3. A Member stated that she had recently spoken to the local Inspector who had confirmed that not all people who are arrested in Seaham are taken to Peterlee as there is not always room available. Sometimes they can be taken to Darlington and then the Officers have to wait for hours until the person is taken into custody. The Member stated in her opinion the new custody suite was a good idea as the Officers will be able to hand over the arrested person straight away and then come straight back which will free up waiting times for the Officers.
4. A Member stated that out of the 4 current custody suites there must be a proportion of costs for maintaining them and it would not be expected that maintenance costs would be high in a new building. What are the differences in costs as a comparison?

Mr White stated that the centralised suite would save the Police £400k per year in maintenance costs, however the new build will cost £21m but the money can be reinvested. He noted that most of the current suites will be mothballed.

5. A Member noted that in the presentation it was stated that there would be a dedicated Nurse at the new suite and questioned whether that was in place of a GP, and also questioned what qualifications the Nurse would have as a lot of criminals have mental health problems and whether the Nurse would be qualified for this?

Ms Farrell noted that when they are discussing medical provision this is in regard to physical provision. There are currently liaison workers who deal with mental health problems who are available for periods of time within the suites but with a centralised suite the Police would hope that these provisions would be for longer periods of time. Ms Farrell noted that this provision is provided by the Mental Health Trust.

The Chair thanked the Police for attending the meeting and they then left the meeting.

FC16/21 **TO CONSIDER THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SEAHAM TOWN COUNCIL HELD ON 26th JANUARY, 2021**

A Member raised a point of order regarding Special Establishment meeting minutes. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that he would contact CDALC regarding this matter and ask them to contact the Chair of the Establishment Committee directly.

A Member questioned whether the lighting at the incline had been repaired. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that they had been repaired and a note had been placed on the Council's website to inform members of the public.

A further Member noted that there were two lights that needed repairing at the Green Drive which the Deputy Town Clerk noted that he will look into.

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

FC17/21 REPORTS OF SERVICE COMMITTEES

RESOLVED that the reports of the following Committees, copies of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, be approved:

- a) Report of the Arts and Information Committee held on 2nd February, 2021.
- b) Report of the Parks and Events Committee held on 2nd February, 2021.
- c) Report of the Planning & Environmental Committee held on 9th February, 2021.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed Members that the Special Planning meeting arranged to take place on the 4th March, 2021 has been cancelled. The Chair of Planning noted that the meeting has been postponed to allow Members to be given the information held by the Deputy Town Clerk which he has received so Members can decide what Seaham Town Council's strategy will be. A meeting can be re-arranged following this with guest speakers.

- d) Report of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on the 9th February, 2021.

FC18/21 GERLINGEN

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that following the letter sent to Gerlingen they have agreed to postpone the April visit and have agreed to hold a late afternoon zoom meeting on 23rd April 2021, which would have been the planned date of the Mayors Ball.