

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 15 AUGUST 2017

PRESENT

The Mayor Councillor Wood
The Deputy Mayor – Councillor McGuinness
Councillor Baddeley
Councillor Court
Councillor Davies
Councillor Hall
Councillor Hart
Councillor Jones
Councillor Jackson
Councillor Lawson
Councillor Lovatt
Councillor Nicosia
Councillor Rogers
Councillor Salt
Councillor Sheldon
Councillor Swift

Also in attendance:
Councillor Harper
Councillor Hawley

28.17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence and reasons accepted were received from

Councillor Rushton
Councillor Walley
Councillor Whilding

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- a Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Dispensations: Councillor Sheldon in any matters concerning Biddulph in Bloom. Minute 34, Councillor Salt's husband is a firefighter; Councillors Harper and Wood are retired firefighter. Councillor Lawson served on the Fire Authority panel.
- b Other Disclosable Interests. Councillor Hart in the Local Plan residential site specifics in Biddulph. Minute 32, Councillors Court and Jones walk their dogs in the Country Park; Minute 33, Councillor Hart is a member of the Moorlands Partnership Board

30. MINUTES

It was moved to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 19 July 2017.

Councillor Harper gave a Lifeline update. There had been much he hadn't been able to say at the last meeting. A meeting of interested people had been held; Councillor Harper had been re-elected as Chair and a new Committee had been formed. A generous anonymous donation of £500 had been received and Councillor Redfern had given £100; he was thanked. Councillor Lawson had pledged between £500 and £1000 each year and was thanked. Biddulph Lifeline was 'alive and well, settled and sorted'.

Councillor Lovatt stated that members of this Council wanted to be involved, noted that there were 19 machines in Biddulph and asked how maintenance was controlled.

Councillor Harper replied that Lifeline would continue as before with the machines it had installed. The others should be maintained by their installers.

Councillor Salt had an update on those not maintained by Lifeline. She had contacted the installers who would arrange maintenance, and had passed the information to the Chief Officer.

31. TRANSPORT COORDINATOR UPDATE

Councillor McGuinness circulated copies of the County Council's survey in relation to subsidised bus journeys, noting that further copies were available at Biddulph library. There were four options. Option one being the preferred option. D&G ran 34 routes, only 7 were subsidised by Staffordshire County Council. The dial-a-ride scheme had the greatest cost of £8-10 a journey. Biddulph did not have any dial-a-ride routes.

Councillor McGuinness noted that the service 93 offered a fantastic service, with a link to Leek four times a day. At present the subsidy per person was £3.11. If the subsidy was removed, D&G would not be able to operate and vulnerable people on Biddulph Moor could be isolated.

80% of passengers used the bus from Biddulph Moor to Sainsbury's or Gillow Heath to Sainsbury's, with 20% travelling to Leek.

Councillor McGuinness reported that there was confusion with the information on page 11 of the survey, the impression given was that the 93 service would not be withdrawn as the subsidy was not at risk.

Councillor McGuinness encouraged people to write to this Council with their concerns. The Chief Officer would collate the letters and forward them to the County Council, stating that the subsidy should not be withdrawn.

Councillor Jones very concerned. He was unsure how this situation had occurred; Councillors had been assured that the service was not at risk. He asked if the decision had already been made. He noted that though very few people used the bus, that was not the point – it was a public service. This bus was the only way into town for some, to visit the doctors, the shops etc. By withdrawing this bus, the County Council would be isolating people; there was no safe walking route out of Biddulph Moor. Our County Councillors should take away that strong message and make strong representation.

Councillor Salt echoed the concerns and noted that Leek College students would also be affected, the bus was important for young people too. She suggested that if the decision had been made to withdraw the subsidy then the Town Council should foot the bill.

Councillor McGuinness noted that this would be £2500 per week, Councillor Salt withdrew the proposal.

Councillor Harper asked how the figure was calculated; it defied logic and he asked for a proper breakdown, adding that in his opinion the County Council had 'lost the plot'. This Council should send a letter and have a drop-in box downstairs for comments. He thanked Councillor McGuinness.

Councillor Lovatt thanked Councillor McGuinness for doing the work, adding that it was typical of the County Councillor having the consultation in the summer holidays, with confusing and misleading information. Councillor Lovatt called for an online petition and proposed that campaigning was carried out by Members.

Councillor Jones asked if we were sure that the figures were correct. Had they come from the County Council or from D&G? He added that getting people to write letters was optimistic, but that an online petition was a 'cracking idea'. We should send a strong message to say that we are 'not having this'. Biddulph was an easy target; it is a public service and we should be shouting loudly. Councillor Jones proposed that a letter is sent to the County Council this was seconded by Councillor Harper.

Councillor McGuinness clarified the costings noting that that D&G received £0.25 million for this service and that a smaller bus would not be possible as it needed to be a low-loader. £1.60 was the most usual subsidy per person.

Councillor Lovatt proposed that a petition was set up and it was seconded by Councillor Jones.

Councillor Jackson did not want to get political, but it was the 'chickens coming home to roost'. In 2021, Government grants would fall to zero, it was 'cuts on cuts'. In the Moorlands, the dial-a-ride service was under threat. There was a total pot of £1.3 million, but the figures were confusing; he thanked Councillor McGuinness.

Councillor Jackson noted that subsidised travel accounted for a lot of people. Councillor Jackson was amazed at this consultation. These were public services run by private companies; they must cut the cloth accordingly. He did not think this was the fault of the County Council, but from a higher place. He added that £2 million had been spent on roads. There were many ways in the County Council of moving money around; alternatives must be considered. This would affect the poorest most vulnerable people, and those with mental health issues.

Councillor Hawley noted that the 93 was the only subsidised service in Biddulph and as such was an easy target. If it was cancelled it would remove access to the shops and doctors in Biddulph, from Biddulph Moor, it was bad enough that the service only ran once an hour. There would be no way of accessing the necessary services.

Councillor Nicosia added that behind every statistic, ordinary people were affected. She described a lady living in Biddulph Moor who travelled on the 93 to Congleton to see her friend, if there was no transport, she would be unable to continue the visits. The state of the footpaths was atrocious, pressure must be exerted at whatever level it could be.

Councillor Lawson noted that this was an option for discussion and was not 'carved in stone'. Ideas would be taken into consideration; Biddulph people were not the only ones suffering. He noted that in 2016 the subsidy was £5 million, in 2017 it was just over £1 million. Councillor Lawson agreed that this Council should write. He proposed also writing to D&G and First Bus to see if anything could be sorted out at their end. He added that companies were 'not daft'; they knew there would be an outcry. If the County did not have the money we could not have it. Councillor Lawson noted that the population was getting older and suggested that bus passes could be withdrawn for those in more affluent areas, noting that Staffordshire was one of the few counties still offering subsidies. Councillor Lawson would fight against the withdrawal of the subsidies at the County Council and would encourage Councillor Flunder to do the same.

Councillor Jones noted that this service would never make a profit, but it was a public service. Councillor Jones proposed writing to the County Council to insist that subsidy to service 93 in Biddulph was maintained, this was seconded by Councillor Lovatt, but wanted to add that an online petition would be set up too. All were in favour.

Councillors Lovatt and Salt would set up the online petition. Councillor Rogers abstained – adding that people did not use online petitions. This was agreed.

It was agreed that letters in support of the 93 would be sent to the Chief Officer who would forward them to the County Council

Councillor Salt noted that she would stand at the bus stop with her i-pad to encourage bus users to sign the petition.

32. BIDDULPH GRANGE COUNTRY PARK UPDATE INCLUDING VERBAL UPDATE ON MEETING WITH STAFFORDSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST

Councillor Jones reported that he had received a lot of support and a good mailing list had been obtained. The statistics from the Open Day were being compiled. The next step would be to constitutionalise a 'Friends Of' group. The next meeting would be held on 20 September 2017. The Lottery application was ongoing.

A meeting had been held with representatives of the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) and a verbal agreement had been made to leave current access rights unchanged; long-term decisions would depend on the overall deal with the District Council. Biddulph Grange Country Park was still being treated separately. If the deal fell through the District Council would have to rethink its options. Councillor Jones confirmed that management of the park would remain local whilst he was Chair.

Councillor Hart had been impressed with the Chief Executive Officer at SWT, who had been very forward thinking and interested in what Biddulph had to say; nothing was off the table. It had been an encouraging meeting. SWT had formed partnerships in other areas.

Councillor Jones noted that the schedule for lottery bid was flexible and dependent on discussions. He added that the Chief Officer had done a tremendous amount of work on the bid and he thanked her.

Councillor Hart noted that the Chief Officer had been extremely supportive all through the process and made useful contributions.

Councillor Nicosia added that when the appropriate time came, if SWT took it over, a letter should be sent to Ellen Faulkner thanking her for her work in securing Newpool Meadows. It was agreed that this would be borne in mind.

33. MOORLANDS PARTNERSHIP BOARD (MPB) FUNDING - UPDATE FROM COUNCILLOR SHELDON

Councillor Sheldon reported that MPB now had different aims, conditions and objectives attached to the grants. The District Council wanted to proceed with larger projects this year.

Councillor Sheldon had met with Dai Larner and other District Council Officers. The desire was to take a large amount of money from MPB to facilitate improvements at Cheddleton Station and Leekbrook to help tourism. The MPB had received very few grant requests and there was no queue.

It was noted that Biddulph had never previously done well with MPB grant requests. As a result, the Officers had agreed that the remainder of the money (£12,700) in the pot would come to Biddulph. Most of this would be used to support the bid for the Country Park, the remainder to be used for smaller projects which had previously been discussed

The Chief Officer and Councillor Sheldon had met with the District Council Regeneration Officer in Leek to agree logistics of accessing and spending this grant funding.

The Chief Officer requested that Councillors consider that £10,000 is allocated to the heritage work at the Biddulph Grange Country Park, and the remainder for heritage projects. The £2,700 on smaller heritage projects would be match funded by Biddulph Town Council, as had been the previous arrangement.

Councillor Jones thanked Councillor Sheldon for her initiative, and assured her that the money would be well spent in the Country Park.

Councillor Hart had sat on the MPB for a number of years and noted that some projects went forward; years later the money had not been spent and was taken back into the capital fund. He would still lobby the Cabinet that money not spent must be taken back in some form or other.

Councillor Salt echoed Councillor Jones. She thanked Councillor Sheldon for her work to promote and protect our heritage and history.

Councillor Hall noted that Councillor Sheldon had done a good job in bringing back funding for Biddulph

Councillor Davies thought Biddulph had received a good proportion of the funding. The criteria had changed, but he proposed that the £2,700 is used in the same way as previously, with match-funding by this Council; this was seconded by Councillor Hall, all were in favour.

Councillor Jackson noted that Biddulph had missed out in the past as it did not fit the criteria; now that it did, the criteria was moving again. Thought needed to be given to preparing schemes that would fit the new criteria. He congratulated Councillor Sheldon for a good bit of 'mopping up'. The Chief Officer noted that this funding did not preclude the Council from putting in grant applications at any time, if suitable projects could be developed.

Councillor Sheldon observed that conservation and regeneration projects were very expensive in Officer time, especially if the claim was for a small amount. There was no reason why this Council could not work up larger projects.

Councillor Jackson was concerned that MPB did not feed into any other Committees. Councillor Hall noted that it reported directly to Full Council.

34. FUTURE JOINT GOVERNANCE OF THE POLICE AND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE IN STAFFORDSHIRE CONSULTATION- ITEM REQUESTED BY CLLR WOOD AT GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE ON 18 JULY 2017

Councillor Wood remarked that he had never seen such a one-sided consultation document. It was a one-sided document and only referred to savings for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and not the Fire Service. It was, in his opinion, a 'tick box' exercise. He had been involved in the Fire Service for 30 years; it had changed dramatically in the past 15 years. This report did not give a balanced view of how a fire station was run; he had serious concerns about how savings were being accrued, 75% of the cost of the Fire Service was staffing.

Councillor Wood noted that the number of fire deaths nationally had been creeping up. He felt that the Fire Service would not be seen as an independent body, merely an arm of the Police; he felt that there was no alternative view. Deploying part-time officers and the downgrading and shrinking of local services was leading to the Fire Service employing the least amount of fire fighters it could to serve Staffordshire.

The consultation did not contain information from the Chief Fire Officer – no message from Becci Bryant. In Councillor Wood's opinion, it was loaded towards the PCC and did not give a balanced view. He had been the design champion for the new fire stations; there were no financial savings from property, only people. Councillor Wood finished by stating that the main point of pride of the Fire Service was that it was an independent body. It was not related to law and order, but independent. If this joint governance went ahead it would be seen as another arm

of the Police. Councillor Wood was concerned that the consultation was loaded and no alternative view given.

Councillor Salt proposed that Becci Bryant is invited to attend a meeting of the Town Council to give the views of Fire Service. Councillor Salt was the wife of a serving fire fighter and had some inside information. Councillor Wood was right, if the public trust is lost, fire deaths would increase further.

Councillor Lawson noted that this was a 183 page document, paid for by the PCC that briefly presented 4 options; nothing had been decided at the meeting held the previous week. He felt that Option 1 would be best.

Councillor Jones supported what Councillor Salt said. He felt that the problem was that the Fire Service Chiefs were not engaging. He seconded the proposal to invite Becci Bryant to address Town Council.

Councillor Hawley had read the two pages which had been tabled and felt that on paper the options looked good but, on further study of them, he felt there was no independent business case. Figures could be manipulated to do what you want to do.

Councillor Rogers reported that several years before he had attended fire prevention talks and noted that this had made the Fire Service so good it had become a victim of its own success. Things had worked well in the past, but he thought that the time had come for the agencies to work together, but not under one umbrella.

Councillor Harper had served for several years in the Fire Service, and later in the Police force. He did not believe that staff would be cut, but was sure that savings would be made from the pension pots, by 'attacking pensioners'. He thought that Mr Ellis had made a fantastic job of 'reinventing the wheel'; he wished that he would come to the table with something constructive. Mr Ellis should be invited to address this Council.

Councillor Hart proposed that a letter is emailed forthwith inviting Becci Bryant to a meeting to talk about the consultation.

Councillor Wood noted that this would need to be a special meeting or we would miss the deadline. The Chief Officer clarified that the consultation ended on 4 September 2017.

Councillor Lawson noted that Becci Bryant had been subdued at the meeting the previous week.

Councillor Nicosia knew Becci Bryant as co-Governors of James Bateman Junior High School; and felt that Ms Bryant would have to be tight-lipped in this situation.

Councillor Hart did not want to place Ms Bryant under unnecessary risk or pressure.

Councillor Salt proposed that the Chair of the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services be invited instead of Ms Bryant.

Councillor Jones said that we did not need to be specific; anyone would be welcome to give a balanced view from the Fire Authority.

Councillor Salt proposed a letter was sent to the Chair of the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to attend a meeting. The invitation to be sent forthwith; this was seconded by Councillor Wood and agreed.

Councillor Hawley wanted the views of this Council put to the consultation; to make it clear the consultation appears not to be independent, that it is one-sided and does not show the business case, this was seconded by Councillor Lovatt.

Councillor Hall noted as a point of clarification, that Matthew Ellis was only doing what the Act said he needed to do.

Councillor Salt noted that joint collaboration already took place.

Councillor Jackson had responded to the online questionnaire, but felt that it was loaded. Councillor Jackson felt that with Option 3, representation from the Fire Authority would be lost and with it accountability.

Councillor Hart clarified the proposals on the table, that a letter inviting the Chair and Vice Chair of the Fire Service to come and explain the position is sent forthwith and that this Council was not in favour of the proposals. The motion was proposed by Councillor Salt, seconded by Councillor Jones all were in favour.

Councillor Sheldon noted that time was scarce; an emergency meeting of the General Purposes Committee could be convened, or a written response could be received and circulated

Councillor Salt proposed an addendum that a letter would be acceptable if neither could attend. This was seconded by Councillor Jones and agreed.

Councillor Wood encouraged all members to take part in the consultation.

Councillor Lovatt proposed that a separate letter is sent to Matthew Ellis noting that this Council was not happy with the one-sided consultation; this was seconded by Councillor Wood and agreed.

35. RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS - CONSIDERATION OF HOLDING AN EVENT

The Chief Officer gave an update. A number of projects had been identified where volunteers would be required, for example, an audit of footpaths, support with markets and Christmas Lights Switch-On, and the Country Park restoration. The Chief Officer suggested that a volunteer recruitment event could be held, and asked Councillors whether they were happy if the Officers developed ideas for further consideration.

Councillor Jones thought this was a 'cracking idea'. The event would need to be well coordinated. He believed that people did not have a clue how to get involved and

this event would give all groups access to potential volunteers. The event should be pitched to younger volunteers too.

Councillor Hart suggested that leaders of voluntary groups should be encouraged to talk to the Chief Officer.

Councillor Jones suggested that we contact all interested groups as everyone was short of volunteers.

Councillor Hart noted that Councillor Sheldon may be able to recruit volunteers at this event.

Councillor Salt spoke as a member of the Biddulph Youth and Community Zone (BYCZ) and Air Cadets and noted that, in her experience, it was very difficult to recruit volunteers. This event could incorporate a careers section, as businesses and students needed to see the value of volunteering. Local employers could talk about the importance of volunteering. Councillor Salt suggested that this Council explore the idea of the Prince's Trust and consider accreditation from the Fire Service too.

Councillor Hart asked that interested parties contact the Chief Officer.

Councillor Nicosia suggested that contact is made with the High school and the 6th form college; volunteering plays an important role in the development of the personal statement and access to higher education.

Councillor Jones cautioned that the message should be clear, so that older volunteers were not deterred.

Councillor Harper noted that the Chief Officer had a list of volunteer organisations and suggested that they are contacted.

All were happy to receive further information at a later date.

36. CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

1. Police and Crime Commissioner Updates

Proceeds of Crime and People Power funding opportunities are now open for applications until 14 September 2017.

Applications should align to at least one of the PCC five priorities and also local community safety priorities. Guidance and full details of timelines including processes, pay out and evaluation requirements are on the PCC website, <https://www.staffordshire-pcc.gov.uk/fund/>

Proceeds of Crime

Applications can be submitted by strategic community safety partners (i.e. those that are formally part of a community safety forum, JOG, LSP or similar) and make a long term contribution to local community safety activities. Applications can be made for amounts of between £3,000 and £15,000 with a view to becoming sustainable in the longer term

People Power

Applications can be submitted by community groups for values between £100 and £3,000 with a view to becoming sustainable in the longer term. Applications should be supported by local policing and carry the support of the community safety partnership, who make recommendation to the OPCC.

2. Community Opportunity to Influence Local Road Safety

Community ideas for making their neighbourhood's roads safer can win funding to make them happen. The Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership is organising the trial scheme which is offering up to £5,000 to community groups in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to help improve road safety. Proposals could include speed watch groups and activities with schools such as walking buses, but projects must be community-led.

The first wave of funding will be open for applications between 1st August and 14th September, with funding available for a minimum of 40 schemes over the first two years.

Further information or to make an application to the Staffordshire Road Safety Grant Fund is available at <http://www.staffssaferrroads.co.uk/my-community/road-safety-grant-fund>

Councillor Jackson noted that 22 applications could fund the South View project.

3. '20 is Plenty' programme from September 2017- Squirrel Hayes School (Additional information available). Installation will take place at the end of August in preparation for the new school term. The Speed Indication Devices (SID) will be placed in the most appropriate position, ensuring minimum disruption to local residents wherever possible. Temporary warning signs will also be erected to alert drivers about the advisory 20 mph in the vicinity of the schools. The SID will operate between 08.15 – 09.00 am and 14.45 – 16.00 on school days and will be operational from Tuesday 5th September 2017. This will be for one school term.

Councillor Jackson welcomed this, but questioned if the large amount of parked cars would deter speeding anyway.

Councillor Rogers noted that the lights were being fitted.

The meeting closed at 9.22 pm.