

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF BIDDULPH TOWN COUNCIL HELD ON FRIDAY 25 MAY 2018

There were no formalities to start the meeting.

PRESENT

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

Also in attendance
County Councillor Flunder
28 members of the public and press

10.18 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence and reasons accepted were received from:

Councillor Hawley
Councillor Rushton
Councillor Whilding
Councillor Wood

The Chief Officer – Mrs Sarah Haydon was not in attendance.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- a) To declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests & Dispensations. None declared.
- b) To declare any Other Disclosable Interests – Councillor Jones as a resident of Biddulph Moor, who did not use the bus service but might need to one day.

12. 93 BUS SERVICE

To discuss and find a solution to Staffordshire County Council's removal of the funding for the 93 bus service.

Councillor McGuinness reminded members of the rules of debate.

Confidential papers had been tabled containing indicative costs.

Councillor Lovatt proposed that Standing Orders be suspended to allow members of the public to address the meeting; this was seconded by Councillor Jackson.

Councillor Jones appreciated that people wanted to speak, but all the arguments had been made. This meeting was to have the bus restored not to re-hash old arguments, which would be time consuming and only tell this Council what it already knew.

A vote was taken and the proposal was lost 4 to 13, with no abstentions

Councillor Salt first heard about the decision to remove funding the previous week and was disappointed that the County Council had done this; she had fought long and hard and believed that the County Council had not discharged its statutory duty. Councillors Salt and Jones had gathered over 1000 signatures and this petition, along with letters from the local GP's had been dismissed; this was in breach of the Human Rights Act. The 1968 Transport Act had also been breached. The Town Council had sent many letters in support of the 93 bus and Councillor Salt felt that the County Council had not gone down the legal route; this Council should now make a legal challenge that the job had not been done properly and the law had not been followed.

Councillor McGuinness agreed that members had all worked hard; 1200 people had signed the petition, he agreed that it had not been taken into consideration. He had been working behind the scenes to get the service reinstated. Councillor McGuinness wanted a positive outcome; all Town Councillors agreed that the service was essential.

Councillor Lovatt noted the public in attendance did not know what was being discussed.

Councillor Jones noted that he would clarify this when he spoke on the matter.

Councillor Jones agreed with Councillor Salt that the County had said it would all be sorted out by June. He was outraged by how the situation had been handled but 'we are where we are'; he was not interested in 'raking over old coals'. Councillor Jones continued that he and Councillor McGuinness had independently approached local bus companies to find out how much money would be involved to run a service to Biddulph Moor via Pennine Way, then onto Gillow Heath; two companies had been approached and the costs were affordable, in his view.

Councillor Jones had approached the County Council to see if any money was available and some had been found to go part way to funding the service. The figure that this Council would need to find was relatively small and the Town Council would be able to support the funding shortfall. It would be costly to challenge the decision in court, and it had not been handled well, but his only concern was to get the bus back now. This would give 12-month's breathing space; time to get a long-term solution in place. Councillor Jones stressed that the answer was not volunteers; they could not be relied on and they shouldn't have to be used. A properly funded bus service was required. Councillor Jones proposed that the offer on the table be accepted; this would then have to go through an 8-week tendering process, this was seconded by Councillor Hart.

Councillor Lovatt then read the first paragraph of the tabled document so that the members of the public present were aware of the topic of the conversation, but not the figures involved.

Councillor Lovatt's concern was that it was only a 12-month offer. She agreed with Councillor Salt about sorting out the legal issues, but she felt that further funding would not be found in 12 months' time and proposed that we ask for more than 1 year- for funding for at least 2 years, as this would take some months to get sorted.

Councillor Lawson noted that funding was available for one-year, there would be cutbacks the following year and then in 3 to 4 years all subsidies on all buses would stop. He then stated that Councillors Flunder, Jones and Lawson had worked hard to get this sorted.

Councillor Jones responded that he was talking 'absolute drive!'. Councillor Jones had held long talks with the Portfolio Holder that morning and there was no drive to completely remove the service over the next two or three years. This town needs the service back now. Councillor Jones added that he would say what he was thinking, but there were others present.

Councillor Lawson responded that Councillor Jones had only come in at the last minute; he had been working on this for a number of months.

Councillor Harper intervened adding that he regretted what had just happened. He referred to the two figures on page two of the tabled confidential document, adding that on a separate paper a different sum had been mentioned.

Councillor Hall proposed that this Council help with the funding, subject to the tender. He supported Councillor Jones' proposal, adding that it was important that we get the bus service back. He, as Chair of the Finance Committee and the Deputy Chair, Councillor Jackson, would find out how to make this happen as the budget had already been set. Councillor Salt supported the motion and asked for an amendment, changing this request to proposing a separate motion.

Councillor Salt proposed that we seek legal advice as a Town Council to ensure that the County Council discharges its legal responsibility to subsidise a bus service for our isolated communities. Councillor Salt then read an extract from an email from Councillor Lawson to Councillor Deaville, where Councillor Lawson stated that the service was used very sparingly and he possibly had no reason to keep it.

Councillor Lovatt seconded Councillor Salt's motion.

Councillor Lovatt raised a point of order that there was no way for the members of the public present to show their approval; the Mayor asked for a show of hands. All hands were raised.

Councillor Jones clarified that the service would be a circular one, the return route from Biddulph Moor would be via Park Lane.

Councillor McGuinness proposed that the Town Council would find the difference in the funding to reinstate the bus service.

A vote was taken on Councillor Jones' proposal and it was carried. Councillor Lawson abstained from the vote.

A vote was taken on Councillor Salt's proposal and it was carried.

Councillor Rogers expressed concern about the cost of seeking legal advice. He felt that in the past, money had been thrown away through seeking advice. Councillor Hall responded that there were a number of organisations that worked for Parish and Town Councils; their advice would be sought, this was one of the reasons for paying membership fees.

Councillor Jackson would go along with the very difficult position that this Council had been pushed into by County Council and national government too. It left a sour taste in the mouth that Parish and Town Councils were picking up the slack where statutory bodies should be providing the service. This Council was in a fortunate position that the reserves

were big enough. We would be asking all Biddulph residents to contribute to this. As a one-off this would be alright, but budgets had been set and we would have to go and look again at the figures at very short notice. He applauded the Town Councillors for getting this offer. There were two figures which the Town Council may be asked to help with.

Councillor Jones expressed concern about how long the process would take.

The meeting closed at 5.33 pm

Signed Date