

# Stone Town Council – General Purposes Committee

## Minutes of the meeting held in the Council Chamber at 15 Station Road, Stone, on Tuesday 4 February 2025

**PRESENT:** Councillor I. Fordham in the Chair for agenda items 1 to 10 & 12 to 19 (Minute Numbers: GP25/113 to GP25/130),  
Councillor R. Kenney in the Chair for agenda items 11, 20 and 21 (Minute Numbers: GP25/131 to GP25/133), and,  
Councillors: J. Battrick, A. Best, J. Davies, J. Hood, T. Kelt, B. Kenney, P. Leason, J. Metters and R. Townsend

Officers: L. Trigg, R. Edwards and T. Williams

**ABSENT:** Councillors: A. Burgess, L. Davies, K. Dawson, R. Kenney (to GP25/130), A. Mottershead, J. Powell, N. Powell and C. Thornicroft

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### **GP25/113** Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: A. Burgess, L. Davies, R. Kenney ((to Minute Number GP25/130), due to his attendance at a Borough Council meeting), A. Mottershead and C. Thornicroft

Where a reason for absence is given, this reason was approved for the purposes of Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **GP25/114** Declarations of Interest and Declarations under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

None made

### **GP25/115** Requests for Dispensations

None received

### **GP25/116** To receive the report of the County Councillors

The Chairman invited County Councillors to address the Committee:

#### **County Councillor Jill Hood**

Councillor Hood had no report to deliver on this occasion.

#### **County Councillor I. Parry**

Councillor Parry was not in attendance at the meeting.

### **GP25/117** To receive the report of Borough Councillors

The Chairman invited Borough Councillors to address the Committee but there were no reports.

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**GP25/118 Representations from Members of the Public**

None received.

**GP25/119 Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 10 December 2024 (Minute Numbers GP25/095 – GP25/112), be approved as a correct record.

**GP25/120 Minutes of Sub-Committees**

RESOLVED:

- a) Tourism & Town Promotion Sub-Committee held on 14 January 2025, (Minute Numbers TTP25/026 – TTP25/034), that the draft minutes be noted, and the recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number TTP25/031 be adopted.

The recommendations of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number TTP25/033 was considered as part of Minute Number GP25/130 (agenda item 10).

- b) Environment Sub-Committee held on 14 January 2025 (Minute numbers ENV25/027 – ENV25/035) that the draft minutes be noted.

The recommendation of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number ENV25/034 was considered as part of Minute Number GP25/130 (agenda item 10).

- c) Estates Sub-Committee held on 14 January 2025 (Minute Numbers EST25/017 – EST25/026), that the draft minutes be noted.

The recommendation of the Sub-Committee contained in Minute Number EST25/023 was considered as part of Minute Number GP25/130 (agenda item 10).

**The Vice Chairman, Councillor Fordham, deferred agenda items 9 (General Purposes Sub-Committee – Budget 2025-26 to 2027-28), 10 (225-26 to 2027-28 Budget Recommendation), 11 (Grants to Local Organisations) and 12 (Meeting Schedule for 2025-26) to a later point in the agenda, when the Chairman, Councillor R. Kenney, may be available to take the Chair.**

**GP25/121 Membership of Stone Community Hub Liaison Group**

The Committee considered the appointment of a new member to Stone Community Hub Liaison Group following the resignation of Councillor Jill Hood.

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Robert Townsend as a member of Stone Community Hub Liaison Group.

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**GP25/122**    **Heritage Centre**

The Committee considered an update on Stone Heritage Centre.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the Heritage Centre was now open, primarily for the purposes of the Heritage Centre Manager speaking to people who may be willing to loan their historic items to the Town Council as future exhibits.

The Heritage Centre Manager had reported that several people had come forward with interesting items. Rather than the Town Council building a large, owned collection of items, the preference was to compile a catalogue of artifacts that could be loaned from individuals or museums, supporting a constantly changing exhibition display.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the Heritage Centre Manager had spent the day (Tuesday 4 February) at the County Museum Collection Stores at Beacon Business Park, Stafford, to discuss the arrangements for loans and relevant pieces for Stone.

The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the Council was about to put out a call for people who were in possession of WWII memorabilia that could be displayed on VE Day and VJ day, and individuals who had memories of VE Day and would be willing to have their recounts recorded, with a view to capturing the information as a permanent record for the future.

**GP25/123**    **Stafford District (B) Payphone Consultation**

The Committee considered a British Telecom consultation seeking views on its proposal to remove a public telephone box in Stone after research had shown that the payphone was no longer regularly used.

An email from Stafford Borough Council had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting along with a spreadsheet detailing the location of the telephone box (and others that were outside the boundary of the town) and a BT payphone notice.

The Committee noted that the total calls from the payphone on the Lichfield Road were 14, made over the last twelve months, with no calls to any recognised helplines. The site was not a high frequency accident or suicide location and there was no other evidence of need.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council raises no objections to British Telecom's proposal to remove the payphone on the Lichfield Road, Stone.

**GP25/124**    **Standards Consultation**

The Committee considered a government consultation seeking views on the introduction of a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England to ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension.

Electronic links to full details of the consultation and the online survey had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

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The Town Clerk advised the Committee that the current standards and conduct framework for local authorities (established by the Localism Act 2011) required every local authority to adopt a code of conduct, the content of which must as a minimum be consistent with the seven Nolan Principles of standards in public life, and sets out rules on requiring members to register and disclose pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests. Beyond these requirements, it was for individual councils to set their own local code which may or may not align with the Local Government Association's model code of conduct and guidance.

Every principal authority must also have in place arrangements under which it can investigate allegations of breaches of its code of conduct but there is no provision in current legislation for a sanction to suspend a councillor found to have breached the code of conduct. Sanctions are limited to less robust measures such as barring members from Cabinet, Committee, or representative roles, a requirement to issue an apology or undergo code of conduct training, or public criticism.

The Committee discussed whether the Council should respond to the consultation collectively (through compiling the responses of all Councillors or delegating the authority to respond) and/or suggest that each Town Councillor should respond to the consultation individually.

The Committee concluded that, as there would be very many opinions to document in response to the thirty questions in the survey if answered collectively as a Town Council, it was considered less cumbersome if each Town Councillor responded to the consultation individually.

RESOLVED: That Town Councillors respond individually to the Government's Consultation on Standards.

**GP25/125 Town Council Payments**

RESOLVED: To note the list\* of Town Council payments made during the period 1 November to 31 December 2024.

**GP25/126 Update from Working Groups:**

**Stone Heritage Centre Steering Group**

There was no additional update from the Steering Group.

**Engagement with Young People**

Councillor Dawson was not available to give a report.

**GP25/127 To receive reports from Town Councillors on attendance at meetings of local organisations and outside bodies as a representative of the Town Council**

**Stone Area Parish Liaison Group**

Councillor J. Davies briefed the Committee on a meeting of Stone Area Parish Liaison Group held on 29 January 2025 at the Heritage Centre, where attendees had been invited on a tour of the building with the Heritage Centre Manager.

The County Officer at Staffordshire Parish Council's Association was in attendance and the main topic of discussion, apart from the Heritage Centre, had been the potential impact of the government's proposed reorganisation of local government.

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Councillor Davies said the group provided a great opportunity to work in coordination with other parishes as the reorganisation and devolution of powers develop.

#### **Stone ATC**

Councillor J. Davies advised the Committee that a meeting of the Squadron's Civilian Welfare Committee would be taking place this evening (4 February 2025).

#### **Age Concern Stone & District**

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that no meeting had taken place.

#### **Stafford & Stone Access Group**

Councillor Kelt advised the Committee that a meeting of Stafford & Stone Access Group would be taking place on Monday 10 February 2025. He also informed the Committee that he and other members of the Access Group had recently visited the Heritage Centre to discuss access with the Heritage Centre Manager which had been a productive meeting.

#### **Stone Common Plot Trustees**

Councillor Hood advised the Committee that no meeting of Stone Common Plot Trustees had taken place.

#### **Stone Community Hub Liaison Group**

Councillor Battrick and Councillor Hood confirmed there was no new information to report.

#### **SPCA Executive Committee**

Councillor Kelt advised the Committee that a meeting of the SPCA Executive Committee had taken place on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2025. A lot of its content was procedural, but the reorganisation of local government had also been discussed. The Association was rooting for parish councils to play a full part in the devolution process.

#### **West Midlands Railway and other Rail Matters**

Councillor Kelt advised the Committee that he had been unable to attend a meeting held last month but didn't think any of its content impacted Stone town directly.

### **GP25/128 Meeting Schedule for 2025-26**

The Committee considered a proposed meeting and civic events schedule\* for the period May 2025 to April 2026 which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting.

The Committee noted that as Stafford Borough Council's 2025-26 programme of meetings was not yet available, some amendments may subsequently need to be made to avoid future clashes.

RESOLVED: To approve the meeting schedule for 2025-26 with any necessary amendments agreed in consultation with the appropriate Committee or Sub-Committee Chairman.

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**GP25/129    General Purposes Committee – Budget 2025-26 to 2027-28**

The Committee received the report of the Town Clerk\* (which had been enclosed with the agenda for the meeting) examining the 2025-26 to 2027-28 budget requirements for the specific services managed directly by the General Purposes Committee, including those which had previously been the responsibility of the former Management Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommends for consideration later in the meeting alongside the proposals from Sub-Committees, the adoption of the standstill Committee budget for 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28, as detailed in the Clerk's report, with the following adjustments:

- a. In respect of the ongoing discussions with Stafford Borough Council, the provision of an additional £7,500 per annum from 2025-26 to allow the Council to occupy additional office space in the 15 Station Road building, plus an additional £5,000 in 2025-26 only for additional furniture etc.
- b. The provision of £1,000 in 2025-26 for the replacement of the wooden stand used for wreath laying at the war memorial.
- c. An allowance of £30,000 to support the introduction of ANPR in Stone High Street, partially funded by the removal of the £10,000 provision in the current year for Market square improvements.
- d. An increased inflation provision of £1,197 in 2025-26, £418 in 2026-26 and £656 in 2027-28 for the Council as a whole as a result of budget changes put forward by this Committee and all of the Sub-Committees.

**GP25/130    Budget 2025-26 to 2027-28 for recommendation to the Council**

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk\* (which had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting) alongside the budget proposals from Sub-Committees and from this Committee.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Council that:

1. The Standstill Budget included in the Clerk's report to this meeting be recommended to the Council for adoption with the following amendments:
  - a. Estates:
    - i. An additional provision of £12,000 should be made in 2025-26 for repainting the Stone Station which should be funded from the Building Maintenance Reserve.

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b. Environment:

- i. The £1,560 in the current year's budget for Hedgerows is used instead for improvements to the paths at Crown Meadow in 2025-26 with an additional contingency of £1,000.
- ii. £300 is added in the current year for cutting back Willow trees.
- iii. An Environment Initiatives budget of £810 for 2025-26 is added to the anticipated carried forward sum of £1,190.

c. Tourism and Town Promotion:

- i. An allowance of £1,000 should be made for the additional costs of VE Day and VJ Day events. These events would be in addition to VJ Day themed High Street event on 16 August 2025, which would be funded from the existing Tourism and Town Promotion budget.

d. General Purposes:

- i. In respect of the ongoing discussions with Stafford Borough Council, the provision of an additional £7,500 per annum from 2025-26 to allow the Council to occupy additional office space in the 15 Station Road building, plus an additional £5,000 in 2025-26 only for additional furniture etc.
- ii. The provision of £1,000 in 2025-26 for the replacement of the wooden stand used for wreath laying at the war memorial.
- iii. An allowance of £30,000 to support the introduction of ANPR in Stone High Street, partially funded by the removal of the £10,000 provision in the current year for Market Square improvements.
- iv. An increased inflation provision of £1,197 in 2025-26, £418 in 2026-27 and £656 in 2027-28 for the Council as a whole as a result of budget changes put forward by this Committee and all of the Sub-Committee.

As a consequence of the above, the precept on Stafford Borough Council for 2025-26 would be £409,788, with Local Council Tax Support Grant of £26,210 to be added. This would result in a 2025-26 Council Tax for this Council's purposes of £63.99 for a Band D property, an increase for the year of £2.99, with indicative Council Tax levels of £67.13 and £70.42 for the following two years.

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After arriving at the meeting during the deferred agenda item 10 (Minute Number GP25/0130), Councillor R. Kenney took the Chair for the remaining items on the agenda.

**GP25/131 Grants to Local Organisations**

The Committee considered requests for grant aid from local organisations. Before consideration, the Town Clerk reminded the Committee that £2,600 remained within the Grants budget.

The following organisations met the eligibility criteria within the Council's grants policy:

a. **Organisation: Big Top Musical Adventures**

**Amount Requested:** £500

**Reason:** To offer sound hearing sessions to support the mental and emotional well-being of Stone residents.

RESOLVED: To decline the award of a grant to Big Top Musical Adventures.

b. **Organisation: Bromfield Court Residents Focus Group**

**Amount Requested:** £250

**Reason:** To purchase plants and shrubs for a spring and summer display at Bromfield Court.

This application was withdrawn as no accounting information had been provided.

c. **Organisation: Stone Lions Club**

**Amount Requested:** £500

**Reason:** Prostate screening.

RESOLVED: To award a grant of £500 to Stone Lions Club.

d. **Organisation: Stone Gang Show**

**Amount Requested:** £500

**Reason:** To support Stone Gangshow

RESOLVED: To award a grant of £500 to Stone Gang Show.

The following organisations did not meet the eligibility criteria within the Council's grants policy for the reasons stated, and no proposer or seconder came forward to instigate a discussion about making an award of a grant. The applications were therefore not considered due to their ineligibility.

e. **Organisation: Stafford & District Bereavement & Loss Support**

**Amount Requested:** £500

**Reason:** To support the 'Circle of Friends' group who meet fortnightly at Coop Funeral Care in Stone.

i. Level of reserves

f. **Organisation: Douglas MacMillan Hospice**

**Amount Requested:** £200

**Reason:** To support Dramatherapy sessions in the children's hospice.

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- i. Turnover is over £100,000
- ii. Level of reserves

**GP25/132 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

**To resolve, pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting whilst the next items of business are discussed on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the debate.**

RESOLVED: To exclude the Press and Public from the next items of business.

**GP25/133 Confidential Minutes Sub-Committees**

- a) Estates Sub-Committee Meeting held on 14 January 2025, Minute Numbers: EST25/017, EST25/025 and EST25/026.

RESOLVED: To note the draft minutes.

**CHAIRMAN**