



HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL

I GIVE NOTICE that an online meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee will be held on 23 September 2020 at 6.30pm, when the following items will be discussed:

A G E N D A

1. Apologies for absence.
2. To receive minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 17 August 2020, enclosed.
3. Matters arising, if any.
4. Declarations of interest (see enclosed).
5. To receive bank reconciliation and budget income and expenditure report to 31 August 2020 (attached).
6. To consider membership on the HSHAZ Programme Board.
7. To consider making an application under the Community Chest scheme (information circulated to Councillors on 11 September).
8. To review and update the Communications Protocol (see enclosed).
9. To review and update the Complaints Procedure (see enclosed).
10. To review and update the Representative Protocol (see enclosed).
11. To agree exclusion of the public during consideration of agenda item 7.
12. To consider and agree 2021/22 Grant Aid applications (see enclosed).
13. To agree a date for the next meeting of the Committee.
14. Any urgent matters at the Chairman of the meeting's discretion. (*Matters to be raised under this item should be written out (if possible) and given to the Chairman of the meeting or the Clerk before the meeting begins.*)

Jane Kevan
Town Clerk
17 September 2020

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H agenda 0920 FandGPCcommittee

HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE ONLINE MEETING HELD ON 17 AUGUST 2020

724.	PRESENT: Councillors R Hull, S Ball, T G E Gillanders, T Cessford, C R Homer, J M Graham and T Pearson.
725.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Councillors T Dodds and J Ord.
726.	MINUTES of the meeting held on 21 July 2020, having been circulated, were AGREED.
727.	MATTERS ARISING: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN AND IT BACKUP (minute 715 and action log refers). A further revised quote for a full IT onsite and offsite backup was considered and AGREED.b) HEXHAM ABBEY PCC FUNDING (minute 718 and action log refers). It was noted that the payment is pending receipt of the risk assessment and proof of public liability insurance.c) CHRISTMAS LIGHTS (minute 719 and action log refers). It was noted the Community Engagement Committee had accepted the part of the quote relating to the trees and Shambles and that the lighting company has been advised accordingly to do this work.d) STREET SWEEPER (minute 720 and action log refers). It was noted that the County Council has been contacted regarding a reduction of this year's costs.e) TOURISM (minute 721 and action log refers). It was noted this had been referred to the Community Engagement Committee and it is hoped a working group will meet soon.
728.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: Councillor Homer declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Board member of Hexham Community Partnership.
729.	FINANCIAL REPORT: The bank statement and account reconciliation together with the 2020/21 budget report to 31 July 2020 were received and accepted. Copies are attached to the minutes.
730.	HEXHAM COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP: Together with Board members Roger Hancock, John Bridge and Wendy Best, Peter Rodger, Chairman, provided information on the Partnership. He advised of achievements in the last year, including the Spring Festival, Hexham Hidden Gardens, Spook Night and the Christmas Market in 2019; the Community Showcase event, with 45 groups participating; involvement in Heritage Open Days; the No 28 project; continued collaboration with the Forum Cinema; training 14 Town Guides; tourism promotion through the Visit Hexham website, social media, nearly completed tourism App and North Tourism Fair; town clean-up events and clean and green promotions; and involvement with the Hexham Hub and HSHAZ work. Regarding future plans, he noted the Covid situation and that

	<p>HCP is in a good position to help in Hexham but that he would like to prioritise events where possible, tourism promotion and its tourism strategy 2021-24, culture and town regeneration, the website, Forum Cinema, post-Covid support, partnerships, and to continue the Hexham Communities Together work.</p> <p>It was noted that the Grant Aid paid in April has been used for salaries, office costs and office rent. It was further noted that interviews are currently being held for a new management post, with funding in place for the salary until next March, but that the successful candidate will need to source funding for their salary long-term.</p> <p>Questions asked included other sources of funding, staffing and about the Cinema. It was noted the Cinema will reopen in early September and that changes have been made to the auditorium to fit 50% of the former capacity. With audience support, a small profit should still be made. The first of planned outdoor screenings took place last Saturday and tickets sold out in less than two hours.</p> <p>It was also noted that HCP currently has 28 partners (other organisations in Hexham) and approximately 100 members.</p>
731.	<p>NEXT MEETING: It was AGREED that the next Committee meeting will be held at 6.30pm on Wednesday 23 September 2020.</p>

Action Log

Check the national agreement and re-refer staff salaries to the Committee once agreed (minute 659)	Clerk
Arrange the IT backup (minute 727a)	Clerk

Chairman

HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Under the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council on 3 September 2012 Councillors must declare if they have a disclosable interest in any matters under consideration.

To do so Councillors must use one of the following statements:

1. "I have a disclosable pecuniary interest
in..... (for example) Agenda item 3,
Planning application number 13/1234".
(NOTE: Code of Conduct paragraphs 11&15 apply).

2. "I have a disclosable personal interest
in..... (for example) Agenda item 4,
Grant aid application by Hexham Youth Initiative
(NOTE: Code of Conduct paragraph 13 applies).

Councillors should familiarise themselves with the Code of Conduct regarding the definitions of (A) pecuniary interest and (B) other personal interest and their obligations when declaring any interest.

To ensure Councillors interests are correctly minuted please use one of the above statements when declaring an interest.

NB. Should a Councillor wish to take part in the consideration and voting on a matter or matters in which he/she has a disclosable interest then they may request a dispensation be granted to enable them to take part in the discussion and voting on it but at least 10 days' notice must be given for any dispensation request.

HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL
FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL, COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE AND
REPRESENTATIVE PROTOCOL

The Committee is requested to consider and recommend the following Communications Protocol, Complaints Procedure and Representative Protocol to Full Council.

HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL
COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL

A. Correspondence

- a. The point of contact for the Town Council is the Clerk and all correspondence for the Council should be addressed to the Clerk.
- b. The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.
- c. No individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Council, a Committee, Sub-Committee or Working Group. In particular, Councillors do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.
- d. All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper or email using Council email format.
- e. Where correspondence from the Clerk to a Councillor is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person (e.g. copy to XX).

B. Agenda Items for Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Groups

- a. Agendas should be clear and concise and contain sufficient information to enable Councillors to make an informed decision and for the public to understand what matters are being considered and what decisions may be taken at the meeting.
- b. Items for information should be kept to a minimum on any agenda.
- c. Where the Clerk or a Councillor wishes Councillors to receive matters for "information only", this information is to be circulated via the Clerk.

C. Communications with the Press and Public

- a. The Clerk will clear all press reports or comments to the media, with the Chairman of the Council.
- b. Press reports from the Council, its Committees or Working Groups, should be from the Clerk or via the reporter's own attendance at a meeting.
- c. Unless a Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it must be clearly reported as their personal view.
- d. Unless a Councillor is certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.
- e. If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted Complaints Procedure.

D. Councillor Correspondence to External Parties

- a. As the Clerk should be sending most of the Council's correspondence, any correspondence from a Councillor to other bodies needs to make clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the Council.
- b. A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Council or a Councillor's role within it should be sent to the Clerk, and be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised.

E. Communications with Town Council Employees

- a. Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so (i.e. for example, three or more Councillors sitting as a committee with appropriate delegated powers from the Council).
- b. No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chairman of the Council, the Chairman of a Committee or are styled "Leader" of the Council, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee that are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.
- c. E-mails:
 - i. Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk and any reasons for urgency should be stated;
 - ii. Information to other Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk;

- iii. E-mails from Councillors to external parties should be copied to the Clerk;
 - iv. Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so.
- d. Meetings with the Clerk or other staff:
- i. Wherever possible an appointment should be made;
 - ii. Meetings should be relevant to the work of that particular officer;
 - iii. Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate Council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

September 2020 – Date for Review: September 2025
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HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This procedure covers routine complaints and those that could be described as habitual and vexatious. The majority of complaints generally fall under the first category and only occasionally move to the second option covered by paragraph 4 onwards.
- 1.2. Habitual or vexatious complaints are defined here as unreasonable complaints, enquiries or outcomes that are repeatedly or obsessively pursued.
- 1.3. Some types of complaint will be handled outside this procedure: financial irregularity will be handled by the Council's own auditor; criminal activity by the Police; member conduct by the standards committee of the relevant principal authority; employee conduct by internal disciplinary procedure.

2. Complaints Procedure for Hexham Town Council

- 2.1. Council will handle complaints in Full Council or nominate Councillors who are authorised to deal with complaints but are not involved with the particular case.
- 2.2. If the complaint is handled by the Full Council then two nominated Councillors should not take part in the proceedings. They will then be available to handle any appeal, if required.
- 2.3. The Clerk will normally represent the Council through the proceedings but a nominated Councillor may act instead.

3. The Procedure

3.1. Before the Meeting

- The complainant will complain in writing to the Clerk or to the Chairman of the Council. Assistance will be given to the claimant if necessary.
- The complainant will be advised when the matter will be considered and whether it will be treated confidentially or heard by a Committee. A copy of this procedure will also be given to the complainant.
- The complainant will be invited to attend a meeting with a representative if wished.
- Not later than seven clear working days prior to the meeting, the complainant and the Council will exchange copies of any documentation or other evidence to be relied on.

3.2. At the Council Meeting or Committee Meeting

- The Chairman of the meeting will introduce everyone and explain the procedure.
- The complainant (or representative) will outline the grounds for complaint before any questions from the Clerk and then from members if present.
- The Clerk will explain the Council's position before any questions from the complainant, and from members if present.

- The complainant and the Clerk will then summarise their position. They then leave the room while members decide whether or not the grounds for the complaint have been made.
- If the decision is unlikely to be finalised on that day an estimated date will be given.

3.3. After the Meeting

- The decision will be confirmed in writing within seven working days together with details of any action to be taken.
- The result of the proceedings will be reported at the next Council meeting after the appeal period has passed, ensuring that agreed confidential issues are appropriately respected.

3.4. Appeals

- Should the complainant not agree with the decision they will be entitled to appeal the decision within fourteen days of receipt of the result of the proceedings.
- The Councillors nominated to handle the appeal will, within twenty-one days of receiving the appeal, examine the way in which the Council dealt with the complaint.
- If procedures were correctly handled by the Council then the appellant will be notified that the appeal has not been successful. If the complaint was not handled correctly it will be referred back for consideration as at 3.2.
- The appellant will be notified of the result of the appeals process within fourteen days.

4. Habitual and Vexatious Complaints

- 4.1. Council will endeavour to deal with complaints in an efficient, equitable and effective manner.
- 4.2. The Council may have to initiate further action if the complainant behaves in ways which can: impede the investigation of the complaint; have significant resource implications; hinder the complaints service for others; be offensive, abusive or threatening.

5. Aims of this Section

- 5.1. The aim of the Council is to manage each case properly, consistently, fairly and respectfully and ensure that the complaint, not the complainant, is the issue during any procedure and decision making.
- 5.2. It is important to establish guidelines for identifying habitual or vexatious complainants and that any decisions made follow agreed guidelines and procedures.

6. Guidelines

- 6.1. Council will try to keep open the lines of communication with appropriate support

e.g. clarifying the reason for the outcome; offering relevant support for a complainant with special needs; suggesting an independent representative to help present their case.

- 6.2. Any action taken as a result of proven persistent and/or vexatious complaint will be proportionate to the degree of annoyance/aggravation caused.

7. Procedure

- 7.1. The possibility of there being an unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious complaint will be brought to the attention of the Chairman or Vice Chairman to ensure that the complaint has been dealt with according to the Council's complaints procedure.
- 7.2. The Chairman or Vice Chairman will contact the complainant in an effort to resolve the situation.
- 7.3. In the case of a meeting, if there is a personality issue, the complainant may nominate another Councillor who will be made aware of all the facts. A complainant may wish to bring a representative. The Council will give appropriate support (e.g. special needs) to the complainant in choosing a representative etc.
- 7.4. The Chairman/Vice Chairman will:
 - Listen to the grievance/complaint
 - Assure the complainant of confidentiality with personal details
 - Carefully explain what action the Council has taken within its remit to resolve the complaint
 - Offer any relevant support about the complaints procedure to the complainant
 - Suggest complaint routes available if the complaint is outside the Council's remit
 - Explain how the complainant's actions are of concern but are hampering the complaints procedure
 - Explain what actions the Council may take
 - Seek an assurance that the persistent/unreasonable nature of complaint will be addressed
- 7.5. The outcome and relevant details of the meeting will be noted.

8. Decision

- 8.1. If the complainant continues to behave in an unreasonable and/or vexatious way, the Chairman or Vice Chairman will seek the approval of the Council to follow the policy and agree what action(s) to take, e.g. restrict or refuse any further contact.
- 8.2. The complainant will be advised by letter from the Clerk of this action, including any further actions the complainant may take with other bodies including their right to obtain independent advice.
- 8.3. The Council will record the decision and hold all relevant correspondence except all personal details about the complaint and the complainant, which will be stored appropriately in line with the Data Protection Act.
- 8.4. The Clerk will notify all Councillors and members of staff as appropriate.

- 8.5. Any new complaint from any person who has come under the policy must be treated on its merit.

9. Review

- 9.1. The decision taken at Section 8 will be reviewed after 6 months. The complainant will be notified of the result if the decision to apply the policy has been reversed.

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HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL **REPRESENTATIVE PROTOCOL**

Guidelines for Councillors representing the Council on another body/organisation or in general.

Scope

It is of paramount importance that Councillors represent both the Council and themselves in the correct manner to ensure that both are not misquoted or misrepresented and views belonging to one or the other are not confused in conversations or meetings.

Situations

Councillors may be requested or volunteer to be a Council representative on another body. This could include attending a group as the Council's representative or attending a meeting of another authority as the Council's representative to pass on information or ask a question.

Also, as most Councillors live or work in the town they may often be stopped by residents who have information, ideas, or problems which they wish to have resolved.

Councillor as a Representative

Hexham presently has a number of groups with Councillor Representatives attending on its behalf, such as Hexham Youth Initiative and Hexham Community Partnership. Whilst attending these groups, Councillors attending as a Hexham Town Council representative should only put forward the views agreed by the Council and not their own personal views. In principle, all Councillors should abide by the democratic decisions of the Council once made.

If you are attending a meeting as a Hexham Town Council representative but feel you have a view, questions or objection which you would like to express as an individual or as a view held by another group or committee then this must be clearly communicated to the meeting you are attending (see some examples below).

No member of the Council should misrepresent or do something 'in the name of the Council' which they have not been authorised to do so by the Council.

Examples

1. The Town Council agreed it supported a particular planning application but you have decided to attend the planning authority meeting because you personally did not like the planning application and have a strong objection towards its design and position.

If you speak and you introduce yourself as a Town Councillor for Hexham Town Council then you may only offer the Town Council view - which was that it supported the application.

If you wish to express your personal views at the meeting about the application, then you should not introduce yourself as a Town Councillor for Hexham Town Council and must make it very clear to the meeting that you are expressing your personal views.

If you do not make yourself clear about whose views you are expressing to the meeting then the Town Council could be quoted as not liking or objecting to the

application when this was not the case.

2. You have been asked to attend a community meeting as the Council's representative, for no particular purpose but to gather information of what is happening and to see if any items will affect Hexham. You are only attending the meeting because you are the representative of Hexham Town Council and otherwise you would not have been invited.

The meeting goes off track and begins discussing an item which is not at all relevant to the town of Hexham but that you are interested in and have knowledge about. If you engage in conversation regarding issues, opinions or objections you should make the meeting clearly aware that this is your own personal view and not the views of the Town Council - remembering that you are only there because of the Town Council.

Councillor as a Resident

Councillors may sometimes be stopped by residents when they are out and about who have information or ideas for them to listen to or problems which they wish to be resolved or passed on. It is important that these queries are noted for either passing on or raising with the Council.

No member of the Council should promise to do something, or agree to do anything, which they have not been authorised to do by the Council.

Example

A resident approaches you because they know you are a Town Councillor. They ask if you might consider their idea which they feel would make things better for their age group.

You go to inspect, for example, an area of land where they are suggesting changes and meet with the land owner and discuss the project. You agree with the resident that the Council thinks this is a good idea and promise that the Council will carry out this project.

These actions, described above, **are wrong** in a number of ways.

- You should never be seen to be acting on behalf of the Council by getting involved in discussions which the Council is not aware of, such as with a land owner.
- You as an individual should not be giving the Council's 'endorsement' or 'agreement' to anything without its express permission.
- You should not be agreeing to carry out any works, however small, on behalf of the Council.

The recommended course of action to an approach of this kind from a resident would be to listen to the idea/suggestion, note the details, and then raise this idea at a Council meeting for the Council to consider.

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