

Minutes of the Ordinary YTC Meeting held at
Challoner House,
Challoner Rd.,
Yarm, TS15 9DS.

Date: Tuesday, 14th January 2025

Time: 7pm

Members of the public were invited to
attend the meeting

Juliet Johnson - Town Clerk / Proper Officer



Yarm Town Council
Town Hall
High Street
Yarm
TS15 9AH

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YARM TOWN COUNCIL - MINUTES

(incorporating Weigh & Tolls)

PRESENT: Cllr Brian Newcombe (Chair); Cllr Steve Atkinson (Vice Chair); Cllr Philip Addison; Cllr Marje Blaire; Cllr John Coulson; Cllr Joyce Hardy; Cllr Yvonne Pybus; Cllr Barbara Wegg; Cllr Robert Wegg; Rate Payers' Representative (RPR) - Karen Shields; Town Clerk/Proper Officer/RFO*; 3 members of the public. (* Responsible Finance Officer)

1.0 Notice of Meeting - it was confirmed that public notice of the meeting has been given in accordance with schedule 12, paragraph 10 (2) of the LGA 1972.

2.0 To appoint a Chairman in the absence of the Chair and/or Vice Chair - N/A

3.0 To Receive and Approve Apologies for Absence - Apologies were received from **Cllr Monck** and **Cllr Smailes** due to illness. A vote was taken and it was agreed to accept apologies from both Councillors. **Cllr R. Wegg** questioned the need to approve apologies. The Clerk confirmed that the meeting should decide whether apologies are accepted.

4.0 Code of Conduct | Declaration of Interest | Dispensation

- a) To record declarations of interest from members of any item to be discussed
- b) To consider, vote upon and record any requests for dispensation

4.1 Cllrs B&R Wegg declared an interest in all matters relating to item 10.3 on the agenda. No requests for dispensation were received.

5.0 Confirmation of Minutes

To approve the minutes of the previous meetings:

5.1 Yarm Town Council (incorporating Weigh & Tolls) held on Tuesday 10th December 2024 and approve their signature by the Chair of the meeting. **PROPOSED:** Cllr Atkinson; **SECONDED:** Cllr Blair **AGREED**

With the exception of any item identified above as containing exempt or confidential information under the Local Government Act 1972 – section 100A(4), members of the public (other than those prohibited from doing so) are entitled to attend this meeting and/or have access to the agenda

5.2 **Finance and Governance Committee** held on Tuesday, 7th January 2025 and approve their signature by the Chair of the meeting.

Cllr R Wegg stated that the vote on item 7. had been minuted incorrectly as **Cllr Addison** had, in the end, voted against his own Precept proposal. **The Clerk** and **Cllr Addison** confirmed that this was not the case (simply that Cllr Addison's hand was raised last and crossed over with the Chair asking if anyone was voting against the proposal); The meeting accepted that the vote had been recorded correctly. A typographical error was asked to be corrected i.e. Cllr Addison had not proposed and seconded the motion, Cllr Atkinson had proposed it and Cllr Addison seconded. Subject to the typo agreed, the minutes were approved.

PROPOSED Cllr Addison; SECONDED Cllr Blair; AGREED

6.0 **Clerk's Report: Matters Arising** (DOCUMENT REFERS) - **Cllr Atkinson** requested that the agreement between YTC and the Bowling Club be chased up - currently with YTC solicitors. **Cllr Newcombe** (Chair) wished to further comment on the previous month's item re 'Email Protocol: Avoiding Exclusion'; he suggested that **Cllr Pybus** had blocked him rather than not receiving his emails for another reason. **The Clerk** clarified that this matter had been solved during the last meeting i.e. Cllrs should check that they are using the correct email address for Cllr Pybus i.e. yvonne@yarmtc.org, not yvonne.pybus@yarmtc.org. There were no further queries regarding the Matters Arising report.

7.0 Council Finances

7.1 **To authorise payment of the accounts** - Accounts Payable (DOCUMENT REFERS) (includes Weigh & Tolls).

Cllr Addison requested that 1 further payment be added to the list presented - £2,520 for the annual contract for CCTV with Stockton Borough Council (SBC). **Cllr Addison** proposed the Payments list be approved, it was seconded & agreed.

7.2 **Bank Reconciliations** (DOCUMENTS REFER) - The meeting noted the Bank Reconciliations.

7.3 **Income and Expenditure Report** (DOCUMENT REFERS) - **The Clerk** referenced an error in the print out (namely bowling club expenditure appearing under office expenses). The meeting noted and accepted the Income and Expenditure Report.

7.4 **To Note the Forecast Budget Outturn Report for April '24-March'25** (DOCUMENT REFERS) - **Cllr Addison** asked for any questions regarding the Estimated Outturn Report (previously discussed at the Finance and Governance Committee on 7th January 2025). There were no further questions and the meeting noted the report.

Cllr Coulson requested a recorded vote for items 7.5 & 7.6.

7.5 **To Review and Approve the Budget for April '25 - March '26** (DOCUMENTS REFER) - **The Clerk/RFO** presented the budget as proposed by the Finance and Governance Committee (7.01.25) and recapped the main issues and risks that had been discussed/considered and asked if there were any further thoughts on anything not included or to be amended. **Cllr R Wegg** stated that the budget had already been agreed at Finance and Governance and was already approved as the minutes for this meeting had just been approved. **The Clerk** clarified the difference between approving minutes (i.e. detail and accuracy) as opposed to approving proposals made by a committee that still required ratification by Ordinary YTC, as in this example - a major proposal/decision that is the council's budget for the next financial year and associated precept request.

Cllr Atkinson stated that YTC needed to add a budget line for HR Support and the figure of £1,200 was proposed. The debate moved to 7.6 below.

7.6 To Review and Agree YTC's Precept Request for '25-'26 (DOCUMENT REFERS) - **The Clerk** reminded the meeting of the Precept request and % increase on last year's request that this represents (i.e. 3% increase to cover inflation), as agreed at the Finance and Governance Committee. Prior to the meeting, on request from several councillors, the Clerk had forwarded a further table showing the approximate effect of other % increases on a) the total for the Precept request and b) different council tax bands (i.e. the portion that is paid to YTC, not the total paid to SBC). **Cllr Coulson** stated that after further careful consideration he would advocate a further 1% increase (raising, approximately, a further £1,400 at the cost of a further 39p for the year for a band D property). This would provide the Council with a little more resilience should inflation be higher or in the instance of unforeseen events. **Cllr Coulson** asked to bring in a member of the public who stated that she and another person who'd been present at the Finance and Governance meeting both felt that the % increase proposed was too low, a budget should be set that avoided touching reserves and that the Clerk had advised similarly (having more knowledge than herself). **Cllrs Atkinson** concurred reminding the meeting that the 5% increase of the previous year had worked well (**Cllr Newcombe** agreed) i.e. had helped the council be resilient in the face of unforeseen events e.g. the need to automate the Town Hall clock, which was a 'one off' but other eventualities may occur (reserves needing to remain robust). **The Clerk** briefed the meeting as to the General Reserves and Earmarked Reserves position detailing where sums had been reserved for potential expenditure that might not be avoided (e.g. by elections/elections) and advised that these amounts should not be touched (despite the option for virements) and gave guidance as to the desirable General Reserves position (% against annual expenditure); Cllr B Wegg suggested further belt tightening; the meeting was reminded of the 'extreme belt tightening' already . Discussion ensued as to the advantages and disadvantages of raising the precept request to either 4 or 5%.

It was proposed (Cllr Coulson) and seconded (Cllr Atkinson) that the precept should be requested at a rate of 5% increase on the 2024/2025 amount (i.e. **£144,434**).

For a 5% increase: Cllrs Atkinson, Coulson, Blair and Hardy.

It was proposed and seconded that the precept should be requested at a rate of 3% increase on the 2024/2025 amount.

For 3% increase: Cllrs Pybus, Addison, Newcombe, B.Wegg and R.Wegg.

It was therefore agreed that the precept request would be a 3% increase on the amount requested for the 2024/2025 budget (i.e. **£141,683**), as proposed in the documents from the Finance and Governance Committee.

8.0 To Review and Consider the Correspondence List (DOCUMENT REFERS) - Noted. There were no queries.

9.0 Adjournment and Questions From the Public - **The Chair / Cllr Newcombe** adjourned the meeting for questions from the public. Discussion took place in which a member of the public was asked about their observations re. reported damage to Snaith's Field it is understood occurred due to a contractor (attending a nearby residency) driving across it repeatedly. Parts of this play area have been churned up & paths were reportedly obstructed.

ACTION: **The Clerk** will write to the resident re. seeking remedy from the contractor. **The Chair** will photograph the damage and forward to the Clerk (Wednesday 15.01.25)

10.0 Policy and Resources:

10.1 Weigh and Tolls Matters: Events and Heritage Centre

10.1.1 Events Update (inc. 2025 plans) - Not covered.

With the exception of any item identified above as containing exempt or confidential information under the Local Government Act 1972 – section 100A(4), members of the public (other than those prohibited from doing so) are entitled to attend this meeting and/or have access to the agenda

10.1.2 Yarm Town Hall Heritage Centre: Update (inc. Rail Bi-Centenary) - Dev. Manager / Cllr Hardy

reported to the meeting that planning for the walks and other programme events by Friends of YTHHC were underway. The Head of Layfield Primary is communicating with other Yarm Primary heads about the book by children that tells the story of the Stockton and Darlington Railway and working out how best to schedule the workshops across the 3 schools. A workshop could also be held at Challoner House if thought to be appropriate. The Head at Layfield also suggested that field trip education packs could accompany a primary school version of the railway related heritage walks (collated between the Friends Group and the schools) - short visits to key sites (e.g.) skew-arch bridge; cattle arch etc. The planned main exhibition for YTHHC re the First Passenger Railway - 'Difficult Decisions, Disasters and Days Out' - would also encompass accounts of great railway days out by children (building on the example of a regular trip that Layfield organise with their pupils).

The Clerk & Cllr Hardy clarified that whilst Cllr Smailes (Chair of Events) had not advocated a YTC budget line for Railway Bicentenary work, any of her YTC proposals (scavenge hunt and roundabout Locomotion silhouette) could be publicised along with the Friends of YTHHC led projects; it was simply useful to have clarity of who was leading what and to ensure and support/encouragement for the independence of the new Friends of YTHHC group.

10.1.3 New Christmas Lights Sign and Storage of Lights Signs - Cllr Blair

reported that the Merry Christmas sign on the north face of the Town Hall now needed to come down (repair to the star, following Storm Darmagh will then take place) and go into storage but that the hatch for the Fellowship Hall loft was now reported as too small to accommodate it; any new south facade sign would also need storage. **The Chair** suggested he would dismantle it further. **The Clerk** stated that this would compromise the electrics and cause it to need remaking. The suggestion was for it to be bubble wrapped and stored flat against walls in the Brickyard Allotment Tea Hut (properly fitted out & without dampness/condensation).

ACTION: Clerk to reconfirm storage arrangements/measurements - preference being Fellowship Hall loft followed by Brickyard Tea Hut or Challoner House loft space.

The Chair has obtained costs for string lights on Yarm Bridge. Cllr Pybus had advocated string lights all year round as the bridge was an important 'welcome' and gateway to the town (Cllr Coulson concurred). It was suggested that string lights would not be possible due to 'a heritage concern' regarding the bridge/borough bridges in general.

ACTION: Clerk to confirm with SBC Heritage Officer what the issue is regarding the bridge and potential for string lights between the lamposts; **Chair** to forward to the Clerk the string light costs he has obtained.

10.2 Cemeteries Report - General Update

Cllr B Wegg reported that white stones / gravel on graves remain an issue; the audit of graves where this is the case has been completed and families will be written to (agreed to start this after Christmas). Materials used for edging graves can also be a problem. **Cllr B Wegg** will be organising a Cemeteries Committee meeting to consider these issues further, especially in relation to grounds maintenance. Potential locations for Remembrance areas (memorial plaques and scattering of ashes) has now been scoped and quotes will be obtained for the panels to enclose this/these area(s). Confirmation of guidance/legislation re. consecrated ground and creating areas for scattering of ashes areas is being sought (ICCM and Diocese of York). **Cllr R Wegg** said preparation for these areas had already happened many years ago but that there had been no demand; the Clerk confirmed that she would check up-to-date guidance. Discussion took place re. where to source and have memorial plaques engraved locally.

ACTION: The Clerk will create draft spec for plaques and chase up guidance re memorial areas.

10.3 Allotments Report - General Update

Cllr Pybus gave a report on costs for current repair and maintenance issues: toilet door for upper allotments; fence, gate and posts repair, noticeboard mounting and locks (circa £1060). It was stated that this could come from repairs and maintenance budget with a possible contribution from the Allotments Development fund. There are 4 plot vacancies at Brickyard, 2+ at Worsall, 2 evictions pending and lots of moving around (leaving and transfers). **Cllrs Newcombe and R Wegg** made recommendations as to their opinions of what should be done about the allotments toilet doors. A metal door is preferable (several second hand metal doors have been previously looked at to fit but have not been suitable). The **Clerk** presented the background information and circumstances pending the two potential evictions; **Cllrs R&B Wegg** felt that both tenants involved should still have been sent rent demands despite the circumstance. It was suggested that **Cllr Pybus** be given dispensation to act on the second eviction, following further research as to the circumstances, should she deem it appropriate, the first case being more clear cut. It was proposed to support Cllr Pybus to continue with the 2 evictions proposed (including dispensation to follow-through or not on the second eviction, dependent upon further research).

PROPOSED: Cllr Atkinson; **SECONDED:** Cllr Pybus; **AGREED.**

(inc. proposals for repairs and maintenance expenditure - totalling max. £1060)

10.4 Re-confirmation of Arrangements re. Presentation to Clock Winder, EGM

Cllr Blair (lead Cllr on these arrangements) expressed her concern that it has emerged that the proposed date of the 21st January excludes 5-6 councillors (also being on holiday herself that week). **The Clerk** had been charged with clarifying arrangements at the last meeting and had spoken to the Clockwinder (once it had become apparent many could not make the 21st), re. dates during the week of 27th January which he'd confirmed were fine and had asked that he would like **Cllr R Wegg** (a friend since childhood) to make any presentation to him that would be photographed. **Cllr Newcombe** stated he had now also spoken to the Clockwinder and had made all the arrangements himself and would be sticking to the 21st as he, **Cllrs R Wegg, B Wegg and Smailes** could all attend and that was all who was needed. **Cllr Pybus** stated that this deliberately shut out the majority of the Council & comment was made that this was not in the spirit of what had been intended. **Cllr Newcombe** stated that he would collect the Clockwinder on the morning of the event to attend the meeting and would then take him along with **Cllr R Wegg**, and himself, to be photographed under the clock outside the Town Hall. **Cllr Newcombe** stated that the Clockwinder had confirmed to him that 21st January was the only date he could attend and that he was now not available at the end of January (the **Clerk** and **Cllr R Wegg** stated that this was contrary to what they understood). It was noted that whilst the presentation had been agreed early in 2024, YTC had been delayed in making the presentation over a number of months due to a number of serious personal circumstances. **Cllr Coulson** expressed his dismay at the turn part of the discussion had taken, given how important it was to individual Councillors & for as many as possible to be present, given the respect for and gratitude to the Clockwinder. **Cllr Blair** concurred; **Cllr Newcombe** challenged **Cllr Blair** as to why she was leading on this matter *[Clerk's Note: Cllr Blair had made the original proposal to formally recognise the Clockwinder's longevity of service and commitment, becoming lead on this]*. The meeting was reminded of the Clerk's role (supporting Cllr Blair) in making such arrangements (practicalities) to ensure fairness (i.e. that arrangements weren't angled in favour of some and not others) noting that whilst the Chair can call an EGM as he sees fit, there had been general understanding that this was a special occasion with the aim of finding a date that all/majority could attend *(NB and the reason an EGM rather than a party had been advocated to ensure the Clockwinder's service is then properly minuted and will thus exist as a historic record within the archives for posterity)*.

ACTION: Cllr B Wegg was charged with agreeing the date with the Clockwinder and the Clerk gave Cllr B Wegg all the availability and non availability collated from Cllrs. (i.e. majority availability beginning from the week of 27th January, excluding 28th and 29th, and into February to accommodate Cllr Newcombe (who gave further unavailability). Cllr B Wegg to get back to the Clerk having spoken again with the Clockwinder

10.5 Proposal for Memorial Plaque on Bridge at Willey Flatts

Cllr Pybus detailed this proposal in respect of the young person who'd been involved in designing the bridge who is sadly no longer with us. Discussion took place regarding size and type of plaque required.

ACTION: Cllr Pybus will consult with the family and liaise with the Clerk to create a spec for the plaque identify and seek permission from SBC.

10.6 Request for Support from Yarm Fun Run: £1,000 for Medals and Trophies - Cllr Coulson presented this request and the history of the relationship of YTC and the Fun Run was given i.e. it used to be linked in with the Gala so YTC had been a partner providing in-kind support with the stage and context for all presentations along with toilet, medics & insurance provision etc. Discussion revolved around: the recent budget discussion, 'belt tightening', agreeing to not fund further projects/events; the benefits of the fun-run and impact gained by YTC supporting this; Cllr Coulson advocated that the Fun Run provided greater benefits to residents and more impactful profile for YTC than the £4k given to school fairs in 2024 (Cllrs B&R Wegg & Cllr Newcombe disagreed); the RPR suggested that YTC should consider if the decision regarding the proposed £1k support for the Fun Run was more about achieving community/area benefit or PR benefit for YTC (even if both to some degree); there is paid entry to the fun-run but it is understood this goes to charity (run by The Lions); concerns as to whether this would become an 'annual ask'; comment that funding support is raised from different sources each year.

ACTION: Clerk to contact C.Walker & obtain details of how the Fun Run is funded and budget breakdown.

11.0 Planning & Environment: - Cllr Monck

11.1 Matters Arising: Planning Applications & Lists - no queries were raised as regards planning lists and applications.

The Clerk briefed the meeting regarding a request from RSPB to run an information stand near the Town Hall this Spring; this was agreed. **PROPOSED: Cllr B Wegg; SECONDED: Cllr Atkinson AGREED**

The Clerk reminded the meeting about consultation meetings regarding proposals for the previous Judges Hotel and site (boutique hotel and associated services), prior to a planning application. These are being held at Kirklevington Village Hall (20.1.25, 15.00-18.30pm) and at St Mary & St Romuald Community Hall, Yarm (23.1.25, 15.00-18.30pm). 11.2

11.2 Update: Latest Play Area Reports & Issues - circulated (no discussion).

12.0 Adjournment and Final Questions from the Public - The Chair adjourned the meeting for final questions from the public. A member of the public reported that a number of allotment holders at Yarm Allotments had commented on the very positive difference that Cllr Pybus has made to the allotments in her role as Chair of the Allotments Committee.

13.0 To agree any content for the YTC website and requests for Facebook features

13.1 Feedback on items to date & proposed new items - The Clerk proposed that whilst Friends of YTHHC created posts on their own Facebook page these could continue to be shared on the YTC page e.g. programme for Stockton and Darlington Railway (and any YTC additions).

14.0 To receive items for information and consideration for the next agenda - No items currently identified.

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15.0 To confirm the date, time and location of the next YTC meeting (Challoner House): 7pm, 11th February 2025

This part of the meeting closed at 8.25pm. **The Chair** asked that the meeting resolve to hear confidential items as listed (in the context of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Section 1 (2)). Members of the public were asked to leave.

16.0 Confidential Items

The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Sec 1 (2) - A body may, by resolution, exclude the public from a meeting (whether during the whole or part of the proceedings) whenever publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons stated in the resolution and arising from the nature of that business or of the proceedings; and where such a resolution is passed, this Act shall not require the meeting to be open to the public during proceedings to which the resolution applies.

16.1 Staffing Issues: - Cllr Atkinson / Staffing Committee

A) Complaint

A, i) **Cllr Atkinson** consulted the meeting and clarified the process for discussing a complaint and went on to present all the information received, which included the approved minute relating to the situation (from the YTC meeting of 12.11.24) and 4 statements which were read out in full: 2 from witnesses to the event complained about, 1 from someone who'd encountered the complainant prior to the event complained about and 1 from the person involved / complained about. The complaint was not read out as it had been circulated to all prior to the meeting. There were comments about and following the reading of the statements regarding the event in question, including that the Chair thought the complaint was about how another person was treated, not the complainant themselves. **Cllr Atkinson** read out a statement regarding the conclusions of the Staffing Committee having considered the complaint, the statements and all information/circumstances provided to them. The complaint was not upheld. The conduct of a member of staff involved was complimented. As part of the statement, comment was made regarding how women (within YTC and generally) should be treated (and not treated); comment was made warning that whilst YTC took complaints seriously and sought to deal with any fairly (in line with procedure*), should any member of YTC consider seeking to generate, create or support false complaints, this would be against the Code of Conduct for elected members (and a serious matter for any staff member/contractor). A proposal was made to accept the findings of the Staffing Committee and communicate to the complainant that no further action would be taken; this was seconded and agreed by a vote (there were 2 abstentions - **Cllr R Wegg and Cllr Newcombe**). **Cllr R Wegg** stated that generating statements/complaints makes the council a laughing stock and should not happen/had to stop.

A, ii)* **The Chair / Cllr Newcombe** sought to introduce a second complaint that was not on the agenda. It was confirmed that no complaint had been received and there was not an agenda item relating to it. **Cllr Newcombe** claimed that the matter should be heard as it came from not only himself but also a friend of his (also the complainant) who had phoned **Cllr Pybus**, as a friend, about the matter and to make a complaint (Cllr Pybus also being a member of the Staffing Committee). In the ensuing discussion, the majority of councillors (including Cllr Pybus who'd received the phone call) confirmed that a phone conversation, such as it was understood had taken place, was not a formal complaint (an invitation was made that any complaint should be submitted in writing), and that the course of action currently unfolding was inappropriate on a number of levels. **Cllr Pybus** re-confirmed that she'd understood the call to be a phone call between friends (the idea that the phone call was actually a complaint was not stated during the call); the **Chair/Cllr Newcombe** replied that Cllr Pybus was therefore permitting harassment of her own friend to take place & continue (the Chair also re-confirming who he was making the allegation of harassment about and that this person was therefore 'getting away with it').

[* Clerk's Note: the context of the above paragraph, A,ii) relates to the safe-keeping and care of Yarm's Mayoral Regalia]

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B) Update re. Employee Request: Purchase and Deployment of a Body-Worn Audio/Visual Recorder; Accompanying Employee for Specified Meetings; Communication Methods.

The Clerk explained why she had discussed the above with the Staffing Committee (aspects of which members of the Staffing Committee had recommended to her previously). **The Chair** asked why a body-worn/audio visual recorder was required and several Cllrs present referred him to previous matters discussed. The Clerk gave the example of words / actions being misconstrued / misrepresented and the audio visual recorder might provide support in this context (e.g. in relation to any complaints that might come forward) and in terms of personal safety. **Cllr Atkinson** asked the Council to support B) above which was largely supported. **The Chair** stated that he recorded all conversations with the Clerk and told her so beforehand - **the Clerk** had a different recollection. **Cllr R Wegg** stated that it was wrong for only a few / the Staffing Committee to receive certain material as all councillors are equal; it was pointed out that all the material relating to item A,i) above had been fully presented to all members present. **Cllr Newcombe** stated that he would be referring all complainants to the press (having done so with a complaint during the previous week) adding that lies were being told; the majority of councillors present expressed dissatisfaction and dismay at these remarks, calling for unity and for the council to work together to support each other serving Yarm.

The meeting closed at 9.03pm.

**It was pointed out that the download button on the YTC website Complaints Procedure was not working (Clerk to address).*