

Town Meeting Notes (draft v 1), 6th January 2025, The Royal Hotel, Whitby

Chair: Nigel Ward

Minute Taker: Joyce Stangoe

Attendees: See petition, plus other non-Whitby residents, including 6 WTCllr's

1. **Election of Chair:** Nigel Ward was nominated and seconded; no other nominations received. Nigel was elected by 100% vote.
2. **Previous Meeting Notes:** The Chair welcomed everyone to the Meeting and explained that this was not an official Whitby Town Council meeting, as the Notices displayed did not have the requisite number of signatures, even though the original document contained the signatures. However, as it was felt the outcome would be same, it was agreed to go ahead with the Meeting and submit petitions to the Town Council requesting any actions recommended. It was also noted the previous Town Clerk left in August '24 and the present Clerk only started in October '24 with no hand-over period. This has caused several problems in tracing records and sorting out the Council's financial situation, however the present Town Clerk comes with extensive experience of running a Council with a much larger portfolio than Whitby and it is expected his experience will benefit the Council greatly – for more info see <https://www.seafordtowncouncil.gov.uk/about-us/>

3. Written Notice Matters:

3.1 "Is a projected further increase of 31.6% to the precept (Local Council Tax) acceptable to Whitby Local Council Tax payers?"

The Chair confirmed the Town Clerk had revised this figure to between 15 – 15.3% due to increased payment expected from the Second Home Owner's Council Tax increase, however this is still around six times the present inflation rate. The original increase in the precept was recommended in line with Local Government recommendations to add £100k to "reserves". The full Council will vote on the precept increase at next Tuesday's meeting and it was noted the Chair of the Finance & General-Purpose Committee has suggested she would not accept anything above 10% and Cllr. Riddolls suggested a 0% increase. It was highlighted attendees can, if they so wish, attend the Meeting, but if they wanted to speak it was recommended questions/statements be submitted ASAP before the Meeting with a time limit of 3 minutes per person, max 5 speakers. The main question is, is Whitby Town Council spending tax payer's money wisely and providing value for money to benefit residents and is the precept increase necessary?

Q1: Cllr. A Smith asked for views on whether the additional money received from the Second Homes tax should be ring-fenced for special Whitby projects and not just disappear into the reserves. Responses as follows:

A: Agreed with ring-fencing, possibly to reinstate Dundas Gardens Play area bulldozed by NY Council.

A: Agreed with ring-fencing.

A: Agreed with ring-fencing, but recommended using to set up a Whitby Community Land Trust to purchase existing buildings to provide local primary, affordable housing.

A: Yes, but how could we trust Cllrs to spend wisely on suitable projects?

3.2 "Should Whitby Town Council commission a reputable independent Forensic Accountant to investigate and report upon the Council's finances and governance accountability for the time-period 1st April 2019 until the publication of its findings?"

Petition signed by majority - 30 attendees

Q 1: It was highlighted that an investigation is needed, but people must be aware this could cost possibly £20,000 and tax payers will have to pay for via the precept.

Q 2: Financial figures are important and the Council needs to know the extent of the issues and problems to move forward, however do we have any idea of the possible costs? **A:** Other Councils have done this in the past and £20,00 is a rough guide and could be beneficial if issues identified leading to future savings.

Q3: Do people really think the Town Council will take any action over this petition? **A:** No, but we could ask for a recorded vote.

Q4: How many Councillors does WTC have? **A:** 19, but there are 2 vacancies. Two people applied to be co-opted, however they were rejected in a very unsatisfactory manner.

Q5: Did a Councillor not suggest reducing numbers of Councillors at a Town Assembly, why do we need this many? **A:** Yes, Town Mayor at the time Proposed 12 Cllrs, Seconded by Mr Ward.

Q6: Can Whitby tax payers afford to pay for this? Should we not look at alternatives moving forward to ensure Councillors have financial training/only those trained Cllrs. sit on F&GPC and for a limited period?

Q7: Is signing and sending this petition not sending a message to WTC, therefore worth progressing?

3.3 “Should Whitby Town Council commission a reputable external law/accountancy firm to investigate and report upon the Council’s contractual and financial position vis-a-vis its agreements(s) with Danfo (UK) Ltd (Reg No. 02682551) for the time period 1st July 2017 until publications of its findings?”

Petition signed by all registered voters in attendance - 33 attendees

Q 1: Is it correct Danfo drafted the contract? **A:** It is understood this is the case, but signed by the Town Mayor & Town Clerk at that period in 2017 (Cllr Coughlan and Mrs P Dobson, respectively).

Q2: What has happened to the various Meeting minutes at that time as these must have a record of any agreements. Surely this was followed up at following Meetings and must be on Council staff computers? **A:** It was noted objections have been submitted to the External Auditor regarding missing documentation. The previous Clerk left in August and the present Clerk only started in October with no hand-over period which has led to several difficulties in tracing records. It was noted the Council at Full Council Meetings have tended to sign-off individual Meeting minutes *en bloc* with no further scrutiny or discussion and those who have questioned issues have usually been over-ruled.

Q3: Scrutiny appears to be an issue, there must be minutes, so where are they?

Q4: The Deputy Town Clerk is a long serving member of WTC, does she not know where the records are? Also, the Town Clerk should give guidance on how minutes are taken where issues occur, has this not been actioned?

Q5: There must be a record on a computer, is there not a legal requirement to retain minutes? **A:** Draft minutes must be published within 28 days, ratified minutes do not need to be published but must be retained by North Yorkshire Records office – these tend to be difficult to find unless you have the exact document heading/number.

Q6: Told at a similar meeting by WTC that all minutes are available on the website, but this is not the case when checked.

Q7: Why does the Council not ask for quotes for the toilet contract and compare to present service, which by all accounts is unsatisfactory. **A:** Present contract is for 10 years with a 120-day notification period for faults, however full details of one/two verbal (?) changes to the agreement made by Councillors/Officers not known.

Q8: Is there an amount for the money lost on the Danfo contract? **A:** Budgeted for £55,000.00, actual £15,000.00.

Q9 A further issue with the toilets has been the water cost, budgeted £15,000, actual cost for 12 months to Dec 2023 was £43,000, how is this possible as Business Rates for water would not explain this increase? Latest budget £30,000 why?

Q10: A question for the Government as this should be Government, not a local council issue – why do we need to pay for a basic human need, particularly in a key tourist town? Many other countries supply free or businesses are legally required to supply if food & drink sold (eg Germany).

Q11: The standard of maintenance and cleanliness of the toilets including disabled toilets are generally unsatisfactory and does not warrant the fee charged. Toilets also close at 6.00pm and does not meet the requirements for a busy tourist town.

Q12: The Town Council needs to move forward and instigate better procedures to monitor financial issues via the F&GPC, set against a risk register, with a method of highlighting the level of risk, perhaps via a traffic light system.

The Chair thanked all residents for attending and confirmed the next Whitby Town Council meeting discussing the precept was set for Tue, 14th Jan 2025 18:00, see WTC website <https://www.whitbytowncouncil.gov.uk/> for Agenda details.

Signed: N. WARD (Chair)

**SIGNATURE
REDACTED**

Minute Taker: Mrs Joyce STANGOE

**SIGNATURE
REDACTED**