



Acting Clerk: C J Arnold
9 Manor Close
Great Horkesley
Colchester
CO6 4AR

cjarnold@hotmail.co.uk
07703 168125

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING 11TH APRIL 2022

Those attending: Cllr Mead (Chairman)
Cllrs Arnold, Baker, Duckworth, Taverner, Williams

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed those present to the scheduled April meeting of the Council. He explained that the meetings scheduled for February and March had not taken place owing to illness.

2. Apologies and reasons for absence

The Chairman reported that Cllrs Ewing and Wescomb-Cross were unable to attend the meeting for work-related reasons. It was agreed that these absences should not count against their record of attendance.

3. Declaration of interests

Cllr Duckworth declared a prejudicial interest in item 11.

4. Have your say

No members of the public were present at the meeting.

5. Minutes of previous meetings

a. Consideration of the minutes of the meeting which took place on 17th January was deferred to a future meeting.

b. It was agreed that the circulated draft of the minutes of the special meeting of the council which took place on 1st February were a correct record and should be adopted as such.

6. Verbal reports from members and officers of other authorities

The Clerk reported that Cllrs Laws (CBC) and Barber (ECC) were working on election campaigns and therefore unable to attend the meeting. However, Cllr Laws had asked that his work to ensure that CBC Street Services were clearing the spills of glass fibre insulation along the A134 in the north of the village was reported to the council. The Clerk reported that Cllr Barber had lobbied at ECC Cabinet level to have the flooding in London Road fixed – the chairman said a fine job had been done and that the council's thanks should be recorded. The clerk reported that Cllr Barber was also working on two flooding sites in London Road, speeding problems and careless parent parking in Coach Road, the narrow footway opposite the filling station on the Causeway, the poor condition and lack of lighting and signage at the A134 pedestrian refuge south of Blackbrook Road and excess surface water on the A134 near the A12 bridge.

7. Finance

a. No invoices needed to be approved by the council prior to payment.

b. The council noted the payment by CBC of £20,764.00 in the council's bank account, this being the half of the precept levied by GHPC for the current year.

c. It was agreed that the grants to village organisations for which there was provision in the budget agreed at the February meeting should now be released, with the exception of the grant to the BWWS Parents' Association which would be held until matched funding had been secured.

d. Cllr Baker reported that he was now able to update the accounting system regularly and produce balances which matched those of the council's bank accounts. However, the accounting system still contained some structural defects which had hindered budgeting in previous years, notably that the retainers held temporarily against damage to the village hall by users were still being shown as income which made it difficult to be confident that the hall was not being run at a loss.

e. Cllr Mead gave a report on how the council's finances were being run since the departure of the clerk. Under the new mandate payments from the Council's bank account needed a double authorisation, so generally he was setting up payments which were then checked and authorised by Cllr Arnold. Occasionally these roles were reversed. Either way, Cllr Arnold was exercising the clerk's powers to make payments only where there was budget provision or where a retainer was to be returned to a hall user. Cllr Baker was then checking payments made and income received according to bank statements against the transactions recorded on the accounting system. It was agreed that the involvement of three members in this way provided an adequate safeguard against fraud.

f. Cllr Arnold reported that the end of the 2021-22 financial year meant that there was a need for internal and external audits of the council's accounts. He had made contact with the external auditors and explained the council's unusual position, which had been noted. He had received advice as to where to find the audit requirements which he was discussing with Cllr Baker. He had been assured that the requirements were not particularly onerous. Contacting the internal auditor was work in progress, not least because the contact details in the council's records seemed to be out of date.

Cllr Arnold reminded members that Cllr Baker had already been added to the mandate and proposed that he should now be added to the online banking too, to provide holiday cover; **this was agreed**. Cllr Arnold also proposed that the Bookings Manager be added to the online banking, which would greatly simplify the administration of the hall finances because she would then be able to monitor payments of deposits and hire fees directly and initiate the repayment of retainers. **This was also agreed**.

8. Village Hall

a. Estimates for the repair or replacement of rainwater goods were not yet available; this item was deferred.

b. The need to upgrade the CCTV system to enable more cameras to be added and introduce remote monitoring had been identified in 2021 and one estimate obtained. A further estimate was needed. It was agreed that grants should be sought to cover the cost of this work.

c. For reasons stated by Cllr Baker earlier in the meeting, it was not yet possible to be clear whether the hall had been operating at a loss during 2021-22. However, it seemed

likely that operating costs would rise sharply as electricity costs rose so a review of hire charges should take place as soon as reliable data was available. Regular hirers ought to be given notice of this as soon as possible.

d. Cllr Arnold reported that he had been using an app to remotely monitor the temperature of the main hall and match the operation of the heating to occupation of the room. He had found that the hall was frequently too hot when occupied and it had been possible to reduce both the hours of operation of the heating and the temperature set on the thermostat without making the hall uncomfortable. He had discussed this with the hall manager who had agreed to over this work. He had yet to discover whether the heating for the rest of the building could be controlled in the same way and would report to a future meeting.

9. Jubilee celebrations

Various councillors reported that plans for the celebration of Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in the village were finally coming together. Current indications were that no financial support would be needed from the parish council – other than permitting the use of the village hall without charge. Funds could be made available from balances if necessary but not to support any commercial elements. A further report would be made to the May meeting.

10. Dates of future meetings

a. Annual Parish Council Meeting: Monday 9th May

b. Annual Parish Meeting: Although a view was expressed that a complete evening should be set aside for this, it was accepted that whilst the council was operating without a professional clerk and with planned absences cutting down the dates on which the meeting could be held, the best option would be to hold the Annual Parish Meeting on the same evening as the Annual Parish Council Meeting, but earlier.

It was agreed that the Annual Parish Meeting would take place at 1900h on Monday 9th May to be followed by the Annual Parish Council Meeting which would commence no earlier than 1930h.

Cllr Duckworth left the meeting at this point

11. Appointment of Parish Clerk

Cllr Arnold reported that he had sought advice from the EALC about whether the council was entitled to appoint a clerk without formally advertising the post. He had been told that provided the council was satisfied that there were sound reasons for doing so and that these were recorded as part of the decision, the council was so entitled. In this case, the appointment would be taking place at a time when there was a widespread shortage of clerks with some posts remaining vacant for months. He had made clear in his piece in the January Village News that a new clerk was needed but only one person had come forward: Cllr Duckworth. He had already interviewed her once prior to the council's decision to co-opt her as a member; there had since been another discussion about what the role of the clerk to the council would be in future and how much time it might take up. Advice from EALC was that a probationary clerk who attended all the available courses could be up to speed within six months. Cllr Duckworth was aware that she would need to resign from the council before she could become its employee.

After a short discussion **it was unanimously agreed** in principle that Teri Duckworth should be appointed as Clerk to Great Horkesley Parish Council, subject to both parties mutually agreeing terms and conditions.

It was also agreed that to facilitate a speedy appointment, the personnel committee be empowered to make the final decision for the council.

Cllr Duckworth returned to the meeting at this point

12. Resolution to exclude the public

There being no members of the public present, the resolution was not moved.

13. Letter from Mrs Ruth Butt

Along with other papers for the evening's meeting members of the council had been supplied with a copy of a letter from Mrs Ruth Butt dated 16th March 2022. During a short discussion members generally expressed the view that the advice was clear and consistent with what they individually believed to be true.

It was resolved that no action would be taken by the council for the present.

14. Letter from Mrs Penny Mutch

Along with other papers for the evening's meeting members of the council had been supplied with a copy of a letter from Mrs Penny Mutch dated 11th March 2022. After discussion, members decided that they did not have sufficient information before them to make a decision. The Clerk was asked to obtain copies of certain documents and bring the matter back to a future meeting.

The minute for Agenda Item 15 contains information of a personal nature relating to a contract of employment. It will therefore not be published, though it will appear on the printed minute endorsed by the Chairman after approval by the Council.

15. Village Hall Manager

Meeting closed.

Agreed to be an accurate record

Mick Mead, Chairman

9th May 2022