

THE IVERS PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 19th JULY 2021 AT 7.00PM VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE

Cllr Ciarán Beary (Chair)
Cllr Julie Cook (Vice Chair)

Present: Councillors Sam Bhachu, Kevin Brown, Wendy Matthews, Graham Young, Peter Kinchin, Michael Sullivan, Peter Stanhope, Adam Burke, Mohinder Bhatti and Stuart Mills

Apologies: Councillor Christine Ball

Absent: Councillors Paul Brooksby

In attendance: 2 Members of the Public, Stephanie Bennett (Clerk) and Jeremy Day (Deputy Clerk)

The Chair informed those attending that the meeting would be recorded for minute taking purposes

104/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were declared

105/21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Carol Gibson thanked the Council for progressing the Neighbourhood Plan and asked how the Plan was now to progress. The Chair responded that the Neighbourhood Planning Committee would now consider the responses and consider whether adjustments to the Plan were required.

The Clerk added that the end of Regulation 14 was officially at midnight today (19th July 2021) and explained that an immense amount of comment had been made from the landowners and statutory consultees.

Carol Gibson expressed her thanks for all those members of the Council, both past and present.

Wendy Matthews reported that Bucks are running the food voucher program again for this entire school holiday, which means that every child who is receiving any sort of support from the council, will get food vouchers allocated to them, this includes all of those who are at school, or within the early years settings. The vouchers are worth approximately £50 per child per week.

106/21 CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed Cllr Bhachu to the Council and thanked him for his interest in the Council; the Chair added that the council needed more people to be involved.

The Chair reminded councilors to consider which committees they wished to sit on and asked that they consider at least 2 committees.

The Chair asked whether anybody is still concerned about joining a committee or would like more information. The Chair invited those with questions, to please contact himself or the Clerk. The Clerk reminded members that the next meeting of Council will agree the membership.

The Chair reminded councilors of the benefits of appropriate meeting behaviours that are positive and respectful, and that deliver good decision making.

The Chairs' reminded members of the standing order requirement that no meeting is longer than 2 hours and that Council is scheduled to end at nine. The Chair explained that due to the time constraints, there may be a need to limit debate at times, so that the meeting can push forward and if a vote is needed, a move to votes will take place. The Chair requested that the meeting needs to pass through the agenda quickly.

107/21 COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Clerk explained that it had not been possible to prepare the listed minutes of Facilities and Events Committee and Planning Committee completed. These will therefore be considered at the next meeting

108/21 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The Clerk presented the current calendar of meetings and reminded councillors that the format of meetings will be reconsidered in September.

The Clerk explained that agreeing a calendar of meeting will enable councillors to arrange their diaries and recommended that dates are agreed for the council year to May 2022 with venues to be arranged once physical meeting return

RECOMMENDED that

The calendar of meetings be agreed

109/21 IVER HEATH RECREATION GROUND

The Chair opened the discussion around the Iver Heath Recreation ground, a matter, which he explained is close to many people's hearts. The Chair continued to explain that there are a lot of complications around this governance and reminded the meeting that they were sent documents setting out the legal opinion obtained.

The Chair briefly summarised the challenges faced with the Iver Heath Recreation Grounds:

- There is a question on who owns the land, is it a trust and how is the trust managed?
- The trust is not currently convened

- Interim legal opinion has been obtained and we await final opinion.
- The trust began in the 1930's.
- The legal opinion will suggest what needs to be done to ensure that the Recreation Ground is operated in accordance with the law.

The Clerk took councillors through the interim legal opinion the information that had been sourced and the actions being taken:

- The governance of The Iver Heath Recreation Ground has been a question for sometime
- It is not suggested that Council makes any decisions at this meeting and that we await the outcome of the assessment of the 1939 document.
- There is a question mark whether the parochial council, has become mixed up with the parish council
- It has been asked if it's possible for the land to be held by the trust, but then could there have been a horizontal lease, where the buildings still belong to the parish council.
- What is likely to result from the legal opinion is that we reform the Trust with the Council as the Administrative trustee
- We are trying to avoid the setting up of parallel organisations, with duplicated work
- The most important question is therefore can we make decisions about the Recreation Ground as parish council as leasees or do we have to do it as Iver Heath Recreation Grounds administrative trustee.
- If it can be kept it streamlined, it means that potentially, all that is needed is a bank account.
- However, in order to open a bank account in the name of the trust, the trust is to be convened and we will need to have officers of the trust.

The Clerk proposed that a briefing meeting is had with the solicitor in attendance to answer councillor questions. The Clerk stated her biggest concern for the parish council is that the buildings do not belong to the parish council.

Cllr Stanhope agreed that the Clerk's suggestion is a good idea to come back and see what the actual breakdown is, because it is very complex. The Chair addressed the new councillors in attendance and reiterated that, as the Clerk explained, this is a complex issue. He explained that it is a muddle that has gone back over years and, picking it apart and finding out what's what, is quite difficult.

Cllr Cook commented that she agreed with the approach. She further requested a deadline for this matter to be resolved, as the initial conversations with the Charity Commission was that the conveyancing document that she had sourced, was the only document that they had on file, and that they said, for it to be updated, was just a case of logging on and doing it.

Cllr Cook expressed worry whether there is something else that the lawyers could find, as they've been successful in finding other documents, that both

Fields in Trust and the charity commissions have told her, that they did not have.

Cllr Cook agreed that it is positive that they might and again suggested that a deadline be put on the matter, to at least try to get an explanation, rather than this going on forever, because the unwinding of some of the actions that have occurred can be significant. Cllr Cook also suggested that the other thing that might be worthwhile bringing into that extraordinary meeting is that if the council is to resubmit returns to the Charity Commission, to also take the assets out of the financial statements and that there may be a need to engage some accounting resource for a period of time to do that and asked whether there is a feel of the cost to do that.

Cllr Matthews questioned why an accounting resource would be required to remove assets from the fixed asset list. Cllr Cook responded that an accounting resource would be needed, because everyone would be too busy and because it would take too much time.

Cllr Matthews raised a further issue with the financial accounting as previous years were held within Xero and the contract is due to be terminated on the completion of external audit that is due October 2021

Cllr Cook suggested that maybe the deadline should be September to get to the bottom line and know whether an extension on the zero account is required, to access the historic information.

The Chair enquired whether it is necessary to look at the banking, as it would be looking at bank accounts, dating back to the 1930s.

Cllr Cook responded that the most likely answer that from an accountant is seven years, because that is how long records are usually kept for, and it is a requirement under the tax legislation, etc. If asked, an accountant might say what's a reasonable number of years and say to go back seven years.

Cllr Sullivan asked whether there would be more documentation available to the councillors prior to the briefing meeting.

The Chair responded that he hoped it would not be the case and that the councillors will not be required to trawl through papers and agreements dating back to 1930. The Chair suggested that the councillors need ask questions of the lawyer and that the Chair thought, probably, their concentration would be the best way forward to regulate this issue.

RECOMMENDED that

A briefing meeting with the solicitor in attendance be arranged

The Chair invited comments on the finance notes and explained, to those who maybe did not see it, that the council had had a good look through how the accounts are built, and shown, so if anyone has an interest in this, to please either let the Chair or Stephanie Bennett know, and they will arrange finance notes for those who would like to have a look at it.

Cllr Stanhope reported that he was progressing the inspection of the bank reconciliations and that all had been in order.

The Clerk proceeded with overview of the Quarter 1 variance report:

- The report is constructed by pulling the data from the various sources on the column headings.
- The first column is the actual expenditure last year
- The heading 'actual year to date', means how much money has either been received under that code or spent from that code, for year to date.
- The budget year to date is where the whole budget is taken and then split to the number of months.
- There some budget codes where that would be not applicable, such as insurance. Insurance is paid once a year, so there is no point to include it in budget year to date, because it doesn't add any value at all to councilors looking at the accounts.
- Then there is variance % and actual on year to date
- Note the traffic light at the end Green means everything is in order, it is under budget in its expenditure, it is over budget in its income.
- Yellow is between zero and 10% off. That is the one that we are keeping a close eye on in the office.
- The red is where it is over 10% off and officers have provided a note to give further detail
- Blue is for technical items, like the insurance

The Chair thanked the Clerk and commented that when the variance report was reviewed a couple of weeks ago, he finds it incredibly informative, and easy to understand.

Cllr Mills asked about the precept and the Clerk explained that the payment comes in two tranches in April and September/October. For 2021-2022 the Council precepted £608,585.

Cllr Mills continued his enquiry by pointing that it does mean though, that when all the income is added up, all the expenditure, it gives an artificially optimistic view of where the council is at, at present and he thinks the councillors need to be aware of that.

Cllr Mills queried whether too much was budgeted for national insurance and the Clerk explained that the government has given the council a £4,000.00

allowance this year, which means that the council need not pay employers national insurance until it reaches £4,000.00 pounds in total.

Cllr Mills asked for an explanation of the EMR code, which seems to have a big chunk of expenditure with no budget. The Clerk explained that 'EMR' is earmarked reserves that is allocated within reserves. To get that into the accounts for expenditure, it is allocated to an earmark reserves expenditure code, so there is no budget on it.

Cllr Young had a question regarding the calculation of the budget year to date and suggested that it would probably be handy to have a column or somewhere, that gives the percentage by which payments are completed, because otherwise councillors would be trying to divide one number by the other or work out how far down the road are they are with the budget. He then suggested that a simple percentage would provide a more thorough understanding.

The Clerk agreed to add column showing percentage as requested.

The Chair and Cllr Matthews explained that the precept is money that received for the Council from the Council Tax payments of the residents. This year the precept was reduced as councillors reduced the budget however there was also an impact on households as the tax base was reduced due to the numbers of households claiming housing benefit. This in turn increased the Council Tax to be paid.

Cllr Cook responded that the comment The Chair recalls from last council was that the the number of taxpayers varied, and the council get given a percentage figure that they calculate out to form the preset. The reason that that varies, can be many, it can be for example, a student household pays no council tax. So, if there are more student households and they registered, then the tax base would decrease. Cllr Cook noted that there are two universities very nearby, and that it is probable and noted that there are quite complex numbers.

RECOMMENDED that

The Quarter 1 variance report be received and that Quarter 2 report include a % spent column

111/21

IMPROVEMENTS AND EFFECTIVENESS

The Chair reminded the councillors this was the conversation in which to discuss anything that they would want to improve over time. Particularly in the way that meetings were run.

Cllr Cook asked that every item should have a document attached to it, so that the councillors can read it in advance, and contemplate the information, thus allowing the discussion to be about clarification of that document, rather than the introduction of new information, and it can be bullet points.

Julie Cook further explained that the idea is that the discussion is clarification, and then on to decision. And if more intensive clarification is needed, to someone seeing some finance stuff for the first time, for example, they might even choose to get clarification, offline, or extensively, that would help councillors to be decision makers.

RECOMMENDED that

All agenda items be accompanied by a document

112/21 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RECOMMENDED that

the Public and Press be excluded from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 as matters which will be discussed are confidential.

113/21 COUNCIL, PROCESSES AND RISKS

The Clerk presented an overview on council processes and risks. Points raised on the presentation included rights, responsibilities, finance procedures such as budgeting and external auditing, and GDPR.

Cllr Sullivan asked when councillors were going to see any risk assessments and he raised a concern at not having seen a health and safety policy. Cllr Sullivan further commented that he considers what he has seen to policies and procedures that need reviewing. Cllr Sullivan also asked how Sharepoint was used.

The Clerk offered that councillors could use Sharepoint how they wished. All policies must be agreed by Council and that a programme of review is to be implemented once the current priorities are dealt with. The Clerk explained that policies are available on the website.

Cllr Sullivan raised his concern that policies and procedures that have been signed off by committees should contain data on when they were adopted and by which committee.

The Clerk explained that the previous Council considered policy at the Policy and Finance Committee and that all policies that had been sourced had been placed on the website. If councillors wished them to be placed in an alternative location this can be considered.

Cllr Sullivan suggested that the policies should be on both, but that they should be done in an order where the councillors know when these were prepared, where they work, what committee they've gone to and what committee they've been approved by.

Cllr Burke suggested that moving forward, maybe the council should have, in the next meeting, an agenda item to consider the policies already in place. Councillors can then consider if they would like more policies and a process for updating.

Cllr Burke further suggested that in the next meeting the councillors decide which policies are current, and which are required by this council.

Cllr Cook proposed a suggestion, in specific a management suggestion that a spreadsheet, listing all the policies that the council has and last update.

Cllr Matthews responded that the document that Cllr Cook was suggesting had been used before, that they had taken the last council. Cllr Matthews recalled that it came to the policy and finance meeting every November, because that was when the review took place of all the policies. The Chair requested the Clerk to look for the previous document.

Cllr Cook asked if it is possible, to get the document to her for August because she will be taking leave and will have to use her leave to do the work.

Cllr Burke asked how the document would be made public and available to councillors. Cllr Matthews clarified that none of the policies are confidential.

Cllr Cook responded that as it is a work in progress, the document would go into the SharePoint, and then after it was approved, then put into the public domain. Cllr Cook reminded the Chair that the SharePoint is the only shared drive they have.

RECOMMENDED that

The previous policy tracking document be resurrected and that an agenda item be placed on the September Council to consider policies

114/21

VACANCIES

The report of the Clerk was considered

The Chair explained that this describes the structure that is recommended and that he is very much in support of this. He continued to explain that he thought it offers a good opportunity to be better customer focused and more support to councillors. He also highlighted the cost reduction to the council.

The Chair commented that he thought, overall, it gives the council exactly what the councillors said. It gives play area inspection cover for weekends and caretaker assistance for bookings at the pavilions.

Cllr Stanhope questioned how the 20 hours for the caretaker would be broken down over Saturday and Sunday, when they would have three sites to visit.

The Clerk responded that the caretaker would work on a full-time day but would have to have some leeway. The Deputy Clerk would be forward planning the work of the post because if there's a couple of parties on, they will do basic checks and bin clearing, and then run the pavilion bookings so the caretaker might end up with a couple of longer days at the weekend and reduced hours in the week.

It was confirmed that a vehicle will be available to the caretaker

Councillors asked for clarification on who would be the contact for emergencies. The Clerk explained that if there is an emergency the point of contact is the Deputy Clerk.

Cllr Cook suggested making it clear that the role is focussed on a Saturday and Sunday. Cllr Sullivan commented that what this does, is it gives Saturday and Sunday cover, to make sure that the council are inspecting their play areas and that they are dealing with any potential health and safety issues, picking up tranches of food wrappers left around the racks. He stated it is about delivering excellent customer service to our residents.

Cllrs discussed a potential job share and also the potential for this to grow into 2 jobs of 1 full time equivalent. It was also noted that the cleaning of 45B High Street was included in this role.

Cllr Young asked what would happen during sickness and annual leave, if they only had that one person.

The Clerk responded and explained that they did not believe that they had the work for two part time roles and that she had previously operated a system with two caretakers on 19 hours guaranteed and additional hours. The next stage of the staffing review would cover out of hours and sickness/annual leave requirements. In the meantime we do have a local contractor that might be keen to assist.

Cllr Cook raised a question regarding the administrative assistant role and suggested that maybe they needed someone with some more project management/construction knowledge.

The Clerk explained that the shortage in the office at this time is somebody sat on the front desk, however because of the types of queries that are coming in such as the issues with the website this is where the resource is needed.

The Chair reminded the councillors on where they were, what they really want, and one of their goals, which they talked about earlier was making sure that they do increase their customer service to their population.

Cllr Sullivan raised an objection to the grouping together of the Vacancies to be voted upon. He did not agree it to be appropriate to vote on it all in one go. He further

commented that this is where policies and procedures come in. Michael Sullivan pointed out that they don't seem to be using any policies or procedures now.

Cllr Sullivan raised a further objection in that the information that the councillors had in front of them was not appropriate enough for him to make a decision on anyway.

The Chair acknowledged Cllr Sullivan's objections. In his view they had received appropriate information.

The Chair went on to remind Cllr Sullivan that Council had asked for a reduction in management costs; this was challenged by Cllr Sullivan.

Cllr Matthews thought that this is a very well put together piece of work. She agreed that the council need all these posts and that they can't carry on surviving on the goodwill of their staff, as now, they are all overworked and frazzled. Wendy Matthews commented that the council must support the staff and that this proposal gives them the opportunity to be able to recruit the staffing that they need.

Cllr Brown commented that he liked the proposal, that he had read through it and thinks that it is a good job.

Cllr Cook responded normal practice is to first consider the structure and you have some indicative costs, which is what she sees this proposal as. You would then work through the proposal according to policy.

The Chair responded to Cllr Cook that her suggestion is a consideration as well, and that they can also make this decision this evening if she wishes.

Cllr Cook responded that if they give a salary rise now, and then they subsequently want to do something like, add in horticultural requirements or add in anything else that's a change. They will be needing to pay for that again

Cllr Kinchin responded that the Ivers Parish Council is a small parish council, not a corporation and agrees that the roles should be advertised, exactly as the Clerk is suggesting. He does not see any reason why they must have a horticultural qualification. He agreed that the council needs the staffing structure as set out by the Clerk .

Cllr Stanhope commented that he agrees in principle with the whole idea, but required clarification on how the grounds team increase was come by.

The Clerk responded that she had gone through benchmarking for the grounds team, and that the additional salary puts it in the mid-range for that type of role; the private private sector is quite a lot more.

Cllr Burke asked for confirmation that the council has budget for training the grounds team, and this was confirmed.

Cllr Bhachu explained that he had been listening and sees some good things. He noticed that a member of staff used to work at the front desk and that it was important to provide that role to talk to people and see what their needs are.

Cllr Burke responded that he thought that they need the customer service side of it and that he thought it's a great proposal. Cllr Young commented that the structure makes sense and has obviously been well thought through in its offering as a customer service. And secondly, as the councillors have asked for in a reduction in costs, as guardians of the public purse, they should always be looking for ways in which that can be achieved.

Cllr Mills stated that he is broadly in favour, but he does acknowledge Michael Sullivan and Julie Cooks points. He continued to say that the council does need to look carefully at what they spend and look carefully at salaries, and they do need to be careful about salaries for itself, but the structure itself looks good, and if we are increasing responsibility then there is a need for some remuneration for that.

Cllr Sullivan objected to the proposal being put to a vote and suggested to the Chairman that he go through the vacancies and proposal items one by one.

The Chair responded that he had listened to everybody around the room, and, and on hearing that most people are in support of the whole structure as is proposed, and nothing indication otherwise, that the Chair had taken comment the whole group and that is why the Chair deliberately went and listened to everybody around the Group. Cllr Sullivan requested a recorded vote be minuted

8 councillors voted for and Cllrs Sullivan and Cook voted against.

RECOMMENDED that

- a. The proposed structure and job descriptions/person specs be agreed
- b. The appointment of the Administrative Assistant and Caretaker be undertaken as soon as possible
- c. The appointment of the Maintenance Team position be undertaken to co-incide with the completion of the seasonal resource contract
- d. The Business Administrator role be adjusted and remunerated as proposed
- e. The existing Grounds Team be remunerated as proposed

Cllr Cook explained that she voted against and asked for her reasons to be noted as there are parts of this proposal that she agrees with. And there are parts that she does not, and the fact that the council can't disaggregate that, means that she must vote for the No.

Cllr Burke responded that he has no further comment, other than that Cllrs Sullivan and Cook made a good point, and in future if something's put on the agenda in sections then it should be gone through in sections. He further stated that he does agree with the original proposal.

The recording of the meeting was stopped.

115/21 TRAINING

Councillors reconsidered the request of the Clerk to undertake the MA in Public Leadership and Management.

Councillors raised a question on tax liability through the funding of such training and requested a check be made to ensure that the council is not incurring any liabilities. Councillors also requested that a training agreement be implemented for a period of 2 years following the attainment of the MA

RECOMMENDED that

Subject to the above the application to study the MA be agreed

The meeting ended at 9:19PM

Signed Chairman

Date