Meopham Parish Council

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Minutes of the Annual Council Meeting
held on Tuesday 16th May 2023 at 7:00pm
at Meopham Village Hall

Members Present:
Cllr D Bramer
Cllr S Buchanan – Chairman ***(until item 1)***
Cllr G Green – Vice-Chairman ***(until item 1),*** Chairman ***(from item 2)***
Cllr J Ogden DL
Cllr D Sims ***(arrived at 7:04pm)***
Cllr C Price – Vice-Chairman ***(from Item 2)***
Cllr B Wade

In Attendance:
S Fishenden – Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
C Collings – Deputy Clerk

Item 1: **To elect the Chairman of Meopham Parish Council for the 2023/2024 Council Year and to receive the Declaration of Acceptance of Office from the Chairman**

F.C. 01 It was agreed to elect Cllr Graham Green as Chairman of Council for the 2023-24 council year. Cllr Green signed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office as Chairman.

PROPOSED: Cllr Ogden DL. SECONDED: Cllr Wade. All in favour.

Item 2: **To elect the Vice-Chairman of Meopham Parish Council for the 2023/2024 Council Year and to receive the Declaration of Acceptance of Office from the Vice-Chairman**

F.C. 02 It was agreed to elect Cllr Cheryl Price as Vice-Chairman of Council for the 2023-24 council year. Cllr Price signed her Declaration of Acceptance of Office as Vice-Chairman.

PROPOSED: Cllr Wade. SECONDED: Cllr Buchanan. All in favour.

Item 3: **Apologies for Absence: To receive and accept apologies**

F.C. 03 There were no apologies for absence.

Item 4: **Declarations of Members' Interests:**

4.1 **To remind all Members that they are required to submit their declaration of interest forms to the Monitoring Officer within twenty-eight days of the election**

F.C. 04 This was noted. All councillors had signed the declaration of interest forms prior to the meeting and returned them to the Clerk for sending to the Monitoring Officer.

4.2 **To receive declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests for this meeting**

F.C. 05 Cllr D Bramer declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 6 – Meopham Windmill Trust due to her husband serving as a MPC-nominated trustee.

Item 5: **To approve minutes of the previous Full Council meeting: 18.04.23**

F.C. 06 In discussion it was agreed unanimously that the following amendments should be made to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 18.04.23.

- To correct F.C. 437 so it reads 'John Ogden DL' instead of 'John Ogden CL'
- To correct F.C. 466 to remove reference to the scrapping of the 2026 deadline, and replace it with 'the deadline was extended until 2031'
- To insert into F.C. 467 'Cllr D Bramer, M Bramer, Cllr Price and Cllr Buchanan attended the Culverstone Community Association AGM'.

F.C. 07 Cllr D Bramer said that she believed the draft minutes contained further inaccuracies and errors. The Chairman invited her to identify those alleged inaccuracies and errors, but she declined to do so.

The Chairman then moved that the draft minutes be approved as accurate subject to the agreed amendments referred to above and this motion was carried with five votes in favour of approval and one against. The motion was carried.

Item 6: **Meopham Windmill Trust: To receive an update on the Windmill Trust and consider any actions required to support the Trust in restoring its quorum of trustees**

F.C. 08 The Clerk provided an update on the situation, a summary is below

- Notwithstanding his purported declaration that his appointment as an MPC nominated Trustee was "void" it was his view that Mr M Bramer continues to be an MPC-nominated trustee until his resignation became effective on 31st August 2023 as there was no mechanism whereby the appointment could become void.
- In those circumstances the Parish Council cannot appoint two new Trustees
- In any event one of the two individuals that had been selected as replacement Parish council nominees had withdrawn has withdrawn from the process
- The Trust is below its quorum
- The Charity Commission had been contacted for advice but so far has failed to respond.

F.C. 09 It was agreed to formally report the issue of the Windmill Trust to the Charity Commission, asking them to investigate and provide written advice, in particular to confirm whether Mr M Bramer's actions in declaring his appointment as a Parish Council nominated Trustee as "void" and then co-opted himself to the Trust could were valid. The Council would not appoint new trustees until this advice had been received.

The draft of the letter to be sent to the Charity Commission would be circulated to all Councillors for comments but the final form of it was delegated to the Clerk.

PROPOSED: Cllr Green. SECONDED: Cllr Price. Five votes in favour and one abstention due to declared interest.

Item 7: **Clerk's Report: To note the report from the Clerk**

F.C. 10 The Clerk's Report is noted and attached as an appendix to these minutes.

Item 8: Council Structure Review: As agreed in decision *F.C. 113* on 09.08.22, to review the council's operating structure and determine whether to continue with the streamlined structure

F.C. 11 It was agreed to retain the streamlined structure of holding monthly Full Council meetings and a monthly Planning Applications Working Group meeting. A Personnel Committee would continue to be convened.

The liaison councillor system would be reviewed at the all-day training event held by the council in July with a view to ensuring that the role was properly developed, and that Councillors could fulfil it effectively.

There would be a renewed focus on training offered to Councillors to enhance their ability to play a full role in the life of the Council and to ensure that it worked on a more collaborative basis.

PROPOSED: Cllr Green. SECONDED: Cllr Ogden DL. There were five votes in favour and one abstention. The motion was carried.

Item 9: Committees & Working Groups – Terms of Reference

9.1 Personnel Committee: To agree the terms of reference for the Personnel Committee

F.C. 12 It was agreed to adopt the Personnel Committee terms of reference, subject to the following amendments:

- To replace bullet point three in Section 2 with 'the committee chairman and vice-chairman will be elected at the first committee meeting held after the Annual Council meeting'
- To insert a new bullet point into Section 5, to include 'The Committee has the right to create sub-committees'
- To replace the reference to the 'A&R Committee' with 'Full Council' in bullet point five in Section 6.
- To remove bullet point fourteen completely in Section 6

PROPOSED: Cllr Green. SECONDED: Cllr Buchanan. All in favour.

9.2 Planning Applications Working Group: To agree the terms of reference for the Planning Applications Working Group

F.C. 13 It was agreed to adopt the Planning Applications Working Group terms of reference, subject to the following amendment:

- To amend bullet point two in Section 2 from 'The Chairman of the Planning Applications Working Group will be the Vice-Chairman of Council' so that it instead reads 'The Chairman of the Planning Applications Working Group will be operated on a rotating basis amongst members. The annual rota of chairmanship to be delegated to the Clerk to arrange.'

PROPOSED: Cllr D Bramer. SECONDED: Cllr Green. All in favour.

Item 10: Personnel Committee – Membership: To elect three members and two substitute members to the Personnel Committee as per the agreed terms of reference

F.C. 14 It was agreed to elect Cllr Buchanan, Cllr Ogden DL and Cllr Wade as members of the Personnel Committee. It was agreed Cllr D Bramer and Cllr Sims would serve as substitute members of the committee.

PROPOSED: Cllr Green. SECONDED: Cllr Buchanan. All in favour.

Item 11: Annual Review of Council Operations

11.1 Schedule of Meetings: To note the schedule of meetings of meetings up to and including the next Annual Meeting of Council

F.C. 15 The schedule of meetings for 2023-2024 was noted. It was agreed to switch the December meetings so that the Full Council will be held on the 5th December and the Planning Applications WG on 12th December.

The Annual Parish Meeting would be held on Wednesday 10th April 2024 or such other date set by the Clerk after consultation with all Councillors

11.2 Meeting Start Time: To agree the start time for all ordinary meetings of the Council

F.C. 16 It was agreed the meeting start time would continue to be 7pm, this would however be reviewed at the September 2023 meeting following the induction of new councillors.

11.3 Asset Register: To review and approve the inventory of land and assets including buildings and office equipment

F.C. 17 The Asset Register for 2023-2024 was reviewed and approved. It was agreed the benches would be added to the council's insurance.

11.4 Keyholders: To review and approve the key-holders for council buildings and assets

F.C. 18 The keyholders were review and approved. It was agreed the keypad lock code for the parish office would be shared with all councillors, subject to them informing the council officers of any visit they plan to make in advance of the visit.

11.5 Subscriptions: To review and approve the Council's and employees subscriptions to other bodies

F.C. 19 It was agreed to approve the following subscriptions:

- Kent Association of Local Councils, at a cost of £1695 + VAT
- Open Spaces Society, at a cost of £45.00 + VAT
- Breakthrough Communications 'Council Hive', at a cost of £993 + VAT
- Parish Online, at a cost of £356.40

PROPOSED: Cllr Ogden DL. SECONDED: Cllr Green. All in favour.

11.6 Arrangements for Receiving Correspondence: To confirm that all councillors will continue to receive summons, agendas and minutes plus other correspondence via email

F.C. 20 It was agreed that all councillors will continue to receive summons, agendas and minutes plus other correspondence via email for the 2023-2024 council year

11.7 Banking Arrangements: To review and approve the list of bank account signatories for 2023-2024

F.C. 21 The bank signatories were reviewed and approved.

11.8 Internal Audit Report for 2022-2023: To receive the Internal Audit report from Mulberry and Co and consider its recommendations

F.C. 22 The Internal Audit report for 2022-2023 was reviewed and its recommendations considered:

- The notice of conclusion of audit for 2021-2022 was noted as having been received
- The Council would consider updating the website to include transparency data along with supporting documentation for meetings
- The suggested changes to Financial Regulations FR 4.1 were noted and would be incorporated into the review of the document being considered in Item 13.2 of this meeting
- The approval of payments lists would be explicitly stated
- The level of general reserves would be reviewed and a plan developed to reduce them to acceptable levels
- A report would be made to Council following any Councillor performing a bank reconciliation and formally minuted
- The VAT refund discrepancy was a result of the historic book-keeping arrangement and had been resolved.

Item 12: 12 **Parish Council Representatives on External Bodies**

12.1 Roles and Responsibilities: To note the report from the Clerk setting out the responsibilities of representative roles as determined by the governing instrument for each organisation

F.C. 23 The report was noted. It was confirmed the Parish Council had the right to nominate:

- 1 x voting member to the Meopham Village Hall Management Committee
- 2 x voting members to the KALC Gravesham Area Committee and to attend and vote at the KALC Annual General Meeting
- 2 x council-nominated trustees on Meopham Windmill Trust for four-year terms

It had not yet been possible to establish whether the council had any right to nominate to Culverstone Community Association. When their governing document is received, it will be reported to Council.

12.2 Representation for 2023-2024: **To agree representatives for the 2023-2024 council year**

F.C. 24 It was agreed to appoint the following:

- Cllr Buchanan to Meopham Village Hall Management Committee
- Cllr Green and Cllr Ogden DL to attend the KALC Area Committee meetings and AGM
- The Council was currently unable to appoint to Meopham Windmill Trust, as agreed in ***F.C. 09***.

PROPOSED: Cllr Green. SECONDED: Cllr Buchanan. All in favour.

Item 13: Council Governance

13.1 Standing Orders: To review the Council's Standing Orders

F.C. 25 It was agreed to continue with the council's current standing orders for now, pending revisions to the model standing orders by NALC. Thereafter there would be a review of the Council's own standing orders which would take into account the issue raised by the motion submitted to the previous Council by Cllr D Bramer.

13.2 Financial Regulations: To review the Council's Financial Regulations

F.C. 26 It was agreed to adopt the draft financial regulations.

PROPOSED: Cllr Green. SECONDED: Cllr Ogden DL. There were five votes in favour and one abstention.

13.3 Scheme of Delegation: **To review the proposed Scheme of Delegation**

F.C. 27 The scheme of delegation was adopted with the following amendments:

- To add to bullet point five "as and when required in order to inform council decisions"
- To add to bullet point eleven "authorised by council"

PROPOSED: Cllr Green. SECONDED: Cllr Wade. There were five votes in favour and one abstention.

Item 14: Financial Matters

14.1 Expenses Claims: To consider the expenses claimed by the Clerk and Deputy Clerk

F.C. 28 The expenses claim forms for the Clerk (£128.62) and the Deputy Clerk (£54.79) were approved.

14.2 Schedule of Payments: To approve the schedule of payments up to 02.05.23, in accordance with Financial Regulation 5.2

F.C. 29 The payments recorded in the schedule, totalling £10,031.32 were approved.

14.3 Receipts & Payments Report: To note the receipts and payments report up to 02.05.23

F.C. 30 The receipts and payments report up to 02.05.23 were noted.

14.4 Bank Statements: To receive the bank statements as of 02.05.23

F.C. 31 The Unity Trust Bank and Lloyds Bank statements up to 02.05.23 were noted.

14.5 Council Reserves: To receive the reserves balance as of 02.05.23

F.C. 32 The Council reserves balance as of 02.05.23 were noted.

14.6 Payments by Standing Order & Direct Debit: To agree regular payments to be made by either standing order or direct debit

F.C. 33 The following payments were authorised to be made by standing order and direct debit:

Payee	Type	Service
S Fishenden	Standing Order	Salary
C Collings	Standing Order	Salary
Meopham PCC	Standing Order	Office Rent
May Harris Cleaning	Standing Order	Pitfield Toilets Cleaning Contract
DM Payroll Services	Standing Order	Payroll Services
HMRC	Standing Order	PAYE Contributions
Kent Pension Fund	Standing Order	Pension Contributions
Highview Tree Services	Standing Order	Service contract
Zen Internet	Standing Order	VOIP Phone System
EDF Energy	Direct Debit	Pitfield Toilets Electricity
Business Stream	Direct Debit	Water Supply – Pitfield Toilets
Microsoft 365	Direct Debit	Email Hosting
Lloyds Bank	Direct Debit	Multi-pay card charges
Smart Office Systems	Direct Debit	Photocopier lease

Item 15: Progress Tracker for 2022-2023: To note the finalised progress tracker for the 2022-2023 council year

F.C. 34 The progress tracker for 2022-2023 was noted. Councillors expressed their gratitude to the Clerk for producing this document.

Item 16: Matters for 2023-2024

16.1 Student Advisors: To consider introducing Student Advisors to the Parish Council from September 2023

F.C. 35 It was agreed in principle to introduce Student Advisors to the council from September 2023. The Clerk would ensure that a sufficient training programme was devised and would liaise with Meopham School to progress the idea further.

16.2 St Johns Centre: To consider authorising the Clerk to write to Meopham PCC advising them the Council wishes to commence discussions about securing a long lease of the whole building

F.C. 36 It was agreed to authorise the Clerk to write to Meopham PCC to explore the option of pursuing a long lease of the building, to determine whether the PCC would be interested in granting such a lease and if so on what basis.

PROPOSED: Cllr Green. SECONDED: Cllr Sims. Four votes in favour and two against. The motion was carried.

16.3 Staffing Review: To consider quotes received for commissioning a professional staffing review

F.C. 37 It was agreed to instruct LGRC to complete a professional staffing review, at a cost of £1140.00 + VAT. This would be drawn from the council's general reserves.

PROPOSED: Cllr Green. SECONDED: Cllr Price. Four votes in favour and two abstentions. The motion was carried.

16.4 Training Workshop: To consider quotes received for venue hire for holding the council training/induction day on 3rd July 2023

F.C. 38 It was agreed to book Luddesdown Village Hall for the whole-day training event, at a cost of £50. The Clerk would arrange external catering for the training event.

16.5 Community Forums: To consider the recommendations of the report to establish informal networking groups facilitated by the Parish Council

F.C. 39 It was agreed to adopt the recommendations to create four community forums; a Community Safety forum, a Schools forum, a Local Business forum and a Clubs and Groups forum.

16.6 Community Toilet Scheme: To consider authorising the Clerk to explore options for establishing a Community Toilet Scheme. There is no proposal to close the Pitfield Toilets, but to explore options as a contingency for future-proofing against future risks

F.C. 40 It was agreed to authorise the Clerk to explore options for a Community Toilet Scheme. The findings of the exploratory research will be reported back to Full Council in due course.

16.7 Review of IT & Communications Costs: To consider the recommendations of the report

F.C. 41 It was agreed to adopt the recommendations of the report:

- To migrate the council email addresses hosted from Google Workspaces to Microsoft 365
- To terminate the clerk@meopham.org email hosting by GWT Media
- To terminate the use of Dropbox for storing council files, and transfer these to OneDrive/Sharepoint contained within the Microsoft 365 package
- To terminate the Zoom business account and utilise Microsoft Teams within the 365 package for hosting virtual meetings

There were five votes in favour and one abstention.

16.8 Men's Shed Survey: To authorise the circulation of the proposed survey to assess demand

F.C. 42 It was agreed to authorise the circulation of the Men's Shed survey with the following amendments:

- To add 'prefer not to answer' to the age and gender questions
- To split question four answers into 'Morning, afternoon, evening' and then 'weekend or weekday'
- To allow multiple answers to question four

CLOSED SESSION
Pursuant to Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that due to the confidential nature of the next item, the public and press will be asked to leave the meeting

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Item 17: **Bus Shelter Cleaning Contract: To consider quotes received for a new three-year bus shelter cleaning contract**

F.C. 43 It was agreed to instruct Element Cleaning Management for a three-year bus cleaning contract, as per the agreed specification.

The cost per annum (excluding VAT) for year one will be £760, year two will be £784 and year three will be £808.

The meeting closed at 9:10pm