Meopham Parish Council

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Minutes of the Parish Council meeting
held on 2nd October 2023 at 7:00pm
at Harvel Village Hall

Members Present:
Cllr M Adam
Cllr D Bramer
Cllr P Haslam
Cllr C Price – Vice-Chairman ***(until Item 1)***, Chairman ***(from Item 1)***
Cllr D Sims
Cllr B Wade
Cllr P Watson

In Attendance:
S Fishenden – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer
A de Jager – Clerk & RFO to Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council

Item 1: Election of Chairman: To elect a Chairman for the remainder of the 2023-2024 municipal year and to receive their Declaration of Acceptance of Office

F.C. 119 The existing Vice-Chairman invited nominations for Chairman.

Cllr Wade PROPOSED that Cllr Buchanan be elected as Chairman of Council. SECONDED: Cllr D Bramer.

Cllr Adam PROPOSED that Cllr Price be elected as Chairman of Council. SECONDED: Cllr Haslam.

It was put to a vote, and Cllr Buchanan received four votes in favour, and three abstentions. The motion was therefore carried to elect Cllr Buchanan. Cllr Buchanan was not present to sign her declaration of acceptance of office.

F.C. 120 Cllr Price confirmed her resignation as Vice-Chairman of Council. The Council therefore had no Chairman or Vice-Chairman of Council present.

F.C. 121 It was then PROPOSED that Council did not agree to Cllr Buchanan signing her Declaration of Acceptance of Office at the next meeting of Council.

PROPOSED: Cllr Haslam. SECONDED: Cllr Sims. There were four votes in favour, two against and one abstention. The motion was carried.

The election of Chairman was therefore required to be held again.

F.C. 122 Cllr Adam PROPOSED that Cllr Price be elected as Chairman of Council for the remainder of the 2023-2024 municipal year. SECONDED: Cllr Haslam.

There were four votes in favour, two against and one abstention. The motion was carried.

Cllr Price's declaration of acceptance of office was signed and witnessed by the Proper Officer.

Item 2: **Provisional - Election of Vice-Chairman: To elect a Vice Chairman for the remainder of the 2023-2024 municipal year and to receive their Declaration of Acceptance of Office**

F.C. 123 It was agreed to defer the election of Vice-Chairman until the next meeting of Council to enable other councillors to participate in the election process.

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

F.C. 124 Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Buchanan (convalescing), Cllr Burlington (work) and Cllr Nicolaus Evans (prior commitment)

Item 4: **Declarations of Members' Interests: To receive declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests for this meeting**

F.C. 125 There were no declarations of interest.

F.C. 126 Cllr Price PROPOSED the council entered closed session. SECONDED: Cllr Wade. All in favour.

It was agreed by the Council that the Clerk to Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council could remain during closed session to offer legal and procedural advice.

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 were asked to leave the meeting

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Item 5: **Staffing: To consider conducting an independent review into the staffing, workplace culture, training needs and performance managements arrangements within the Parish Council Office**

F.C. 127 It was agreed to commission an independent investigation into the HR and governance matters which had arisen. The terms of reference for the investigation were agreed by Council.

It was agreed that the preferred consultancy to conduct the investigation was Council HR & Governance Support.

The Chairman of Council would write to the Chief Executive of KALC to ask whether they were able to confirm the suitability of the proposed consultant, and if they did not agree their suitability to recommend a suitable alternative.

It was agreed to delegate an initial budget of £5000 to complete the investigation.

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Haslam. All in favour.

F.C. 128 The existing Personnel Committee comprising of Cllr Buchanan, Cllr Wade along with the two substitute members Cllr Sims and Cllr Bramer would be responsible for submitting the terms of reference to the consultant.

Cllr Price confirmed she wished to recuse herself from the Personnel Committee and an amendment to the Personnel Committee terms of reference to remove automatic membership for the Chairman would be considered by the Full Council meeting on 17th October.

Item 6: **Consultant Assistant Clerk: To consider the extension of the consultancy arrangements for a period of three months in light of the resignation of the Deputy Clerk**

F.C. 129 The Chairman PROPOSED suspension of the standing orders as the meeting had reached the two-hour limit, to enable the meeting to continue. SECONDED: Cllr Adam. All in favour.

F.C. 130 It was agreed to authorise the Clerk to instruct LGRC to provide a Locum Deputy Clerk for a three-month period until 1st January 2024, for 20 hours per week and to delegate a budget of £13,000 for the locum.

It was however recognised that due to a shortage of locums, there would be a time delay before they could commence the locum assignment.

Therefore, it was agreed to offer Mr G Duffort (as Assistant Clerk), Mr K Everson (as Admin Officer) and Ms C Collings an initial one-month fixed term contract to provide administrative support to the Clerk. They would be on fixed-term contracts with no guaranteed hours and the salary point would be set as SCP10 to match the existing locum arrangement.

It was agreed that Ms de Jager would provide mentoring to Mr G Duffort in the office for one-hour per week.

It was agreed to delegate to the Clerk, in consultation with Cllr Adam and Cllr Haslam to prepare a suitable fixed-term contract for the three individuals.

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Watson. There were five votes in favour and two abstentions. The motion was carried.

The meeting closed at 9:13pm