

Meopham Parish Council

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Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 5th December 2023 at 7:00pm at Judsons Pavilion

Members Present:

Cllr M Adam
Cllr D Bramer
Cllr S Buchanan – Vice-Chairman
Cllr P Crow
Cllr A Evans
Cllr D Fisher
Cllr P Haslam
Cllr C Price – Chairman
Cllr D Sims
Cllr B Wade
Cllr P Watson

In Attendance:

S Fishenden – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer
G Duffort – Assistant Clerk
Two members of the public

Item 1: Apologies for Absence: To receive and accept apologies

F.C. 198 There were no apologies for absence received.

Item 2: Declarations of Members' Interests: To receive declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests for this meeting

F.C. 199 There were no declarations of interest received

F.C. 200 To enable the members of the public present to observe the budget discussions without having to leave first for the closed session items, the Chairman of Council re-ordered the agenda to defer the closed session until the end of the meeting.

Item 6: To approve minutes of the previous Full Council meeting: 21.11.23

F.C. 201 The minutes of the meeting held on 21.11.23 were approved subject to a minor amendment to replace the word 'treasurer' with 'trustee' in **F.C. 193**.

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

Item 7: Officer's Report: To receive a report of items for information from the Clerk, Assistant Clerk and Administrative Officer

F.C. 202 The Clerk provided a verbal report, a written copy is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

Item 8: Interim Audit 2023/24: To note the interim audit report received from Mulberry and Co and consider its recommendations

F.C. 203 The Interim Audit report was noted as being received. The recommendations were considered:

- A new website provision was included in the draft budget to enable supporting documents to be uploaded
- The level of general reserves would be reviewed as part of the budget-setting process
- The Standing Orders and Financial Regulations would be updated when NALC release their updated model documents

Item 9: Budget Monitoring for 2023-2024: To receive a budget monitoring report from the Responsible Financial Officer for the 2023-2024 financial year

F.C. 204 The budget monitoring report as of 4th December 2023 was noted.

Item 10: Council Budget for 2024-2025

10.1 Budget for 2024-2025: To approve a budget for the 2024-2025 financial year

F.C. 205 The draft budget was considered by Council. The budget was discussed line-by-line, where there was consensus on an item a formal vote was not taken. Items where there was a difference in views were put to a vote.

F.C. 206 A vote was held on the provision of £6000.00 for the New Website Project. Cllr Wade requested a recorded vote.

Councillor	Vote
Cllr Adam	For
Cllr Bramer	Abstain
Cllr Buchanan	Against
Cllr Crow	For
Cllr Evans	For
Cllr Fisher	For
Cllr Haslam	Against
Cllr Price	For
Cllr Sims	For
Cllr Wade	Against
Cllr Watson	For

The motion therefore received seven votes in favour, three against and one abstention. The motion to include a provision of £6,000 for the new website project was therefore carried.

F.C. 207 There was a vote to include a budget provision for the Camer Parade Highways Scheme, set at £7,000.

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Sims. Seven votes in favour, two against and two abstentions. The motion was carried.

F.C. 208 A vote was held to include a Community Engagement budget provision at £4,750.00.

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Evans. Seven votes in favour and three abstentions. The motion to include the cost code was therefore carried.

F.C. 209 The decision on the final budget and the precept was then deferred to enable the closed session items to be taken as this would have budgetary implications.

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

Item 4: Investigation

4.1 Verbal Update: To receive a verbal report from the Chairman of the Personnel Committee on the progress of the investigation by WorkNest

F.C. 210 Cllr Bramer reported a response had been received from WorkNest which had been discussed by the Personnel Committee.

F.C. 211 The Chairman of Council then read a verbal report (***confidential memo: F.C. 211***) following concerns raised to her by councillors about the transparency and decision-making of the Personnel Committee.

Following prolonged discussion, Cllr Bramer was recused from the Personnel Committee.

The Chairman of Council requested the four permanent members of the committee meet urgently to review all documentation and correspondence issued by Cllr Bramer to both WorkNest and a former employee, to check it is in accordance with the agreed terms of reference set by Full Council on 2nd October 2023.

4.2 Committee Recommendations: To consider any recommendations received from the Personnel Committee

F.C. 212 This item was dismissed due to the matters raised under F.C. 211 which require exploring before the Committee provides any recommendations.

Item 3: Staffing Review: To consider the recommendations of the independent staffing review carried out by LGRC

F.C. 213 It was agreed to adopt recommendation four from the Personnel Committee; *to provide an additional twenty-five hours a week of staffing for the office. Subject to the job descriptions for the new roles and existing roles being produced and reviewed by the Clerk, in consultation with Cllr Ogden.*

It was noted that following Cllr Ogden's resignation, Council had already agreed this recommendation would instead be done in consultation with Cllr Adam and Cllr Haslam.

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Adam. Nine votes in favour, one against and one abstention. The motion was carried.

F.C. 214 It was agreed to adopt recommendation five from the Personnel Committee; *the Clerk be given delegated authority to conduct the recruitment process subject to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman being involved at each stage of the process and being invited to interviews.*

In agreeing this recommendation, Council made an amendment that the recruitment process would be done in consultation with Cllr Evans and Cllr Fisher instead of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

In addition, this delegation would cover both the recruitment process for the vacant role of Deputy Clerk, and the additional twenty-five hours once the job descriptions had been produced. It was noted this was a one-off whilst the Personnel Committee focused on the investigation.

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

- F.C. 215** It was agreed to adopt recommendation six from the Personnel Committee; *to agree the rise in salaries for the Clerk and Deputy Clerk as recommended by LGRC subject to (1) the on-costs generated by the increases being identified and approved and (2) the job descriptions being updated.*

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

- Item 5: Complaint Received: To consider actions arising from the complaint received from a resident**

- F.C. 216** The Clerk reported that a complaint had been received from a resident which concerned the conduct of a councillor.

Due to this, the Council is unable to investigate it and it will automatically be referred to the Monitoring Officer for their consideration.

END OF CLOSED SESSION

10.1 Budget for 2024-2025: *Continued*

- F.C. 217** The final budget for 2024-2025 was agreed at **£196,971.00**. A copy of the agreed budget will be attached as an appendix to the minutes.

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

10.2 Precept for 2024-2025: To set the precept for the 2024-2025 financial year

- F.C. 217** The precept for 2024-2025 was agreed at **£196,146.87**. An income of £824.13 is expected in 2024-25.

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

The meeting closed at 11:00pm