

Meopham Parish Council

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A Civility & Respect
Pledge Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 16th January 2024 at 7:00pm at Judsons Pavilion

Members Present:

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
Nine members of the public

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

F.C. 225 Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Adam (work commitment)

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

F.C. 226 Cllr Price declared a non-pecuniary interest in the applicant for the co-option vacancy due to knowing them in her capacity as Chairman of Luddesdown Parish Council.

Item 3: Minutes of Previous Meetings: To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 05.12.23 and 19.12.23

F.C. 227 The minutes of the meeting held on 05.12.23 were approved subject to the following amendment; to amend **F.C. 211** so it reads 'Cllr Bramer recused herself' instead of 'was recused'.

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

F.C. 228 The minutes of the meeting held on 19.12.23 were approved.

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

Item 4: Public Session & External Reports

4.1 Public Session

F.C. 229 Members of the public present raised the following concerns:

- The poor lighting of the zebra crossing at Neville Parade

- Concerns around the 2024/25 budget including increases in staffing costs and costs for a new website.
- Requests for a public meeting
- Closure of the Pitfield Green public toilets

Attendees were advised by the Chairman of Council that they'd receive individual written responses to the concerns and queries they had raised.

4.2 Borough Councillors and County Councillor

F.C. 230 There were no Borough Councillors or the County Councillor present.

4.3 Police and Community Warden

F.C. 231 There was no Officer or Community Warden present.

Item 5: Councillor Vacancy

5.1 Adjournment of Meeting: To adjourn the meeting to enable candidates to give a verbal statement and to enable questions to be asked by Councillors

F.C. 232 The meeting was adjourned to enable the candidate to give a verbal statement and to answer any questions posed by councillors. The meeting was then reconvened and the candidate left the meeting at this point.

5.2 Co-option: To agree to co-opt a suitable candidate to the vacancy in the Camer and Meopham Green ward

F.C. 233 It was agreed to co-opt Mr Gary Smith to Camer and Meopham Green ward.

PROPOSED: Cllr Evans. SECONDED: Cllr Haslam. Nine votes in favour and one against. The motion was carried.

Item 6: Officer's Report: To receive a report of items for information from the Clerk and Assistant Clerk

F.C. 234 The Officers provided a verbal report, a written copy is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

Item 7: Financial Matters

7.1 Approval of Payments: To approve the payments made since the last meeting up to 09.01.24

F.C. 235 It was agreed to approve the payments totalling £31,768.66 as listed in the schedule.

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

7.2 Receipts & Payments Report: To note the receipts and payments report up to 09.01.24

F.C. 236 The receipts and payments report up to 09.01.24 was noted.

7.3 Bank Statements: To note the bank statements as of 09.01.24

F.C. 237 The bank statements as of 09.01.24 were noted.

7.4 Council Reserves: To note the reserves balance as of 09.01.24

F.C. 238 The council reserves as of 09.01.24 was noted.

7.5 Expenses Claim: To approve the expenses claim received from the Clerk

F.C. 239 The expenses claim from the Clerk totalling £111.78 was approved.

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

Item 8: Council Administration

8.1 Employee Assistance Programme: To consider the report and recommendations from the Clerk to introduce an EAP for council officers

F.C. 240 The recommendations to introduce an Employee Assistance Programme were put to a vote.

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Watson.

There were three votes in favour, five against and two abstentions. The motion was lost.

8.2 Council Processes Working Group: To consider the report and recommendations from the Clerk on establishing a working group to review council processes

F.C. 241 The report recommendations were agreed that

- A Council Processes Working Group be established consisting of Cllr Adam, Cllr Evans, Cllr Fisher, Cllr Haslam and Cllr Smith
- The Working Group be asked to produce a report for the May 2024 Annual Council Meeting listing recommendations for improvements to council processes

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

8.3 Liaison Councillors: To consider the report and recommendations from officers to reinstate the liaison councillor system for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year

F.C. 242 It was agreed to reinstate the liaison councillor system as per the recommended allocations. An appendix of the allocations will be attached to the minutes.

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

8.4 Meopham Windmill – Container Site: To note the letter received from Meopham Windmill Trust, and consider agreeing actions arising from this

F.C. 243 It was agreed to donate the container to the Windmill Trust if they want it. Additional office cupboards to relocate the files will be purchased under delegated authority.

It was confirmed the Parish Council would donate the chamber chairs and tables to the Windmill Trust.

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

Item 9: Community Grants Scheme – Audit: To note the report from the Assistant Clerk following the audit of grants issued in 2023-24 to ensure they were spent in line with the Council’s Community Grants Policy

F.C. 244 The audit report was noted.

Item 10: Community Engagement Strategy: To agree a strategy for the council’s community engagement

F.C. 245 It was agreed to delegate to the Assistant Clerk, in consultation with the Liaison Cllrs for Youth & Community, to produce a suitable community engagement strategy using the Stone Parish Council example as a framework.

Item 11: Items for Information: To receive verbal reports from all councillors, for information only

F.C. 246 The following items for information were noted:

- Cllr Haslam asked for a ‘lessons learnt’ exercise to be carried out for the Carols on the Green event held in December
- Cllr Bramer reported she had attended a Climate Change training event
- Cllr Wade asked that an item is placed on the next meeting agenda regarding the replacement Harvel Green bench

Item 12: Decisions Tracker: To note the progress tracker of council decisions

F.C. 247 This item was deferred to the next meeting to enable officers to work on updating the document to better record decision outcomes.

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 13: Personnel

13.1 Investigation: To consider recommendations from the Personnel Committee on the remit and progress of the investigation

F.C. 248 It was agreed to accept the following recommendations from the Committee:

WorkNest would be asked to -

- Review information from a previous employee and provide a summary
- To hold an informal conversation with former Cllrs Green and Ogden
- To do a summary review of employment contracts
- To make brief recommendations to the Parish Council.

13.2 Recruitment Process: To receive an update from Cllr Evans and Cllr Fisher on the recruitment process for Deputy Clerk and the additional staffing roles

F.C. 249 It was noted that the role of Deputy Clerk had been advertised and one application had been received. An external Clerk would be brought into assist with the interview of an internal candidate.

The other additional roles had not yet been advertised.

13.3 Temporary Arrangements: To agree to extend the temporary fixed term contracts for Ms Scozs and Mr Duffort until 31 March 2024 to enable the recruitment process to be completed.

F.C. 250 It was agreed to extend the temporary fixed-term contracts for Ms Scozs and Mr Duffort until 31 March 2024 to enable the recruitment process to be completed.

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

The meeting closed at 9:53pm