

COOKHAM PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of the Meeting of Cookham Parish Council
Held in the Community Room of the Library on Tuesday 5th November 2024

PRESENT: Cllrs. B. Perry (Chairman), L. Austin, C. Aisladie, M. Brar, J. Edwards, M. Howard, J. Moore and H. Fleming.

Also Present: Mrs. Hilda Holder (Locum Clerk) and Deepa Kanthi (Incoming Clerk)
 No members of the public or Press were present.

OPEN FORUM:

No comments were made other than to welcome the new Clerk.

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllrs. N. Bedwell, E. Bune, R. Kellaway, M-L. Kellaway, T. Caen, L. Tull and A-L. Regan.

2. Declarations of Interest

Cllr. Aisladie declared an interest in item 23.

3. To approve the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 1st October 2024

These were **approved**.

4. To receive, for information, minutes of committee meetings held since the last Council meeting

4.1 Planning Committee meeting, 8th October – these were noted.

4.2 General Purposes Committee, 15th October – these were noted.

4.3 Staffing Committee, 22nd October – these were noted.

4.4 Finance Committee, 22nd October – these were noted.

5. Matters arising from the meeting on 1st October not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda

There were none.

6. Finance

6.1 to approve payments/receipts to date as per the cashbook circulated to Councillors prior to the meeting – these were **approved**.

6.2 to review and agree revised Financial Regulations – these were **approved**.

6.3 to agree to increase the total authorised spend on locum clerk services by up to a further £10,000 – this was **approved** and it was agreed any such expenditure to date and in the future should be from General Fund.

6.4 to agree expenditure of £100 on an improved logo – this was **approved** to be taken from General Fund.

6.5 to ratify the decision of the Finance Committee to engage the internal auditor to conduct an interim audit – this was **ratified** and the monies to be taken from General Fund

6.6 to agree to erect two Christmas trees – this was **approved** and was within budget.

7. To agree volunteers for the Remembrance Day services

It was **agreed** that the Chairman should lay the wreath at the Village Remembrance Service and Cllr. M. Howard should lay the wreath at the Cookham Dean Service.

Action: Chairman and Cllr. M. Howard

8. Update on new website and email addresses

It was noted that the Council and Councillors' email addresses had now changed to the new .gov.uk address. The website was close to launching but needed more information to be uploaded and photos. The Locum Clerk explained that a few more sub pages might be needed and it was **agreed** that the Chairman and Locum Clerk could make reasonable decisions about this. Any expenditure to be taken from General Fund.

Action: Chairman and Locum Clerk

9. To consider and agree terminating the Letting agents contract for Cemetery Lodge

9.1 It was **agreed** that it was premature to terminate the contract at this stage. The letting agents had said they could not find the original agreement but would ask for 3 months notice given at the rent payment date. The Chairman felt that three months notice was reasonable but it should not be tied to a rent payment date and asked the Locum Clerk to confirm this view to the letting agents as soon as possible.

Action: Locum Clerk

9.2 The new Clerk was asked in due course to investigate other options and prepare a report on the levels of service available amongst other local letting agents with especially emphasis on the need for 6 monthly inspections which a council representative could attend.

Action: Incoming Clerk

10. To consider subscribing to membership of the Open Spaces Society

This was **approved** on the recommendation of Cllr. Edwards having regard to their expertise and access to their legal advice on the issues of Commons in particular. The cost was £45 to be taken from General Fund.

Action: Locum Clerk

11. To consider and agree undertaking a Housing Needs Survey and next steps

Cllr. Edwards was keen to pursue this but would put it on hold until more was known about RBWM's initiative on affordable housing under the Borough Local Plan process. This item to be removed from future agendas until further notice.

12. Update on the Cookham Rise School Lease

The Chairman had instructed solicitors and would report more in due course. The school had expressed their unwillingness to pay the increased rent but he held an email from 2022 when the school had agreed it.

Action: Chairman

13. To consider the potential acquisition of land for the Sutton Road allotments

The Chairman would pursue this further.

Action: Chairman

14. To consider and agree terminating the HR support contract with Croner

It was noted that the 5 year contract with Croner expired next year but would automatically continue for a further 5 years unless terminated by 6 months advance notice. It was **agreed** to terminate the contract and for the Locum Clerk to give the required notice in the next few weeks.

Action: Locum Clerk

15. To receive an update on the Corporate Plan

It was noted that this was better termed a "strategic plan". Cllr. Edwards would meet with the Locum Clerk to progress.

Action: Cllr. Edwards and Locum Clerk

16. To receive an update from the Communications working party

The Chairman noted that he had been invited to submit articles of between 300-600 words each month for the parish magazine.

Action: Chairman

17. To receive a report from the Chairman regarding the Neighbourhood Plan

The Chairman had circulated this to Councillors. It was unanimously approved. RBWM had been asked how they would like it delivered and the Council's planning advisers were still waiting for a response after two weeks.

18. To receive an update from the Traffic working party

Cllr. Howard reported:-

18.1 It was hoped a 'no parking on the pavement scheme' from the garage to School Lane would come into force by Christmas. Double lines would be put down.

18.2 He noted that the AL37 application would have implications for Cookham Rise.

18.2 He was still chasing for yellow lines outside Herries School to try and ensure a break in parked traffic to allow traffic flow.

18.4 Resurfacing work had been taking place on Spring Lane although not around the spring area until an underflow for the water had been sorted.

18.5 Residents had complained of cracks in the Causeway Bridge but he had been assured it had been checked recently and had a reinforced concrete core.

18.6 He noted that RBWM had a duty to protect the safety of children getting to school and to this end the Copas plan to improve the connectivity of the footpaths and cycleways had been submitted to RBWM in September and he would follow up in early December.

18.7 that the new parking restrictions the Council sought in Odney Lane are hoped to be in place by Christmas.

19. Outside Bodies and Borough Cllr. reports

19.1 Cllr. Brar had circulated a report focussing particularly on the bad financial management at RBWM since at least 2021 – noting that there was a £13million shortfall in the finances.

19.2 Cllr. Howard reported that the contract for cutting grass verges was coming up for renewal in 2026 and parish councils would be asked if they were interested in devolved services. Following discussion, it was agreed that the Council should express an interest in this.

20. Any other business (by permission of the Chairman and upon which no decisions may be made)

20.1 Cllr. Aisladie reported on the Marsh Meadow meeting in early October. She said Cllr. Regan had spoken well about some of the issues concerning the Wingday event. The Chairman said he had spoken to the National Trust along the same lines.

20.2 Regarding the War Memorials it was noted that the National trust chief ranger had told Cllr. Edwards that although they owned the land they would not be clearing the weeds around the war memorials. Cllrs. Aisladie and Brar had intended to do this but it seems the previous clerk had arranged for contractors to do this. They would litter pick instead and the situation needed looking at closely next year.

20.3 It was decided to ask the Assistant Clerk to arrange another self-funded Christmas meal for Councillors and staff at the Kings Head.

20.4 The Chairman reported that the twinning reception event recently hosted by the Council had been very pleasant but it would have been better to see more councillors attending. It was agreed to give as much notice as possible in the future.

20.4 Cllr. Aisladie enquired about manning a stall at the Christmas fair. The Chairman agreed to liaise with Cllr. Regan and the organiser to arrange this - thanking Cllr. Moore for the offer of his gazebo.

Action: Chairman

21. Under section 1(2) Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings Act 1960) and under Standing order 3d to agree that in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted below that the public be temporarily excluded and be instructed to withdraw

This was agreed.

22. To agree about the appointment of a new Clerk and if so agreed to approve the resolutions required by the Council's banks to allow online admin access to the bank accounts of the Council

The Chairman reported that Deepa Kanthi had this evening signed her contract of employment and would start work on 18th November. She was warmly welcomed. The following bank resolutions were approved in respect of the Clerk being authorised to access and set up payments for approval on the Council's Unity bank accounts :-

"We confirm this resolution has been recorded in accordance with the rules of the organisation.

- o The people named in this form will be authorised individuals on all accounts.
- o We are aware Unity Trust Bank may not make enquiries before acting on instructions given by any authorised signatory.
- o We acknowledge that Unity's Terms and Conditions may vary from time to time and we agree to be bound by them.
- o We will provide Unity with instructions and changes in line with the mandate.
- o Unity should rely on this Mandate until we send future amends.
- o We will send Unity a copy of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, a copy of the Company's rules, our Trust Deeds or our registration documents if requested. We will inform Unity of any changes.
- o We will also notify Unity in writing of any change in Directors/Trustees/Officers and membership.
- o Committee members/Trustees of unincorporated entities acknowledge that they shall be jointly and severally liable for any liabilities incurred by individuals authorised to give instructions."

23. Update on employment/ retainer of a new Chief Commons Officer

The Chairman reported that this was on hold until more was known about the proposed new law which would abolish zero hours contracts. In the meantime he would speak to the proposed candidate again. **Action: Chairman**

24. To receive a report regarding outstanding issues relating to the former Clerk leaving her employment

The Chairman noted that this was still to be finally resolved. Cllr. Howard moved a vote of thanks for the hard work that the Chairman and Cllr. Aisladie had put into the matter to date. **Action: Chairman and Cllr. Aisladie**

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

Next meeting Tuesday 3rd December 2024 at 7.30pm in the Community Room at Cookham Library.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

.....Chairman

Dated.....