COOKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of Cookham Parish Council held in the Community Room on Tuesday 11th June 2024, at 6.30pm

PRESENT: Cllr. B. Perry (Chairman)
Cllrs. L. Austin, C. Aisladie, N. Bedwell, M. Brar, J. Edwards, M. Howard, R. Kellaway, J. Moore, H. Pleming, A-L. Regan and T. Caen.

Also Present: Mrs. K H Holder, Locum. No members of the public or Press were present.

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllrs. E. Bune, M-L. Kellaway and L. Tull.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3. To appoint Christine Hunter, Assistant Clerk to the Council, to undertake the work of the Proper Officer pursuant to Standing Order 15a during the absence of the Proper Officer, this appointment being retrospective from the first day of the current absence of such said Officer(s) and to operate automatically during any/all future such absence.

This was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Cllr. Howard and was unanimously agreed. It was noted by the Chairman that this was not intended to create an onerous burden on the Asst. Clerk but was necessary to ensure, for example, that meetings could be properly called.

4. To appoint Richard Kellaway as temporary Responsible Financial Officer during the absence (current and/or future) of the permanent Responsible Financial Officer.

This was proposed by the Chairman and seconded by Cllr. Howard and was unanimously agreed. It was also agreed that this appointment be with effect from 4th June 2024.

5. To approve the motion that: This Council authorises and instructs the Chairman of the Council on its behalf to communicate with and to give, and ensure compliance with, such instructions to the Proper Officer, Responsible Financial Officer, Clerk, other staff and contractors working for the Council (as are not contrary to the law, Standing Orders or the terms of contracts) as s/he deems appropriate from time to time to optimise the efficient and effective working of the Council and its office, and implement efficiently and effectively resolutions/motions it has agreed, including if appropriate incurring/involving expenditure on any item up to the maximum authority of the Clerk/Proper Officer/Responsible Financial Officer without requiring further authorisation from the Council (any such authorised expenditure to be reported to Council at its next practical ordinary meeting).

The Chairman noted that this was an item proposed by him but which he did not now wish to move and he would accordingly treat it as withdrawn.

6. To approve the motion that: This Council authorises the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council and Chairman of the Staffing Committee together to employ such part-time and/or full time staff (including, without limiting the generality, if they think fit a temporary Proper Officer, Responsible Financial Officer and/or Clerk) as they may consider necessary from time to time to ensure that the work of the Council is efficiently and effectively carried out, especially in but not limited to times of staff absence for any reason, and authorises expenditure of up to £5,000 in any one instance for this purpose without the requirement of further authority.

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed that the motion be approved subject to the removal of the words ‘in any one instance’.

7. Chairman’s Submissions.

The Chairman noted that on Monday a working party meeting of the members of the emergency committee took place which considered the Clerk’s email offering her resignation which had been copied to all councillors. Following discussion it had been agreed in all the circumstances to accept her resignation and Cllr. Aisladie as Chairman of the Staffing Committee would liaise with the Council’s HR advisers to ensure all steps were correctly followed regarding the Clerk’s leaving and to recruit a replacement.

8 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 approved

9 To receive an update from Cllr C. Aisladie regarding
9.1 the position on the recruitment of the Administration Assistant Clerk following the decision of Staffing Committee on 20th May 2024 - Cllr. Aisladie reported that 2 candidates had agreed to be interviewed.
9.2 the position of the Office and its operation during the current absence of the Clerk - She thanked councillors who had been assisting and the current Asst. Clerk who was undertaking more tasks despite many interruptions but was not able to cover all activities. She noted that many projects will have to be put on hold whilst new staff were recruited and trained.
9.3 the workload of the Assistant Clerk both generally and in the current absence of the Clerk, and to consider the payment of appropriate bonuses - Cllr. Aisladie noted that the current Asst Clerk had asked for additional payments to cover her overtime and extra responsibilities. It was agreed that Cllr. Aisladie should liaise with the current Asst Clerk as to whether she would like to be paid overtime or time off in lieu and proceed to effect her wishes accordingly. The Asst Clerk should be asked if she needed a mobile phone to undertake her visits to the allotments. Cllr. Howard suggested that the opening hours of the office to the public be temporarily restricted.

There followed a brief debate on the roles of the Clerk and Councillors and procedures for procurement and it was noted that processes would be reviewed in due course.

Cllr. Aisladie requested patience and sensitivity on the issue of the Clerk’s resignation. She was asked to take matters forward in order to reach an amicable and expedient arrangement to bring about the termination of the Clerk’s employment.

The meeting closed at 7.20pm