

UPTON BY CHESTER AND DISTRICT PARISH COUNCIL



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Minutes of the Upton by Chester and District Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 15 January 2024, 7.30pm, at Upton Pavilion, Wealstone Lane, Upton, Chester.

Present: Cllr S Akhtar, Cllr M Carter, Cllr J Ebo, Cllr H Jackson, Cllr C Jeffery, Cllr R Lee, Cllr A Lingard, Cllr H Morgan, Cllr S Stanley (Chairperson) and Cllr H Wilman.

In attendance: Suzi Bull (Clerk/Proper Officer).

1. OPEN FORUM.

No members of the public were present at the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M Bryan.

Cllr Bryan has been absent from Parish Council meetings for a continuous period of six months due to family reasons.

Members not present at meetings for a continuous six month period cease to be a councillor, unless Council approves the reason for absence.

Resolved: The reason for the apologies for absence was approved.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No declarations were made.

4. COMMUNITY SAFETY.

No member of the Upton Community Safety Team was available to attend the meeting.

A crime report was previously circulated.

Resolved:

- **To invite members of the Community Safety Team to attend Community Engagement Committee meetings as an alternative option.**
- **Councillors will consider attending scheduled police surgeries and report back to the Parish Council.**
- **The Clerk will request a duty roster for the Community Safety Team.**
- **A further report on the PCSO's progress with school car parking issues will be requested.**
- **The broken fence at Chemistry Pits will be referred to the Assets Management Committee.**

5. MINUTES.

Resolved: The Chairperson signed the Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 11 December 2023.

6. CLERK'S REPORT.

Resolved: A report from the Clerk on action taken on resolutions made at the last meeting was received and noted.

The following further action was agreed:

- The group set up to develop a work plan for the Health and Safety actions will meet at 5pm on a date to be agreed that will accommodate working councillors and staff attendance. A report will be prepared to be presented to the next full Parish Council meeting. Membership of the group includes Cllr Morgan, Cllr Lee and Cllr Jeffery; the Clerk will be in attendance. Cllr Morgan will lead the group.
- A risk assessment will be undertaken and written, by the Facilities Manager, for winter gritting at the Pavilion.

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY.

A list of completed Health and Safety actions was circulated. The Clerk reported that further advice had been sourced from Worknest who have suggested some information from the Worknest Health and Safety portal may be exported to provide a more detailed report. Further advice is to be provided.

Resolved: The following action related to Health and Safety will be taken:

- A report will be provided to each Parish Council meeting with matters arising from site inspections by the Facilities Manager. All Parish Council owned sites will be included.
- The contractor will be asked to check the playing field pedestrian gate once more due to reports of it not self-closing. If the fault is unable to be rectified, a new gate will be requested.
- The Facilities Manager will attend at Chemistry Pits to check for damage to the path.

8. COMMITTEE MINUTES.

Minutes of Committee meetings held since the last meeting were received.

- Finance Committee 08.01.24

Supporting information regarding the Parish Council's VAT liability was received and noted. This information was clarified further by the Chairperson and the Chair of the Finance Committee who along with the Clerk have provided information to an external VAT professional for the purpose of assessing whether the Parish Council's business activities mean it should be registered for VAT and if so, to calculate amounts due to the HMRC.

The advice received is that the Parish Council should be registered for VAT; amounts due from previous years will need to be calculated and paid to HMRC.

It was proposed to appoint the Parkinson Partnership to advise on the VAT liabilities in relation to the pavilion shop and assist with VAT registration, estimating the amount of VAT due, checking a draft registration document and drafting any letters to HMRC. Also, to carry out a review of processes and provide a report on the Parish Council's VAT liabilities.

Resolved: The appointment of the Parkinson Partnership as per the quotation provided at £750.00 was approved.

It was reported that to date, sales income taken directly at the Pavilion is accounted for separately from the main Parish Council accounting system.

To make best use of the Council's accounting software, it was agreed to bring in a qualified consultant to support the Council with the full use of its software so that account data is easily accessible; maintained in line with proper practices and in such a condition that the Council can easily report digitally to HMRC for future VAT returns.

Resolved: Approved.

Cllr Akhtar arrived at this point, 20.16pm.

9. FINANCE AND ACCOUNTS REPORTS.

Resolved: Details of payments and receipts for December were received and noted. A budget variance report, with a brief explanation of the significant variances was also received and noted.

An urgent additional item was taken at this point.

9.1 ANNUAL RETURN AND ACCOUNTABILITY AMENDMENTS.

The Chairperson reported that an ongoing matter to amend the 2022/23 Annual Governance and Accountability Return had not yet been resolved due to the external auditor PKF Littlejohn requiring additional amendments and further information; the auditor requested copies of documentation for the Council's loan from the Lawn Tennis Association to verify the outstanding balance.

In addition, information relating to an 'exception' report on the previous external audit report has been requested from the Council.

The auditor has asked for details of how the inadequate monitoring of the budget in 2021/22 was addressed in 2022/23, including relevant documentation and the Minutes of the meeting where the auditor's report was discussed.

From September 2023, detailed reporting to the Finance Committee and the Parish Council now takes place every month by way of budget variance reports produced from the Parish Council's accounting software.

Resolved: Information above was received and noted.

Correspondence from the external auditor will be sent to councillors, as per financial regulation 2.10.

The amended AGAR document will be uploaded to shared files.

The Clerk will submit the amended AGAR document and all other documents requested by the auditor. Approved.

10. BUDGET.

The Council received a copy of the draft budget for approval.

Resolved: The draft budget was approved.

Further action will be carried out by the Assets Management Committee to review the Asset Register, to assess the expected 'life' of equipment that will need replacing with associated costs that will affect the next budget.

11. PRECEPT REQUEST.

Resolved: a precept request of £158,960 will be put forward; this is an increase of 4.9%.

The annual charge to each band D equivalent property in Upton will be £46.16; an increase of £2.17 on last year's charge of £43.99

It was agreed that it is important to communicate fully with Upton residents regarding the decisions made in setting the budget.

Resolved: This will be referred to the Community Engagement Committee.

Councillor Akhtar left the meeting at this point 20.40pm.

12. BOROUGH COUNCILLORS' REPORT.

Resolved: It was noted that no reports from Borough Councillors on matters which affect Upton were received.

13. CORRESPONDENCE.

Resolved: It was noted that no correspondence requiring a response from the Parish Council was received.

14. RISK ASSESSMENT.

The Parish Council Risk Assessment requires updating and will be informed by the recent Health and Safety audit.

Resolved: A working group consisting of Cllr Lingard and the Clerk will create a plan of how the risk assessment will be upgraded and present information to the next Parish Council meeting.

To approve action to carry out an IT audit and associated risk assessment.

As part of the Annual Governance requirements, all risk must be assessed and sound processes confirmed; this includes I.T. risks.

It was proposed that a professional review of I.T. systems should be undertaken.

Resolved: The proposal was approved. Quotations for an external review of I.T. systems will be sourced by Cllr Lingard.

15. OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH REFERRALS.

It may be necessary to arrange Occupational Health referrals for staff within a short time frame. The Employment Committee would like to have the authority to proceed without waiting for full Council authority.

Resolved: The Employment Committee is authorised to arrange Occupational Health referrals as required, at a cost of approximately £600 each.

16. BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN.

The existing Parish Council Business Continuity Plan and Emergency Plan require updating.

Resolved: A working group to include Cllr Stanley, Cllr Wilman and the Clerk agreed to work on updating both policies.

17. AMENDMENT TO STANDING ORDERS.

A motion was received to make an amendment to Standing Order no:16 as follows:

" The Council shall appoint appropriate staff member(s) or Councillor(s) in a voluntary capacity or qualified professional(s) to undertake the work of the Responsible Financial Officer when the Responsible Financial Officer is absent."

This will allow for the addition of a councillor or paid professional to carry out the duties of the Responsible Financial Officer in the event of unexpected or long-term absence.

Resolved: Approved.

18. CW&C COUNCIL: LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN.

The Parish Council considered a response to the CW&C Council 'Lets Talk About Transport' consultation.

Resolved: an email response will be submitted to include information relevant to the Upton Neighbourhood Plan. Information collated relevant to previous transport matters raised by residents and discussed at the Parish Council meeting in September (min no:146.23) regarding Mill Lane traffic flow will also be included. Transport issues in other areas, including the impact of car parking associated to the Countess of Chester Hospital and those received and noted previously will be added.

Cllr Lingard will prepare the response, assisted by the Clerk. Cllr Stanley will review the response before it is submitted.

19. NEW HIGHWAYS SIGNAGE.

Resolved: This item was deferred to the next meeting.

20. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING.

Resolved: the date and time of the next meeting will be 19 February at 7.30pm.

This meeting closed at 9.20pm.