



**MINUTES**

*Virtual Meeting:* COUNCIL

*Date:* 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021

*Time:* 8.00pm

*Hosted from:* COUNCIL OFFICES, HAINAULT ROAD, CHIGWELL

**PRESENT: Councillors (7)**

Councillors; Pranav Bhanot (Chairman), Deborah Barlow, Jamie Braha, #Rochelle Hodds, #Faiza Rizvi, Mona Sehmi and Barry Scrutton.

**Officers (1)**

Anthony-Louis Belgrave – Clerk to the Council

**Also in Attendance**

There were members of the public in attendance.

# for part of the meeting.

**20.258 RECORDING OF MEETINGS**

**NOTED** that in accordance with Standing Order 3 (1) photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of a meeting may take place.

**20.259 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (4)**

Members **NOTED** that apologies have been received from Councillors; Naveed Akhtar, Kewal Chana, Rochelle Hodds and Alan Lion.

**20.260 OTHER ABSENCES (2)**

Councillors; Faiza Rizvi and Barry Scrutton.

**20.261 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

After discussions, it was then moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that;

- The minutes for the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021 were **CONFIRMED**.

**20.262 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In view of the temporary absence of Councillor Scrutton, the Clerk reminded Members that Councillor Scrutton normally makes the following declaration pertaining to the 'List of payments.'

Councillor Scrutton declared a non-pecuniary interest in the matter of payments for 'employer support' and 'GDPR support' to Wirehouse employment services, on the grounds that he is a Trustee of the Grange Farm Centre; a charitable trust which has engaged the services of this organisation.

After brief discussions, this information was **NOTED**.



## 20.263 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Members were reminded that the received written public questions, with the draft responses were circulated to all Members, in advance of this meeting.

After brief discussion, it was **AGREED** that questions would be received verbally.

**Q.** Some of the roads in Chigwell are extremely below par, Coopers Close for instance looks and feels like an army assault course. Countries in the Third World have better roads than this. I am wondering if Chigwell Parish might allocate some of its overlaid general reserves towards a budget to subsidise repairs in our Parish? Especially considering the Highways department budgetary constraints which induce galling long-waiting times for deemed non-urgent repairs.

**A.** The upkeep of highways throughout the Parish is the exclusive responsibility of ECC Highways. If this council was to consider such a proposal, the respective contractors tasked by ECC, would be engaged to undertake any such project, as described. The resultant proposal would then have to be considered by the county council, utilising the usual protocols. Councillor Braha stated that such matters can only be reported to ECC, whilst he acknowledged their services were somewhat delayed, the requisite works are eventually carried out.

**Q.** Fly-tipping on Pudding Lane and Millers Lane is frequent and significant, can the council look into the possibility of installing street-lighting on these roads, which would encourage EFDC to install CCTV? currently the roads are too dark.

**A.** The council resolved to participate in the scheme, proposed by ECC/EFDC, which enables the reinstatement of night-time street lighting. The expenditure required from this council, for the first year of operation is **£16,943.34**. The scheme was intended to afford the night-time illumination of the entire Parish, further the installation of street lighting would be the responsibility of the Highways Authority, ECC, However this council may convey your concerns to this authority.

# Councillor Scrutton arrived at the meeting.

The Chairman expressed his concerns that the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> questions pertained to 'Highways' matters, He then proposed that these questions be relayed to ECC, rather than being responded to at this meeting and that the next question to be received by the council would be the fifth question.

Councillor Barlow asked whether these questions could still be read aloud, the Chairman then agreed that questions three and four would be read at the meeting.

**Q.** Would the council consider purchasing a number of dummy cameras to deter crime in hotspot areas?

**Q.** A Crash on Romford Road related to poor lighting has highlighted an area where street-lighting has not returned. Is this an oversight and could Parish council please work with Essex County Council to reinstate these lights too?



In response to a query, Members were advised that the previous two questions were received by this office some considerable time previously, months, rather than weeks.

Members were advised that the following questions were received from the Chairman of the CRA via email and they include a statement, pertaining to the Nolan principles. The Clerk reminded Members that it is the Chairman's discretion as to whether the respective questions and statement be read by the attending member of the public, or otherwise. In response, the Chairman allowed the Chairman of the CRA to read the received questions.

- Q.** The Chairman of the CRA stated that the Nolan Principles require Councillors to submit themselves to scrutiny and this is what these public questions are and expressed gladness that this opportunity has been granted. She further stated that the failure of Councillors to respond to scrutiny by the public in an open, transparent and prompt manner may be considered a failure of the principles, which is a serious breach.

The Parish Council devoted considerable time to the concept of using the yellow buses to take residents for vaccinations. There was no needs analysis and the monthly performance review which the Councillors asked for was asked for, I have not seen. The question is, to date how many Chigwell residents have used the agreed EFCT (Chigwell Parish funded) service to reach a vaccination site?

- A.** Members were advised that correspondence was sent to the service provider pertaining to this question, however this office is presently awaiting an appropriate response. The Chairman stated that this is a good question, which he did ask of the EFCT Manager, she responded a resounding zero; the reason for that is a complaint was made by a Member of the public, because they believed a Councillor had not declared an interest, which is subject to an investigation by EFDC. It was then requested by the Councillor in question to hold back in case there were any breaches of any of the rules.

- Q.** If you look at the agendas online and supporting information, you will find payments which are being signed off today by Councillors, she then asked whether the questions pertaining to these payments could be asked now. The 'Soft surfaces' payment, which is much larger than the original amount agreed.

In response, the Chairman then determined that these questions would be received now.

- Q.** There was a meeting in November, at which three quotes were submitted to repair and re-surface the Playground. The quoted cost was £9,112 plus VAT, and the invoice was £14,441.99 plus VAT. Where and when did Councillors consider and approve this cost to the project and are you still satisfied this provider is delivering best value for money.

- A.** Members were advised that whilst the Clerk was not involved in this matter he was advised by the RFO, that the Chairman of the Management committee: Councillor Braha was advised on the circumstances and has a more informed and comprehensive understanding of this matter.



Accordingly, the Clerk advised Members, that after consultation, Councillor Braha has agreed to provide an appropriate response to this question. Councillor Braha advised Members that the service provider began the necessary repairs, having removed the top surface layer of the Playground, they discovered that the under-laying material was considerable thicker than anticipated. When the original survey was undertaken, it was conducted at an area which was at a certain depth, when the entire area was dug up, it was then discovered that the material was at various thicknesses. At that juncture, the workers were on-site, the top layer had been removed, and there were H&S concerns, because despite the area being ‘gated-off’ the playground facilities were still being used. Councillor Braha stated that the RFO consulted with him throughout the project, and after examining the relevant financial regulations, he agreed that the selected service providers could finish the job. Councillor Braha then asked the Clerk to quote the respective Financial regulation 11.1 a (vi);

*“ . . . regulations need not apply to contracts, which relate to or works . . . (vi) to be executed or goods or materials to be supplied which constitute an extension of an existing contract by the council.*

After detailed discussions, pertaining to this matter, it was moved by the Chairman and a **RESOLVED** that:

- The next question would be received.

- Q.** What is the total cost in this financial year of all works carried out on Courtland Drive? Who were all the contractors and how much in total has been paid to each contractor?
- A.** Councillor Braha responded as follows; GTM Rural Enterprises - £5330, Lucas Landscapes - £1930 and £1820, Principal Trees - £3120 and £540.

After discussions, the Chairman proposed that a question he received pertaining to the expenditures associated with the recruitment of staff be responded to at this meeting.

The Chairman stated that he has spoken with the Chairman of the Personnel committee on this matter. The Personnel committee authorised a specified budgetary expenditure and the Chairman of that committee; Councillor Rizvi would decide how and on which portals the money would be spent. The associated costs have been set by these portals, so it is my view these costs would fall within the parameters set by Financial regulation 11.1 (ii), for specialist services, as recruitment services could be argued as being specialist services.

In response, the Chairman (CRA) reiterated her question concerning the reason for the expenditure being so high this year, in comparison to last year. In response, Councillor Rizvi stated that Mark was doing a lot, so we had to create a completely new position encompassing all the roles he was doing, and some more.



So we created a 'Deputy Clerk' role, which is not on the council's organisational chart, and for that we have used many different portals and the print media. She further advised that it was her belief that to get a good, quality staff member is something that will benefit the council and residents. To measure the impact of that advert will be determined by the quality of candidates we get and that the monies have been well spent. Further, the portals we advertised on are well renowned.

The member of the public responded that whilst she agreed that portals used were important and well renowned, in February 2020, you placed an advert for an Admin. Assistant which cost £399 plus VAT, this February 2021, you placed an advert with a service provider for the same role and a 'Deputy Clerk' which cost £2896 plus VAT, so the question is why is it so much more expensive a year later?

In response, Councillor Rizvi stated that the reason for the increase in costs could be due to market forces and the portals used their standard charges, which were received in advance. Possibly because less jobs are being advertised, so the portals have hiked their prices.

In response, the member of the public stated that, on reflection my question asks, knowing it cost this much money to place an ad in the local paper £2896 plus VAT, when Reed and the other were charging considerably less; What is making you think that is value for money? I know you said the committee decided to put it in the local paper, but equally, if someone said, we could fly a aeroplane above Chigwell, with a banner, would that be a sensible decision?

In response, Councillor Rizvi stated that a plan was agreed, at which all these portals were presented, and it was agreed to advertise in all those portals and that is what we followed, to extend our reach. For two substantive positions, in a Parish council a cost of £3000, is quite 'middle of the road' pricing, and is not that much.

After further full and in-depth discussions pertaining to this matter, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This session for questions from members of the public be concluded.

## 20.264 COMMUNICATIONS

Members **NOTED** that no communications had been received.

## 20.265 DOCUMENTS ON DEPOSIT

Members **NOTED** the documents that had been received and/or deposited with the Clerk to the council during February 2021.



## 20.266 REPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER

### a) List of Payments/Incomes/Account Balances

In response to queries and discussions, which included an attending member of the public, Members were advised that a question had been received from an attending Member of the public as follows;

**Q.** The opening balance this month on the Clerk's account was £18,865.88. £15,000 was transferred in on 17th Feb and Feb salaries then paid out were £12,263.99. The closing balance on the Clerk's account is £3,468.10 - what was the other £21,601.89 spent on?

**A.** The figure quoted in the question was a bank transfer, which occurred in March 2021, from the Barclay's current account to the HSBC Clerk's account, that was erroneously included in the figures for February.

After further in-depth discussions pertaining to the 'List of payments', which included a member of the public, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.
- The Incomes and Account Balances would not be approved.
- The 'list of payments' signed up to 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021 be **APPROVED**.
- The payment of **£6584.00** to EFDC, for Street lighting Dec 2020 – Mar 2020, would not be approved for payment.
- Councillor Scrutton and Councillor Barlow would attend the office to countersign the respective 'list of payments.'

In response to a reminder from the Clerk, the Chairman stated he would attend the office tomorrow to sign the 'Social Media contract', and the 'list of payments' if necessary.

### b) Reconciliation of Parish Council Bank Accounts with the Accounts Package

After discussions, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This matter would be deferred.

### c) Confirmation of Salary Payments

After discussions, Councillor Braha **PROPOSED**, and Councillor Scrutton **SECONDED**, that they would attend the office to examine the staff salary payments and complete the necessary sign off, on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021.



d) **Governance and Accountability – Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control**

Members were advised that this agenda item is in preparation for the completion of Section 2 of the Annual Return, the Annual Governance Statement, for the year ended 2020/21 scheduled for the Council meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

Members were further advised that the Finance Committee will continue to have charge of the financial and accounting arrangements of the council, and where necessary make recommendations to full council. However, this annual review is in future to be carried out by the full council to meet the requirements of the external auditors.

Members were encouraged to refer to the following publication: “*Governance and Accountability, A Practitioners’ Guide*”, which provides advice on the accounting practices to be followed and sets out the appropriate standard of financial reporting.

After full and in-depth discussions, which included an attending member of the public, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.
- This document would be re-drafted include a ‘*Table of review*’ that will state when the document was reviewed, and when it is due to be reviewed.
- This document would be re-drafted, in consideration of suggestions received by the Clerk from Councillors, preceding the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021, then duly reviewed at a subsequent council meeting.

**20.267 CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY DECLARATION**

Members were advised that at the meeting of the Management committee held on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021, a brief presentation was received from an attending member of the public pertaining to the significance of declaring a Climate Emergency.

Members **CONSIDERED** the following motion to take action on climate change.

After brief discussions, Members **NOTED** the following:

- Human activity has caused irreversible climate change, the impacts of which are being felt around the world. Global temperatures have already increased by 1 degree Celsius from pre-industrial levels. Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels are above 400 parts per million (ppm). This far exceeds the 350ppm deemed to be a safe level for humanity.
- In order to reduce the chance of runaway Global Warming and limit the effects of Climate Breakdown, it is imperative that humans reduce our CO<sub>2</sub>eq (carbon equivalent) emissions from their current 6.5 tonnes per person per year to less than 2 tonnes as soon as possible.



- Individuals cannot be expected to make this reduction on their own. Societal changes to regulations and infrastructure are required, to make low carbon living easier and the new norm.
- Carbon emissions result from both production and consumption.
- Governing authorities around the world are responding by declaring a ‘Climate Emergency’ and implementing policies and committing resources, in support of this declaration.
- Governing authorities have a responsibility to limit the negative impacts of Climate Breakdown, by adopting accordant policies and recognise the importance of committing to carbon neutrality as quickly as possible.

After further discussions, which included an attending member of the public Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Declare a ‘Climate Emergency,’ acknowledging the urgent requirement for local and global reductions in carbon emissions.
- Pledge to do everything within this council's power to make the Parish carbon neutral by 2030.
- Lobby high tier government institutions to provide the powers and resources to make the stated target achievable.
- Liaise with other local government authorities/community organisations to determine and implement best practice methods to limit Global Warming.
- Encourage and support the wider community towards the achievement of this target.
- Establish a ‘Working Group’ to develop and pursue proposals and initiatives towards accomplishing the stated resolutions.

The Clerk advised Members that the time is 9.45pm, then proposed that Item **12.** on the agenda be received now, as the representative from the RCCE has been waiting to give the respective presentation for some considerable time.

#### **20.268 CONSENT FORM – Electronic Summons/Agenda**

Members were reminded that individual Councillors must give prior confirmation to consent to receiving electronic summons/agendas, for council and committee meetings. This process is to allow the aforementioned actions to be statutorily compliant. Members were further reminded this action does not negate the former policy but provides a further option for members.

Members were advised that in consideration of the recent declaration of a climate change emergency and current delays in receiving mail, this consent will allow a summons to be received, without the requirement for printing and the use of postal services.

After discussions, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.



- Members would sign the respective consent form in accordance with their own preferences.

#### 20.269 PARISH PLAN PRESENTATION by Rural Community Council of (RCCE)

Members were reminded that this council is a member of the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) which provides a unique range of services geared to supporting the needs of Parish Councils and their local communities. These services include a network of field officers to support the development of a Parish Plan. Members were further reminded that at the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021, it was resolved that a Parish Plan for Chigwell would be progressed.

Members were advised that a representative from the RCCE has been invited to attend this meeting to assist Members' consideration of the way in which the described intent will be progressed and developed into a robust and sustainable Parish Plan.

Members **RECEIVED** the respective presentation, which was followed by a brief Q&A session.

After discussions, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.

#### 20.270 DRAFT MEETINGS SCHEDULE – 2021/2022 MUNICIPAL YEAR

Members were advised that an analysis of Parish and District Council meetings for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year has been undertaken. This analysis has considered the religious festivals to be observed during the coming municipal year.

Members were reminded that alterations and additions to this schedule may become necessary, as dictated by arising circumstances, and in all cases, meetings will be scheduled in accordance with the adopted Standing Orders.

Members **CONSIDERED** the draft diary of meeting dates 2021/22 for Council and Planning committee meetings and the draft calendar of meetings 2021/22 for Epping Forest District Council, as shown at the respective appendices.

After further discussions, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.
- The draft schedule of meetings, for the 2021/2022 municipal year, be **APPROVED**, subject to amendments.

#### 20.271 CHIGWELL CRIME STATISTICS UPDATE

Members were reminded that at the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2020, it was resolved the originators of the Chigwell crime statistics report, namely Essex Police, would be asked to provide an explanation for the apparent absence of information concerning incidences of domestic violence, which appear to be deficient from the respective report and that this explanation would be received by the council, to enable an informed decision on the manner in which the council may respond.



Members were advised correspondence, in response to the received public question, from the Community Safety Engagement Officer, is shown at the respective appendix, for Member's information.

Members **CONSIDERED** the response from the Community Safety Engagement Officer.

After discussions, which included an attending member of the public, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.

#### 20.272 COMMUNITY SPECIAL CONSTABLE SCHEME UPDATE

Members were reminded that following a response to a preliminary enquiry, it was resolved that a request would be conveyed to the providing authority for this council to be registered as a potential participant, when the scheme recommences. Members were advised that following further enquiries this council has been advised that the scheme has now resumed, and a meeting has transpired with representatives of this council and scheme coordinators.

After brief discussions, which included an attending member of the public, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.

#### 20.273 CONSULTATION DOCUMENTS

Members **NOTED** there were no consultation documents.

#### 20.274 MEMBERS' REPORTS

##### a) Recruitment of Staff

The Chairman of the Personnel committee; Councillor Faiza Rizvi stated that the adverts for the recruitment of staff have been placed and we are looking forward to interviewing people. But in the interim, what I am recommending to the full council is that we appoint an interim person, to see us thru before Mark leaves, so there is an 'overlap' and 'handover,' when the substantive person is appointed, they would take over. This is to expedite the whole thing, I know this matter should have gone to the Personnel committee, but to expedite the whole thing, I have brought it to full council, as we only have two weeks left. Councillor Braha reiterated that we need someone in place so there is some 'cross-over' with Mark. Councillor Rizvi then asked for the council's agreement of this proposed action.

In response, Councillor Scrutton asked if further details could be provided to the council, concerning about what is being proposed, as it has been sprung on us without any information; he then further questioned whether an individual is presently available to assume this role, what are the proposed hours of employment. How has this been decided upon, and by whom?

In response, Councillor Rizvi stated that as the Chairman of the Personnel there is indeed a person available, who is qualified, and Councillor Scrutton would have to take her word for it.



In response, Councillor Scrutton stated that he could not take her word for it, and that details would be required, to allow an informed council or Personnel committee decision to be made.

In response to further discussions, Members were reminded by the Clerk that the council cannot make decisions on matters which are not featured on the respective council agenda and that if the council are to pursue actions which, it is assumed will involve significant monetary expenditure then those details must be available to Member's for their consideration, to enable an informed decision to be made. The Clerk further advised members that he was not aware of this intention, until now.

In response, Councillor Rizvi stated that this matter was discussed at a meeting, at which the Clerk was not present.

After further discussions, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- A meeting of the council would be scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021, immediately after the Finance meeting, to consider the recruitment of an interim staff member.
- The Chairman would provide the Clerk with the necessary details and supporting documents, which would be duly included on the agenda, as appendices, for Member's consideration.

#### **20.275 HIGHWAYS ISSUES**

Members **NOTED** that were no Highway issues reported.

#### **20.276 REPORT OF THE CLERK**

The Clerk reported that;

- Members are reminded of the meetings of the Finance committee, scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021, at 7pm and the Management committee scheduled for 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021, immediately after the Planning committee meeting, which is scheduled for 7.30pm.
- Members are reminded of several online training opportunities which are available from the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC); Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Law/Procedures. Details have been sent to all Members by electronic means.
- He will be attending the Local Councils' Liaison Committee, scheduled for 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021, the respective agenda will include the following matters; EFDC Local Plan; Progress report, Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy – To advise and clarify on 'Clean Air Zone', Update on the Elections planning process and EFDC Training schedule and prospectus 2021/22.



- He was in self-isolation from 10<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021, during which time he did not have access to his email account.
- He will be engaged in volunteering duties in support of the Epping Forest Foodbank, on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2021.
- Members are reminded that following a received resignation letter, dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020, the employment of Mark Hembury as the Responsible Financial Officer/Cemetery registrar will conclude at the end of this month.

After discussions, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.

#### 20.277 REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN

No report from the Chairman was received at the meeting.

#### 20.278 MATTERS TO BE BROUGHT FORWARD TO THE NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

None.

#### 20.279 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

Members were reminded that in accordance with the *Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960* and *Local Government Act 1972*, a council meeting must be open to the public and the press, and they may only be excluded by manner of a council resolution, that states publicity would prejudice the public interest by reasons of the confidential nature of the business or some other reasons stated in the respective resolution arising out of the business to be transacted.

After discussions, it was then moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that;

- This information be **NOTED**.
- The public and the press be excluded from the meeting, the council believing that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be discussed.



**20.280 VICTORY HALL/CHIGWELL MEMBER’S CLUB UPDATE**

Members were reminded a revised lease was relayed to LMVHF on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020, and a virtual meeting was held on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Members were further reminded that at the Management committee meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and the council meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020, it was resolved that the ‘Final schedule of dilapidations/wants of repair’ report and the Electrical installation condition report, would be conveyed to the LMVHF and the Chigwell Member’s Club. On 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021, a meeting was held with an advisor from the Rural Community Council for Essex, to garner further advice on this, and other associated matters. At the Management committee meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021, it was resolved that access to the building would be denied with immediate effect, essential repairs necessary for a vacant property would be undertaken and the appropriate legal actions would be pursued.

Members were further reminded that at the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021, it was resolved that the recommendations of the selected service provider and the documentation which defined the required services would be approved.

Members **CONSIDERED** the relevant documentation, received from the service provider.

Members **RECEIVED** a confidential update, from the Councillor Braha, on this matter. After full and in-depth discussions, it was then moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.
- The Chairman, after consultation with Councillor Braha, would attend the office on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021, to further consult with the Clerk, and draft accordant instructions to the solicitor, pertaining to this matter.
- This matter would be included on the agenda for the council meeting, scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021, to allow Members to consider other relevant correspondences.

The meeting concluded at 11.00pm.

Signed .....

**Chairman**

Date .....