



MINUTES

Virtual Meeting: COUNCIL

Date: 8th April 2021

Time: 8.00pm

Hosted from: COUNCIL OFFICES, HAINAULT ROAD, CHIGWELL

PRESENT: Councillors (10)

Councillors; Pranav Bhanot (Chairman), Naveed Akhtar, #Deborah Barlow, Jamie Braha, Kewal Chana, #Rochelle Hodds, Alan Lion (Vice-Chairman), #Faiza Rizvi, #Mona Sehmi and Barry Scrutton.

Officers (2)

Anthony-Louis Belgrave – Clerk to the Council.

#David Little – Interim Deputy Clerk/RFO.

Also in Attendance

There were members of the public in attendance.

for part of the meeting.

20.290 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.

20.291 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (1)

Members **NOTED** that apologies have been received from Councillor Barlow.

20.292 OTHER ABSENCES (1)

Councillors; Faiza Rizvi.

20.293 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

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

- The minutes for the meeting held on 11th March 2021 were **CONFIRMED**.

20.294 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.'

A non-pecuniary interest in the matter of payments for 'employer support' and 'GDPR support' to Wire-house 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.

This information was **NOTED**.



Councillors; Barlow and Rizvi arrived at the meeting.

20.295 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman reminded Members that one written question has been received from a member of the public, pertaining to salaries.

Members were advised that an appropriate answer could not be provided at this meeting, however a response will be drafted, then published with the minutes for this meeting, and communicated to the respective questioner.

In view of the time available, the Chairman then invited the attending public to ask questions orally.

An attending Member of the public (CRA Chairman) stated that the question to be asked concerns the Victory Hall; she then handed over to another public attendee to ask the respective question, which was as follows;

The Member of the public stated that she was speaking on behalf of the CRA Vice-Chairman. She stated that Councillors were written to about the CRA's concerns, and an update on the following questions is now required. It is imperative that the Hall be returned to the community, as the non-opening will result in great harm to all users and for the community as a whole.

When can the community be expected for the Hall to be returned to the community and a new lease signed with the new trustees?

Secondly, can the urgent and specific works be carried out by the Parish Council, in the capacity of the freeholder, before Covid restrictions are lifted on 17th May 2021 and hence returned to the community, after this date. She stated that she would like to reiterate why the Foundation are the experts in running Village Halls, rather than the Parish Council, who are already dealing with other important issues in the Parish, and surely would not want another large responsibility, on this kind. As you are fully aware, the Hall has been successfully run i.e. bookings, cleaning, key exchange, and advertising by volunteers, at no expense, since 1959. The Foundation, as a charity has been able to provide the funding, by grants and rebates, which the Parish Council is unable to do. There are new trustees ready to take over the running of the Hall, and are waiting for the new contract, which has already been drafted. The Parish have kindly been asked if they would like to become Trustees, but unfortunately to date no reply has been received by the Foundation. As you are fully aware the Hall is widely used by the community and furthermore, it is a life-line, even more needed now, as proven by Covid, and the need for social interaction and the mental well-being of our residents. So just to confirm, we would like to find out when they would execute a 'Deed of surrender' to clear the ground, for the granting of a new lease to the Foundation, b) The existing trustee for the Foundation; Mr Robert Taylor, will appoint five new trustees, two of these should either be current District or Parish Councillors, nominated by the relevant council and replaced by other Councillors on retirement of office, the three other Trustees will be Rhys-Jones, Christopher Jolly and Mr. William Kennedy.



Upon such appointment, Robert Taylor would retire as a trustee. The council would immediately apply the sums reserved in the accounts for the proper carrying out the various works required, in the surveyor's reports obtained by the council. The council would grant a new lease to the Foundation for 25 years, at a peppercorn rent, as the charitable Foundation, unlike the council, would be eligible to apply for government and other grants to support public funding, to secure the widest possible public use of the Hall. The Foundation would appoint a manager, to manage the various lettings to local users and the Hall would once again be a local asset.

Councillor Barlow arrived at the meeting.

So, it is apparent this situation needs to be resolved urgently and instructions to solicitors to undertake court proceedings against the Foundation, costing thousands of our tax-payers money, has not been conducive to the situation, moreover it has complicated the whole situation needlessly. The Foundation has shown their willingness to resolve this status quo by finding new trustees and drafting a new contract, however they have been met with a wall of silence, for no reason. We would like you to note the Hall is a public building, we would also request that discussions be held in the public domain and not confidential, behind closed doors. As your constituent electors may have their say. To conclude the CRA on behalf of residents urgently ask for an update on the situation, a roadmap to the opening of the Hall and to offer assistance, where possible to the opening of the Victory Hall, which is our village hall, and we would like this before the new Councillors are brought forward. She further stated, this is on behalf of the Vice-Chairman of the CRA.

In response, the Chairman stated he would attempt to sift-out the questions, from the previous statement. The Chairman then proceeded to thank all the residents and the membership of the CRA, who have written to the council on this issue. He further stated that the majority of the questions concern legal matters, which will be dealt with, by the council in the appropriate manner. However, the Victory Hall will only be re-opened, when it is established that it is safe to do so, and this will be done as fast as is possible. The Chairman stated that the council clearly recognises that this facility is a community asset and it is the intent this will continue. He further advised attendees that there appears to be some misinformation pertaining to the facility, suggesting that the Hall it is closing permanently, which has certainly never been the case, or ever considered by this council. The associated lease agreement is being discussed, and the council is required to determine the way forward and will take on board the received opinions and recommendations. The Chairman and Councillor Braha then emphasized the intent of the council to progress this as fast as possible, and re-iterated that he has spoken to a significant number of residents who have been misinformed and alleviated their concerns for the facility's future.

The Chairman of the CRA asked to clarify who would be running the Hall, the Foundation, who have successfully run the Hall for the past sixty years and their lease was not renewed two years ago, or are residents going to have to pay council staff to run it. It is the concern we have a very experienced charitable foundation, with Trustees willing to step up and willing to run the Hall, compared to the council who has many other responsibilities. She further stated that she did not believe residents want to do this, as there has already been a lot of money spent on legalities, whilst the Foundation are willing to complete a 'Deed of surrender.'



She further stated that residents want to see Councillors stop unnecessarily delaying matters. In response, the Chairman stated that this is a decision for the council, which will be made, in due course, at best speed, in response to further questions he reiterated the intent to re-open the facility when it was deemed safe to do so.

In response to further discussion, the Chairman reminded attendees that the purpose of this item on the agenda was for the council to receive questions and reiterated the council's assurances that public funds are efficiently and effectively utilised. He further advised that the council is required to fund any necessary legal actions, which will allow the pursuance of any outstanding payments, required of the tenants, whether that is in relation to rent arrears, service charges, or any other associated issues. In response to further queries, the Chairman re-iterated the council's intent to pursue the outstanding matters pertaining to Victory Hall, at best possible speed.

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

- This information be **NOTED**.

20.296 COMMUNICATIONS

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

20.297 DOCUMENTS ON DEPOSIT

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

20.298 REPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER

a) List of Payments/Incomes/Account Balances

In response to queries and discussions

Councillor Barlow stated that every-time she comes to a meeting she is more and more confused about the 'Bank balances' because the numbers don't seem to add up. In response to Councillor Barlow's questions, the Chairman proposed that the Interim RFO, would be research liaise with Councillor Barlow and provide an appropriate answer. The interim RFO advised Members that this document had been drafted, prior to his tenure, however he would provide an answer, in due course. Councillor Braha advised Members that the previous RFO, had completed the financial transfers as detailed in the document, in preparation for his departure from the post, and any obstacles that may arise, prior to the post being filled on a permanent basis and any delays with the new account signatories being confirmed by the bank.

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

- This information be **NOTED**.
- Councillor Barlow would communicate her query to the interim RFO, who would provide an appropriate answer, which would be circulated to Members.



- The ‘list of payments’ signed up to 31st March 2021 be **APPROVED**.
- The total expenditure for the ‘Courtland Drive’ project would be calculated, to be noted by the Management committee, at a subsequent meeting.

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

Members were advised that the Chairman has today checked, confirmed and accordingly signed these documents.

After brief discussions, the Chairman **PROPOSED**, and Councillor Braha **SECONDED**, that the reconciliation of the Parish Council Bank Accounts with the Finance Accounts will be checked, confirmed, and signed accordingly on Friday 9th April 2021.

c) Confirmation of Salary Payments

After brief discussions, Members were advised that the Chairman has today checked, confirmed and accordingly signed these documents. The Chairman **PROPOSED**, and Councillor Braha **SECONDED**, that the staff salary payments have been examined and signed as being correct.

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 7th 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.

The Chairman reminded Members that at the meeting held on 11th March 2021, it was resolved that this document would be revised to include a ‘Table of review’ and re-drafted in consideration of suggestions received before 29th March 2021. The Chairman further advised Members he has not received any emails pertaining to this matter, but a ‘Table of review’ as suggested by Councillor Rizvi, has now been included in the re-drafted document.

Members **CONSIDERED** the respective document. Councillor Lion stated that the some of the recommendations which are described as being re-raised by the Internal Auditor are four or five years old and proposed that with regards to ‘internal audits’ it needs to be the latest versions, as this reflects the current situation. He further stated he could see no reason why we are including stuff from years ago, which is not relevant.



Councillor Rizvi further proposed that when we are approving this document, we should not approve what was said a long time ago and suggested that this document should be more generic.

After further full and in-depth discussions, the Chairman stated that there is no point in deferring this matter, and that Members must now give their proposals, for consideration at this meeting. After further discussions, Councillor Lion, reiterated his suggestions that the recommendations from previous internal audits be excluded and that only the last audit document recommendations be featured on the governance document.

After further discussions, Councillor Rizvi proposed that 'Section 5' should be re-drafted to include *'The Parish Council will follow the Internal Auditors recommendations'* rather than listing the recommendations as described on the draft document. In response, Councillor Scrutton reminded Members that the purpose of this section of the document was to direct Member's attention to these recommendations as proposed on the internal audits and that these recommendations are too important to be dismissed. In response to the proposal put forward by Councillor Lion and Rizvi, Councillor Scrutton conveyed his emphatic objection to the 'Section 5' being alter in preference to a generic statement, as proposed. In response to discussions, the Clerk reminded Members that the recommendations listed at Section 5, have been exactly quoted from previous Internal Audit Reports, which were received by Members, at previous meeting, consequentially they were drafted by the Internal Auditor, rather the Clerk, and have of course been published, as is statutorily required. In response, Councillor Barlow suggested that we should have it so that it's more generic, so everybody would be able to look at it, because otherwise we could be putting them on for years and years, some may be relevant, others may not. In response, Councillor Rizvi, agreed with this approach and ire-iterated her proposal that this section should simply state; *"We shall follow the recommendations of the Auditor."*

After further discussions, the Chairman proposed that Councillor Rizvi's suggestion that:

"Paragraph is amended such that the entire paragraph is removed, then redrafted to state that the Parish Council would follow the recommendations of the Internal Auditor."

In response to a query from the Clerk, the Chairman suggested that the heading for Section 5 be re-worded to state: *"Managing significant internal control issues."*

In response to further discussions, the interim RFO, reminded Members that the council is legally obliged to follow the recommendations of an External Auditor, whilst there is no obligation to abide by recommendations of an internal audit. Accordingly, the council should thoroughly consider whether it wishes to adopt a policy which binds the council to such recommendations.



In response to this advice, Councillor Rizvi altered her suggestion that the state at Section 5 would read;

“Paragraph is amended such that the entire paragraph is removed, then redrafted to state that the Parish Council would follow the recommendations of the External Auditor.”

Councillor Scrutton asked that his empathic objection to the proposal made by Councillor Rizvi be noted.

It was moved, by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.
- Section 5 of the respective document would be re-drafted, in accordance with Councillor Rizvi’s proposal, and would read as follows:

“Managing significant internal control issues.”

“The Parish Council will follow the recommendations of the External Auditor as may be presented to the council, from time to time, and give due consideration to all recommendations received from the Internal Auditor.”

20.299 CONSENT FORM – Electronic Summons/Agenda

In response to comments, Members were reminded, by the Clerk of the statutory legislation which necessitates individual Councillors providing written consent to receiving electronic summons/agendas, for council and committee meetings.

Consequently, the document as featured at the respective appendix must be completed and signed, to allow an electronic summons to be statutorily compliant. Members were further reminded this action does not negate the former policy but provides a further option for members.

In response to further comments, Members were reminded that at the previous meeting, Members did verbally convey a willingness to receive summons electronically however to date this office has not received the completed and signed forms, as is required.

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

- This information be **NOTED**.
- The consent form would be included in the Induction Pack, for the new Councillors.

20.300 CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY DECLARATION

Members were advised that at the meeting of the Management committee held on 25th February 2021, a brief presentation was received from an attending member of the public pertaining to the significance of declaring a Climate Emergency, and that at the council meeting held on 11th March 2021, the council 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.
- To encourage and support the wider community towards the achievement of this target.
- To establish a 'Working Group' to develop and pursue proposals and initiatives towards accomplishing the stated resolutions.

In view of this council declaration, Members were asked to **DETERMINE** the membership of the 'Climate Emergency' Working Group.

After discussions, which involved attending Members of the public, it was moved and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.
- Mr. Chris Lord would draft a preliminary "Briefing note" for consideration by the council, at the next meeting.

20.301 ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATION PROJECT – Funding Proposal

Members were reminded that a proposal to install an electric vehicle charging station, was first discussed at the meeting held on 24th September 2020. a site visit of the Victory Hall carpark and Brook Parade was undertaken by an EV Charging Consultant on 1st October 2020, and on 21st January 2021, the committee received quotations from a service provider, that proposed three options to install EV Charging facilities at Victory Hall carpark and two quotations for options to install the necessary sub-surface electrical cabling, from UK Power Networks.

Members were advised that a funding proposal for this project and associated correspondences have been received from Electrical Car Chargers UK/Wenea, for Member's consideration.

Members **RECEIVED** a preliminary introduction from the EV charging Consultant and **CONSIDERED** the received options from the service provider and the respective funding proposal, as shown at the appendices. After discussions, which involved an attending member of the public, namely the CRA Chairman, it was moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that:

- This information be **NOTED**.
- An appropriate 'Tender document' to include proposed specification, would be drafted by Councillor Braha, for consideration by the council, at the next meeting.



20.302 CONSULTATION DOCUMENTS

Members *NOTED* there were no consultation documents.

20.303 MEMBERS' REPORTS

a) Policing issues in Chigwell

Councillor Lion advised Members he has recently reported a number of issues to the Community Policing Officer, for Chigwell, PC Cattaway, who has reported on several Parking related issues in Chigwell, at the 'cut-thru' opposite to the Petrol Station, on Manor road, where a double yellow line, needs to be reinforced.

Councillor Lion further advised Members, that Pc Cattaway has conveyed his willingness to communicate with Members, on any issues which may require his attention.

b) Courtland Drive Land renovation project

Councillor Rizvi stated that she has observed that the grassed area adjacent to Courtland drive is very neat and tidy, following the associated works, which have been recently completed by the service provider, on this area of land.

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

- This information be *NOTED*.

20.304 HIGHWAYS ISSUES

Members *NOTED* that were no Highway issues reported.

20.305 REPORT OF THE CLERK

The Clerk reported that;

- An external service provider will be attending to the Waste bins at Chigwell Station Green and the lay-by on Courtland drive. This service is operational from April 2021 to September 2021, three times per week.
- The Clerk will be on Annual leave from 12th to 16th April 2021, and 7th to 11th June 2021.
- Members were 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.
- Members were reminded that following a received resignation letter, dated 1st September 2020, the employment of Mark Hembury as the Responsible Financial Officer/Cemetery registrar concluded on 31st March 2021.

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

- This information be *NOTED*.



20.306 REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman acknowledged this would be the final council meeting, for this municipal year, then thanked the Clerk, and the Councillors, who would not be standing in the coming elections, for their years of service. He further thanked the Vice-Chairman; Councillor Lion, his predecessor; Councillor Barry Scrutton and the CRA Chairman, Mrs. Celina Jefcoate.

The Chairman advised Members of the intent to have a 'socially distanced' Councillor's photograph and stated that the necessary arrangement will be made in the future.

20.307 MATTERS TO BE BROUGHT FORWARD TO THE NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

After discussions, it was agreed that the following matters would be brought forward to the next council meeting:

- Tender proposal for the EV Charging facility.

20.308 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, the Chairman proposed that the matter of whether the public and press would be excluded from the update for the Victory Hall/Chigwell Member's Club would be resolved by vote.

After, results of this vote were announced by the Chairman, 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.

The Chairman proposed that the matter of whether the public and press would be excluded from the Staffing Matter; recruitment of a temporary office assistant, would be resolved by vote.

After, results of this vote were announced, it was then moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that;

- The public and the press would not be excluded from the meeting, whilst this matter was being considered and in the interest of expediency, this matter would be dealt with first.



20.309 STAFFING MATTER – Recruitment of Temporary Office Assistant

Members were reminded that at the meeting held on 19th September 2019, the council was informed that a notice of resignation, for the position of Administration Assistant, was received by this office. This correspondence was dated 9th September 2019, consequentially, this position has been vacant since 30th September 2019.

Members were further reminded that at the meeting held on 10th September 2020, the council was informed that the position of Responsible Financial Officer/Cemetery Registrar will become vacant effective 31st December 2020, due to a notice of resignation, dated 1st September 2020, received by the Clerk, on behalf of the council.

Members were advised that the recruitment of the requisite replacements is an ongoing process and in the intervening period, it was agreed by the Management committee to recruit an interim staff member as a locum, to act as a Temporary Office Assistant, and that Councillors; Braha and Rizvi would re-draft an accordant 'Job description' for Member's consideration.

Councillor Hodds left the meeting.

Members **CONSIDERED** the revised job description for the position of 'Temporary Office Assistant' and the draft 'Particulars of Employment' received from the HR Consultancy.

Members **RECEIVED** an update from the Councillors; Braha and Rizvi on these staffing matters.

Councillor Sehmi left the meeting.

After full and in-depth discussions, which included an attending member of the public, it was then moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that the matter of whether to confirm the appointment of the 'Temporary Office Assistant' would be resolved by vote.

Councillor Rizvi **PROPOSED** and the Chairman **SECONDED** that the matter be resolved by recorded vote.

The result was as follows;

- Councillors in support; Naveed Akhtar, Pranav Bhanot (Chairman), Jamie Braha, Kewal Chana and Barry Scrutton.
- Councillors opposed; Deborah Barlow, Alan Lion (Vice-Chairman) and Faiza Rizvi.

After, results of this recorded vote were announced by the Chairman, as five in support, three opposed, it was then moved by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** that;

- This information be **NOTED**.
- The appointment of the 'Temporary Office Assistant' would be **APPROVED**.
- Councillors Braha and Rizvi would draft the necessary 'Particulars of employment' which would then be duly considered at a subsequent meeting.

Councillor Akhtar left the meeting.



20.310 VICTORY HALL/CHIGWELL MEMBER’S CLUB UPDATE

Members were reminded a revised lease was relayed to LMVHF on 9th October 2020, and a virtual meeting was held on 14th October 2020. Members were further reminded that at the Management committee meeting held on 28th October 2020 and the council meeting held on 10th 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 and on 20th 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.

Members were further reminded that at the Management committee meeting held on 21st January 2021, it was resolved that access to the building would be denied with immediate effect and essential repairs necessary for a vacant property would be undertaken, whilst the appropriate legal actions would be pursued.

Members were advised that at the meeting held on 18th March 2021, it was resolved that the consultant solicitor would be instructed to pursue a; ‘Deed of surrender’ on behalf of this council.

Members **CONSIDERED** correspondence and documentation received from the Consultant solicitor, in pursuance of the agreed actions, and the correspondence received by Councillor Braha, from the Lewis Memorial & Victory Hall Foundation.

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

- This information be **NOTED**.
- The draft document as received from the solicitor would be **APPROVED**.

The meeting concluded at 11.00pm.

Signed

Chairman

Date