

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF ASHFORD PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON
THURSDAY 2nd FEBRUARY 2023 AT 6.45 pm**

Present: - Councillors Davis, Maskell and Roome
M Isaac (Acting Clerk)

In Attendance: Parishioner/Members of the Public – 22

NDC Officers: J. Triggs (Director of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive), S. Fuller (Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer) and A. Tape (Head of Governance)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED that Councillor Davis be appointed Chair.

2. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The following questions were raised by Parishioners:

- a) A Parishioner briefly outlined issues that had affected the function of Ashford Parish Council. He stated Ashford Parish Council was at the lower tier of local government but existed and had a vital local task to undertake. There was no need for the disruption which was vindictive. It was requested that North Devon Council be requested to instigate a full and open investigation into the cause and resolve the issue.
- b) Can a record of expenditure over the last 3 years and its achievements be provided?
Jon Triggs stated that he would update the Council later in the agenda.
- c) What will happen to the present precept for 2022-2023?
Jon Triggs stated that he would update the Council later in the agenda
- d) Is it the case that people can exclude themselves from being recorded and can meetings be recorded?
The interim Clerk stated that members of the public had a legal right to film and record meetings. Even if a person objected to being recorded and requested that they were not filmed or recorded, you could not prevent someone from doing so if they so choose.

The Interim Clerk agreed to consider a proposal that in future meetings, Public Questions/Public Participation) be 'separated' from the Agenda.

- e) The Clerk responded to the following questions raised in writing:
 - i) Ashford Parish Council can no longer get legal liability insurance cover, due to the current legal action being taken by one Councillor against the other Councillors. Even if / when this action is resolved, such insurance will not be

available because of APC's claim record. Therefore, does this mean that all Councillors elected at the May elections will be personally exposed to the risk of any fresh legal actions that may take place in the future?

The Clerk stated that the parish council was a body corporate and so the financial consequences of its activities were those of the Parish Council and not the individual councillors. The only exceptions were misfeasance in public office or misconduct in public office.

- ii) Can the Council function without a Clerk?

The Clerk stated that a Council did need a clerk/proper officer to function, but a councillor could act as clerk as long as they were not paid for doing so. That was not ideal as it could create some confusion between the conflicting roles of the councillor as a decision-maker and the clerk as impartial officer but it was a short-term fix that some councils had employed when necessary. Another option might be to consider the temporary hire of a locum.

4. ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY

There were no matters raised.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

6. INTERIM PARISH CLERK

RESOLVED:

- a) That M. Isaac be appointed interim acting Parish Clerk
- b) That a remuneration commensurate with other Parish Councils be agreed by the Members of the Parish Council.
- c) That North Devon Council be requested to administer the Parish Council pay roll.
- d) That the Acting Parish Clerk prepare an advert and job description for the appointment of a permanent Parish Clerk for consideration at the next Parish Council meeting.

J. Triggs (Director of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive) agreed that NDC would administer the payroll.

7. APPOINTMENT OF BANK SIGNATORIES

RESOLVED that Councillors Davis, Maskell and Roome be appointed as Bank signatories.

J. Triggs (Director of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive) agreed that NDC would assist with the mandate process as they also used the same bank and they would make contact with the Relationship Manager to arrange new mandate to remove the previous bank signatories and for the new signatories above to be added.

8. REVIEW OF FINANCIAL POSITION AND AUDIT

Jon Triggs, NDC Director of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive outlined the present financial Position having received some latest bank statements to November 2022 and a copy of the 2021/22 internal audit report.

Financial Year 2020/21 – Last published audited accounts which were available on the website

Financial Year 2021/22 – Internal Audit report based on:

B/fwd. balance (April 2021) of £8,617

Income Precept £5,000

Expenditure £1,032

End of Year C/Fwd. balance (March 2022) of £12,585

Financial Year 2022/23

B/fwd. balance (April 2022) of £12,585

Income Precept £5,000

Balance as at 1st November Bank Statement £16,289

Indicating expenditure April to October 2022 of around £1,300

Expenditure for 2021/22 and 2022/23 was lower than previous years due to reduced activity as a Parish Council.

He stated the importance for the Parish Council to produce a set of accounts for both the 2021/22 year and the 2022/23 year when this financial year concluded together with a detailed budget for the next financial year 2023/24.

He agreed that NDC would assist in preparing the above-mentioned accounts once they had received a complete set of bank statements and any associated financial documentation from the Parish and would also produce a full bank reconciliation. NDC would also assist the Acting Parish Clerk in the production of a Budget for 2023/24

9. PRECEPT

Jon Triggs, NDC Director of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive reported that the following Precepts had previously been agreed:

2020/21 – £7,000

2021/22 - £5,000

2022/23- £5,000

The approved Tax Base for 2023/24 was 156.12. A £5,000 precept for 2023/24 would equate to £32.03 for a Band D property. Due to the increase in Tax Base this would reduce the current Band D amount by £0.95p.

RESOLVED that the Precept for 2023/24 be £5,000

He stated that that once the new account signatories and bank mandate had been agreed NDC would assist in preparing a budget for 2023/24.

10. CORRESPONDENCE

The Council noted the receipt of an open letter from Mr and Mrs Hall. The Chair agreed to respond to the letter.

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that the next meeting be held in Ashford on a date to be agreed in early March

Chair the meeting ended at 7.25 p.m.