

DRAFT MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION AT NEXT MEETING

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF ASHFORD PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON THURSDAY 7th MARCH 2023 AT 7.00 pm

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

In Attendance: Parishioner/Members of the Public – 24

12. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd February 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The following questions were raised by Parishioners:

- a) A Parishioner thanked the new Members of the Parish Council, NDC Officers and Acting Clerk for assisting Ashford in getting the Parish Council functioning again. He expressed concern at the appointment of a new Parish Clerk due to the issues experienced by 3 previous clerks all of whom had resigned and as a result Ashford Parish getting a bad name. He asked what advice can the new Council give regarding the recruitment and protection of a new clerk?
- b) A Parishioner asked the following questions:
 - What insurance was currently in place to protect Ashford residents from having to fund any future defamation of character type legal disputes brought against Ashford Parish Council?
 - Would a newly appointed Ashford Parish Council in May 2023 be able to get cover for such legal disputes, and at what likely cost, in particular in comparison to the premium paid for April 22 - March 23?
 - If legal cover were not to be available, would future parish councillors be putting all Ashford residents (themselves included) at financial risk, should there be any further legal disputes?
 - If the current council were to receive a future letter accusing them of defamation of character, would the ensuing legal costs be covered by the current insurance? Or would this cost need to be funded by future precepts?

The Acting Clerk stated that to his knowledge the Parish Council currently had no insurance cover and would be a matter for the new Council .

- c) A Parishioner stated that the Parish Council website was not functioning and residents were not able to view Council documents. When would the website be sorted?

It was stated that it would be a matter for the new Parish Council and Parish Clerk.

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- d) A Parishioner stated that the legal action against the Parish Council had still not been resolved. What could happen after the next election if the legal action was not withdrawn and was there anything that could be done?

It was stated that it would be a matter for the new Parish Council.

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

The Chair stated that upon reflection it was considered that it would be more appropriate for the new Parish Council to appoint the new Parish Clerk.

It was agreed that to assist the process that authority be delegated to the Acting Clerk and Chair to agree a job description and advert for the new Parish Clerk.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

17. PUBLIC QUESTIONS/PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Acting Clerk stated that he had, for clarification, sought advice from the Devon Association of Parish Councils regarding the recording of Public Question if it was not part of the agenda.

The advice was, that it was generally considered that the public question time was part of the meeting and irrespective of it not being included as part of the formal agenda, could still be recorded.

It was agreed that the public question time should continue to be included on the agenda.

18. RECORDING OF MEETINGS

The Council considered a report by the Acting Clerk (previously circulated) outlining a policy for recording Parish Council meetings.

RESOLVED that the Policy as (previously circulated) be adopted.

19. CORONATION TREE - GRANT

The Acting Clerk reported that the previous Parish Council had awarded a grant of £300 towards the provision of a tree and plaque to commemorate the Queens Platinum Jubilee. However, due to the breakup of the Council the money was never paid and the tree not planted. He had received a request from a Parishioner that in lieu the Council agree a grant of £300 towards a tree to celebrate the Kings Coronation.

RESOLVED that a grant of £300 be awarded towards the provision of a tree to commemorate the Kings Coronation.

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20. BUDGET 2023/24

The Acting Clerk reported that once the new account signatories had been added to the account and North Devon Council had received the financial documents, the 2021-22 accounts, an updated 2022/23 financial position and a detailed budget for 2023/24 would be produced for consideration/adoption at the next meeting in April.

21. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence reported

22. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that the next meeting be held on 4th April 2023

Chair the meeting ended at 7.37 p.m.