

Minutes of Ashford Parish Council Communications Committee Meeting in public held on Tuesday, 18 February 2020 in Ashford Church Hall at 6pm.

Present:

Councillors Hall (Chairman), Holder and Lawson.

In attendance:

Mrs S Squire, Parish Clerk (Proper Officer).

8 members of the public.

Apologies. None.

Declarations of Interest.

Councillor Hall as Director of ORS and ORS Geneses

Councillor Hall as a Board member of Devon Communities Together

Minutes and Matters Arising.

Councillor Hall went through a brief resume of the Minutes.

Public Participation.

Councillor Moss asked if members of the public would have the opportunity to speak at the end of the meeting to make comments which had been discussed and this was confirmed.

An email received from a resident was read to the meeting and responses / explanations made to the items raised.

Councillor Hall addressed the comments specifically raised regarding a potential Prejudicial Interest in connection with his company ORS.

Five companies were invited to quote.

Councillor Holder confirmed that Councillor Hall was not involved in the decision to award the contract.

Councillor Hall confirmed he was not involved in the preparation of the tender by ORS.

Councillor Hall advised that his company ORS has a £3.5 million turnover. This project is £400 and no money will be made by the company or Councillor Hall. Councillor Hall further advised that ORS is subsidising the Parish Council as it is a below market rate bid.

It was thought the reason other companies did not tender was because it was a small project.

A lengthy letter had been received from another resident and the main points were identified.

Councillor Lawson commented that part of the reason why there should be a Parish Council network is that it should be the Parish Council that should disseminate Parish Council information.

The allegation made is that the Communications Committee have been secretive, underhand and had held closed meetings and this was strenuously denied on the grounds that the statement was incorrect.

Councillor Moss asked for clarity what it means that the Parish Council is registered for GDPR.

The Clerk informed that the Parish Council was registered with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) in respect of data protection. The renewal took place in November 2019 and a renewal Certificate had been received, expiring in November 2020. The Parish Council is protected in respect of information held and complies with the law.

Councillor Lawson had researched data protection on the ICO's website and found there is a strict definition as what constitutes a public body.

The Parish Council is not obliged to appoint a Data Protection Officer (DPO) but are obliged to follow data protection regulations.

Parish Councillors are obliged to protect the information held.

The Parish Council is protected as it does not go into commercial business and does not hold a wide range of personal information. An email address does not constitute this.

Website. Lead by Councillor Lawson.

Handover.

- Two separate meetings had been held with webmaster and details had been advised at the following Parish Council meeting.
- The webmaster had handed over the running of the website to Councillor Lawson who had been running the website since before Christmas
- Councillor Lawson advised there had been 63 individual visits in the last week
- Some changes had been made to the website, including the provision of a new Wildlife page to accommodate reports from Councillor Moss
- No other domain name had been taken on
- For new websites, there is a basic set up cost of £499 + VAT with an annual cost of £250 if the website is on a commercial basis

Domain.

- The initial cost for the domain name was £15, plus £100 in respect of the distribution network for emails
- The previous webmaster was at ease with the original domain name to be used and there was no on-going costs
- Parish risk assessments had been investigated in relation to any on-going threat of losing information, apart from the storage of data held by the Clerk was included on the website

Webmaster activity and policies

- A Parish Council website is a statutory obligation of which a certain amount of information is legally required to be published. Ashford Parish Council is fully compliant with this
- Articles for inclusion are welcomed. It is not intended to become involved in circulating emails
- The Clerk's email address is clickable, meaning that an email to her address is presented on the screen for users
- Councillor Moss advised that the North Devon Biosphere had given complimentary comments about the website
- Councillor Hughes enquired about the previous webmaster paying for the domain name and was advised that Mr Williams has his own arrangement in connection with other websites that he manages and is happy for this to continue
- Councillor Hall spoke about meetings held with the webmaster which could be construed as secret and stressed that the key decisions have been made openly in public
- Councillor Hall was thanked for his work on the website thus far

Email Network. Lead by Councillor Hall.

Representations regarding conflicts of interest. Dealt with earlier in the meeting.

Tendering process and company section.

Proper Officer Mrs S Squire and Councillors Lawson and Holder.

The Parish Clerk, as Proper Officer, read aloud the following statement:

As the Proper Officer to Ashford Parish Council, I can confirm that the tender process to set up the Email Network was properly carried out. A range of suitable companies were invited to tender and Councillor Hall took no part in either the evaluation process or in the preparation of ORS's bid.

In the event, ORS was the only company to tender. As agreed, I forwarded the details to Councillors Holder and Lawson after the deadline date of 31 December 2019 to assess the bid which they considered as good value and coming from a well-qualified company. We were impressed by the value for money that was offered.

Councillor Holder instructed me to contact ORS to confirm that its bid had been accepted with a request that they proceed with the work. At no time whatsoever did I contact or copy in Councillor Hall in the correspondence and he was completely unaware, from Ashford Parish Council's perspective, of the tenders received or who had been awarded the contract'.

Councillors Holder and Lawson felt entirely confident that that had been done was correct.

Recruitment so far.

- ORS had sent out one invitation to register for the email network with a full explanation and a form for completion. It was for people who did not have email whose neighbour may be willing to pass on information.
- 52 email addresses had been supplied as a result of the first mailing
- Fewer are expected from the second reminder

Programme of reminders / encouragement.

◆ Informal encouragement.

- Councillor Hall has mentioned the details at social events in the village and the Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator had also circulated emails encouraging people to sign up.

◆ Reminder letters and signatories.

- A second reminder will be sent to residents after the February 2020 Parish Council meeting and one in March 2020.

◆ Circulars via Ashford Update and Ashford Society?

- At the June 2019 Parish Council meeting, one of the residents involved with circulation of information via the Ashford Update confirmed they were happy to use the Ashford Update to invite people to sign up to receive information from the Ashford Parish Council Communications Committee.

Action: A form of words to be drawn up

Action: Councillor Lawson will arrange for a clickable link on the website inviting people to sign up. There will also be an unsubscribe button.

Technical issues for further consideration and action.

- The host server for a leased email domain '@apcnd.uk' had been acquired
- ORS will host the email domain name free of charge.
- ORS has a system offering the highest security available. They would not have access to the domain and would not be able to see any data. Councillor Lawson felt comfortable with this.
Action: A decision as to who will hold the details to be decided at a full Council meeting of Ashford Parish Council
- If data was sent to the Parish Clerk or Councillors Lawson & Holder, the information would be encrypted.

◆ Ownership of data and contract with host.

- This is currently being held by ORS.

◆ Data protection (renewal of registration by NPWP)

- The Parish Council is registered with the Information Commissioners Office. The expiry date of the current Certificate is November 2020.

◆ **Privacy Policy**

- ORS has a Policy in place.
- The Clerk explained that ahead of the GDPR Regulations, specifically for Parish Councils, coming into force on 20 May 2018, all Parish Councils had been directed to appoint a Data Protection Officer. This had been organized by Ashford Parish Council. Two days before the deadline, the government announced that Parish Councils were not required to appoint a Data Protection Officer.
The Devon Association of Local Councils provided a template for GDPR and a Policy which was adopted by Ashford Parish Council.

When the Parish Clerk was at training on 11 February 2020, she made enquiries about a more permanent style Policy and Privacy Notice and was advised that this was now available, although she had not received this information and was looking into a suitable document with the expectation that it could be presented to the Parish Council with a view to adopting.

◆ **Address for replies / two way responses was agreed (last meeting in public) as:**

- comms@apcnd.uk
- But info@apcnd.uk and clerk@apcnd.uk can also be set up.

Matters for recommendations to APC on the Future Operation of the Network

◆ **Future of the Communications Committee?**

- Councillors Hall, Holder and Lawson were willing to continue in their current role, subject to the will of the Parish Council.

◆ **Continued existence**

- As above

◆ **Composition**

- As above.

Usage to develop incrementally based on evolving experience.

- There is a need for a website and an email network to be mutually reinforcing
- There was the possibility of Parish Councillors have their own dedicated Parish Council email addresses, rather than using their own private and personal email addresses. This is the reason why a host is required to deal with a lot of email addresses
- ◆ **Protocols for the use of the email network**
 - Not to duplicate or compete with Ashford Update's more 'social' content
 - The recruitment letter said the network will feature:

*“Parish Council matters, issues of policy and public interest affecting the village, and (most importantly) it will be a **two-way channel**”.*

Initial / inaugural circulate

- Target date for first communications would be early April 2020 and would comprise:
 - ⇒ Inaugural letter from the APC Chair
 - ⇒ Email addresses for responses
 - ⇒ Useful documents as they arise
 - ⇒ Invitation to submit comments

Councillors were in agreement with the above.

Opportunity for members of the public to speak

1. Councillor Moss spoke about Councillor Hall's potential alleged conflict of interest. This did not involve the phase of collecting the data set, but if Ashford Parish Council proceeds with a new operating system, OTS would be involved.

To allay concerns as a Parish Councillor, he would feel more comfortable with, for example, a written Statement from either the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) or the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) clarifying the circumstances and situation for the avoidance of doubt.

Councillor Hall was keen to address these concerns of the village and there was a discussion about the wording to be used in the enquiry to the DALC or NALC.

Councillor Moss accepted Councillor Hall's assurance that he is not able to see details on the ORS system.

Action: The wording of the question to the DALC or NALC to be decided at the February 2020 Parish Council Meeting.

2. When is the deadline expected for the Communications Committee to assume responsibility for information from the Parish Council to be circulated?

Answer: 31 March 2020.

3. A resident requested that a 4 page letter received from a resident and referred to earlier in the meeting with certain areas being highlighted and discussed, was read in full at the February 2020 Parish Council meeting.

This was agreed.

The meeting ended at 7.24pm.