

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Full Parish Council held on Thursday 10th December 2020 at 18:30 via Zoom.

Present: Councillors E Scott (Chair), E Ashby, J Ashby, V Ashfield, L Brown, S Cahill, R Cornwell, A Doig, J Elmer, D Freeman, R Ormerod and M Ross.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley.

1. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE (OR NOT) APOLOGIES OF ABSENCE FROM TODAY'S MEETING

Apologies were received from Cllr G Holland.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Cllrs L Brown, D Freeman, R Ormerod and E Scott declared an interest in item 9 on the Agenda and took no part in the discussions or vote on this item.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

4. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 22ND OCTOBER 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd October were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

Planning Committee

Cllr R Cornwell presented the minutes from meetings of the Planning Committee held on 2 October, 16 October, 30 October, 13 November. There being no queries from Members, Cllr R Cornwell moved on to Committee reports.

Cllr R Cornwell provided a verbal update on the progress of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan. Cllr R Cornwell took the opportunity to thank Ms Sue Childs for her assistance to the Parish Council in handing over all of the definitive maps and documents to the County Council. All of which, Cllr R Cornwell stated, took account of and were modified according to the Examiner's recommended modifications.

Cllr R Cornwell advised that the County Council is now proofreading all of the documentation sent by the Parish Council and is due to report back to the Parish Council in due course.

Cllr R Cornwell welcomed that DCC planning reports now included references to the Neighbourhood Plan policies; which can now carry significant weight in determining new applications.

Cllr R Cornwell also provided a verbal update on the application to de-register the former coach park at the Sands as Common Land. Cllr R Cornwell advised that the Parish Council has today been informed by the Planning Inspectorate that the proposed Public Inquiry in January 2021 has been postponed until mid-March 2021.

Cllr R Cornwell advised the meeting that a number of concerns from objectors to this application, including the Parish Council's Barrister, have been raised with the Inspectorate regarding the volume and quality of the documentation attached to the County Council's Statement of Case for this application. In many cases, the voluminous documentation provided is either disordered, unnumbered or illegible. Cllr R Cornwell reported that these concerns may have contributed to the Inspectorate's decision to postpone the inquiry.

Cllr R Cornwell updated the Council that a very productive meeting had taken place yesterday (9th December 2020) between the Parish Council's Barrister and objecting parties and work is underway to put together a solid Statement of Case against the application.

• **Environment Committee**

Cllr V Ashfield presented the minutes from meetings of the Environment Committee held on 29 September and 29 October. There being no queries from Members, Cllr V Ashfield moved on to Committee reports.

Cllr V Ashfield presented a proposal by the Environment Committee to gift a "tree of life" mosaic to the University Hospital of North Durham. Cllr V Ashfield advised that the Environment Committee has been working for some months on a proposal to have a piece of public art produced within the parish area.

The agreed format for this piece of public art is a mosaic installation and the agreed specification is a "tree of life" concept. Cllr V Ashfield advised that 2020 has been an exceptionally difficult year for everyone and it is hoped that this concept will provide a source of hope and inspiration.

Cllr V Ashfield advised that a number of possible locations had been considered previously as part of the proposal; these included the steps underneath Framwelgate Bridge, the Riverwalk Centre and Millennium Place but all had been discounted for various reasons.

Cllr V Ashfield advised that the proposal had now developed into a "thank you to the NHS" project; a way of the Parish Council illustrating its thanks to the men and women working at the University Hospital of North Durham throughout the pandemic to keep everyone safe and well. Cllr V Ashfield advised that the Clerk had discussed this with the Hospital and they would gratefully accept such a mosaic if this were agreed by Full Council.

Members unanimously **approved** the Committee's preferred Option 1 for the design of the mosaic and its full associated cost of £2,748. Members also **agreed** that this mosaic should be gifted to the Hospital as a thank you to the NHS.

It was also agreed that the Parish Clerk should have a special plaque made to be installed below the mosaic in the hospital to express the thanks of the Parish Council and to illustrate who was responsible for this mosaic.

In agreeing to the proposal, Cllr A Doig requested that any spending commitments outside the agreed budget of all Parish Council Committees first be presented to the Finance Committee for consideration.

Cllr V Ashfield reminded Members that the Best Business Christmas Frontage competition had taken place again this year in spite of Covid-19. Cllr V Ashfield advised that there had been a terrific take-up from the local businesses in the City for this competition and took the opportunity to thank all of the judges who had participated in this popular project this year. Cllr V Ashfield advised that the winners in each category were as follows:

National chain category – TJ Hughes

Independent category – Woven

Non-retail category – Claypath Delicatessen

Indoor market stall category – Magnificents

Cllr V Ashfield wished all those who had participated this year and who had contributed to the festive atmosphere in the City a big thank you.

It was **agreed** that framed certificates be made for each of the winners, as well as the £500 per category prize fund paid, and both the Parish Clerk and Cllr V Ashfield present these to each business.

Licensing Committee

Cllr L Brown presented the minutes from meetings of the Licensing Committee held on 25 September and 6 November to the meeting. There were no queries from Members and no reports from this Committee.

Business Committee

Cllr E Scott presented the minutes from the meeting of the Business Committee held on 22 October 2019. There being no queries from Members, Cllr E Scott moved on to the Committee report.

Cllr E Scott reminded Members that, earlier this year, the Parish Council agreed to contract the services of a retail consultant with the aim of providing independent and free-of-charge support to local businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

Cllr E Scott advised that, in setting its budget in January 2020, the Parish Council agreed a total fund of £10,000 towards this priority and in May 2020 agreed to contract the services of retail consultant Graham Soult. In agreeing this proposal, the Parish Council agreed to contract Graham's services for a provisional 6 months, with the option of extending this beyond this initial period.

The Clerk reminded Members that Graham currently works 3 calendar days per month for Durham City at a total cost of £900 per month. As part of this, Graham produces a monthly report on actions taken and these have been circulated to Members so that they are kept updated on the effectiveness of this service.

The Clerk also advised that Graham has been actively involved in supporting other aspects of the Parish Council's work. For instance, Graham secured the interview with BBC Look North to promote the Parish Council's Poppy Appeal project.

Cllr E Scott advised that the Parish Council's Business Committee had met and agreed to recommend to Full Council that Graham's contract be continued on the same basis. Sufficient funds for this were allocated for this financial year and will be proposed for the forthcoming financial year.

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council has received some extremely positive feedback on both the work of Graham and its Covid-19 business resilience fund.

Members **agreed** to continuing the services of the Parish Council's retail consultant until the end of the financial year 2020/21.

Finance Committee

Cllr A Doig presented the minutes from the meeting of the Finance Committee held on 11 June 2020. Cllr A Doig reminded Members that the Parish Council would need to agree its budget and precept request at its January Full Council meeting and that the Finance Committee would be meeting in early January to agree a proposal on both these items to Full Council.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 22 October 2020.

The Chair began by thanking the County Council for their support throughout 2020. In particular, the County Council has not charged the Parish Council for the rent of its office at the Clayport library throughout the pandemic.

The Chair also thanked the County Council for their support of the poppy display at the Town Hall during Remembrance. The Chair advised that she felt that the poppy display was an incredible community effort with many knitters getting involved locally and it proved to be a beautiful and fitting display for Remembrance.

The Chair advised that the virtual Christmas Fair, funded by the Parish Council, had been a great success with thousands of visitors having taken part in this virtual event. The Chair also remarked that this may prove to be a good insight into a potential future e-commerce site for local businesses in Durham City.

The Chair advised that the memorial bench for Cllr Judith Atkinson will be installed in the very near future at St. Oswald's Church.

The Chair finished her remarks by thanking all Parish Councillors, residents' groups and volunteers in the community for their work over 2020.

7. PROPOSAL TO PROVIDE A CHRISTMAS MEAL TO THE HOMELESS

The Clerk reminded Members that he was asked to investigate further the possibility of the Parish Council providing a Christmas meal to the homeless this year and he recently met with the organisers of the Winter Night Shelter project and DCC to scope this proposal.

The Clerk advised that tackling rough sleeping and homelessness has been given an even greater priority in light of Covid-19 and, at present, the service is not aware of any rough sleepers in Durham. DCC and Sanctuary 21 are currently working with 25 individuals who have been provided with emergency accommodation and the Winter Night Shelter is also being made available on a referral basis in case of anyone in the City requiring emergency accommodation. These individuals are being provided with food from local food banks but will not have access to a traditional Christmas meal.

The Clerk advised that, if the Parish Council agrees to this proposal, volunteers at both Sanctuary 21 and the North East Mission have offered to prepare a traditional Christmas meal at the Sanctuary 21 centre and to deliver this, along with a small gift from DCC (most likely chocolates and toiletry products), to these individuals on Christmas Day. The Clerk advised that the meal will be cooked and stored and delivered within 30 minutes in a sealed aluminium container. Both organisations understand that they have sufficient volunteers to

ensure that each volunteer visits 1 individual only on Christmas Day and therefore has sufficient time to spend with each individual.

The Clerk advised that the volunteers who will prepare the meals at Sanctuary 21 are all food hygiene certified and meals will be provided to all of those in emergency accommodation (including anyone attending the Winter Night Shelter).

The Clerk advised that Sanctuary 21 has estimated that the total cost of the meals along with packaging and other materials will be approximately £500.

Members **agreed** to the proposal of £500 towards the Christmas Meals for the Homeless project.

8. REPORT ON PARISH COUNCIL INTERNAL CONTROLS 2020-21

The Clerk provided the follow report on the Parish Council's internal controls 2020-21 and the outcome of the external audit for the previous financial year (2019-20).

Report to Council

1. RESPONSIBILITY

Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2011 requires Councils to carry out a review of their internal controls annually before the end of the financial year.

The City of Durham Parish Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for.

In discharging this responsibility, the Council is also responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Council's functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

2. SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them effectively, efficiently and economically.

The Parish Council has now adopted a risk register and this is under continuing review by the Clerk and any issues arising from risk assessments carried out will be reported to full Council.

The Council

The Council has elected a Chair who is responsible for the smooth running of meetings and together with the Clerk for ensuring that all Council decisions are lawful.

The Council reviews its obligations and objectives and approves budgets for the following year at its January full Council meeting each year. The January meeting of the Council also approves the level of precept for the following financial year.

The Full Council meets at least 11 times per year. The Parish Council does not usually meet in August.

A budget report is prepared and submitted to all of the Parish Council's Finance Committee meetings showing income and expenditure together with a budget update for all Committee spends. Any budget revision reports are also reported for information and these set out any changes to the budget as per Council decisions or any known budget over or underspends.

Clerk to the Council

The Council has appointed a Clerk to the Council who acts as the Council's advisor and administrator. The Clerk is the Council's Responsible Financial Officer and is responsible for administering the Council's finances. The Clerk is responsible for the day to day compliance with laws and regulations and advises the Council on managing risks. The Clerk also ensures that the Council's procedures, control systems and policies are adhered to. The Clerk also manages projects agreed by full Council and works with all suppliers and contractors agreed by full Council to carry out functions on behalf of the Council.

2020 has been an unprecedented year for all due to the Covid-19 situation. It became apparent in March, just before the first national lockdown that things would be operating very differently, and it was then that NALC and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) recommended reviewing and agreeing local councils' delegation to the Clerk. Councillors agreed this delegation to enable the Council to fulfil its responsibilities to its residents.

This meant that day to day operations of the Parish Council could continue normally as much as possible. The Clerk has kept Councillors informed of the decisions taken during this period and has sought their views prior to making any decisions regarding significant spending. The Clerk has also consulted with the Chair of the Council on various issues as well as the Chairs of other Committees/Working Parties when necessary.

The Parish Council has also continued holding meetings of Committees and Full Council via Zoom, in accordance with the Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of local authority and Police and Crime Panel meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Payments

All payments made are reported to all Finance Committee meetings. The Parish Council now makes all payments via electronic banking. Two Members of the Council from the current list of five authorised signatories (excluding the Clerk who acts as administrator) must authorise every payment against invoices before authorising the payment using their own login details provided by the bank.

There is a facility for making urgent payments out of meeting if necessary. Such payments are also reported to the Parish Council's Finance Committee meeting and all decisions to spend funds as urgent action are ratified at the next Full Council meetings and minuted as such.

Risk Assessments/Risk Management

The Council carries out regular risk assessments in respect of actions. The Clerk makes an annual risk management report to the Council. A review of financial management risks is included as part of the review report.

Internal Audit

Last year, the Council appointed an independent Internal Auditor, Mr Gordon Fletcher, who reports to the Council on the adequacy of its:

- Records
- Procedures
- Systems
- Internal control
- Regulations
- Risk management
- Reviews
- Insurance cover

A review of internal audit must be carried out before the end of each financial year.

Gordon Fletcher has indicated that he is willing to carry out an audit of the Parish Council again next year. The cost of this service is £150.

Gordon was previously the Audit Manager at Easington District Council before retiring when the Unitary Council was formed and set up his own business by providing an internal audit service for Town and Parish Councils. This has grown to a current portfolio of 7 local Town Councils and 24 local Parish Councils.

Gordon is C.M.I.I.A. (Chartered Member of the Institute of Internal Auditors) qualified and has his own professional indemnity insurance.

External Audit

The Council's External Auditors are Mazars, appointed by the Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA). They submit an annual Certificate of Audit, which is presented to the Council, together with a copy of their report listing any issues to be raised. At the end of the Audit the Council must display the Notice of Conclusion of Audit for 14 days and must make the Annual Governance and Audit Return (AGAR) and Final Accounts available on request. These are also displayed on the Parish Council's website.

4. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

The Council has a responsibility for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control. The review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by the work of:

- The Full Council
- The Clerk to the Council who has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control environment and managing risks
- The independent Internal Auditor who reviews the Council's systems of internal control
- Mazars, the Council's external auditors, who make the final check using the AGAR, which is completed and signed by the Responsible Financial Officer, the Chairman and the Internal Auditor.

5. EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The external audit report by Mazars stated the following:

"On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met".

6. INTERNAL CONTROL ISSUES

The Auditors did not raise any significant issues as part of the 2019-20 Audit. The Council did need to amend figures presented as part of the AGAR submission following an external audit but this did not amend the Auditor's opinion as set out above.

The Internal Auditor did recommend that the Council open a new bank account, not associated with its existing bank, in order to further protect its finances. At present, only £85,000 would be protected as part of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS). The Clerk has sought a new account from another provider.

The Internal Auditor also recommended that all invoices be signed by wet signature from Members approving payments. An alternative electronic provision has been arranged for this year, in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- End of report -

Members approved the report and also **agreed** to the appointment of Mr Gordon Fletcher as the Parish Council's internal auditor for 2020-21.

9. REQUEST TO SUPPORT DURHAM MAYOR'S CHARITY APPEAL

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council has received correspondence from the Mayor of Durham Councillor Katie Corrigan, asking if the Council would consider supporting this year's Mayor's Charity Appeal.

The Clerk advised that, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, it has not been possible to hold the traditional Mayor Making Ceremony and therefore Councillor Corrigan shall be remaining in post as Mayor for the time being. Councillor Corrigan has selected a different charity this year and will now be supporting the Fire Fighters Charity until the end of her term. The Parish Council has been advised that this charity would have been supported by Councillor Ossie Johnson had he taken over as Mayor as expected in June.

The Clerk advised that no specific amount has been requested in Cllr Corrigan's letter and any offers of a donation will be gratefully received and acknowledged.

Members advised that they felt that Cllr Corrigan had been very proactive in raising funds for her selected charities.

From those Councillors participating in the vote on this item, it was **agreed** that £500 would be given towards the Mayor's Charity Appeal.

10. PRESENTATION OF GOOD CITIZEN OF THE YEAR 2020 AWARDS

At this point in the meeting, a video showing the presentations by the Chair to each of the Good Citizen 2020 Award winners was shown to Members. The Chair thanked the Clerk for creating this video.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members for their attendance and contribution and closed the meeting by wishing everyone a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "G" and a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(28th January 2021)**