



HALE PARISH COUNCIL
OF THE HALTON BOROUGH IN
THE COUNTY OF CHESHIRE



**MINUTES OF ORDINARY MEETING OF HALE PARISH COUNCIL HELD REMOTELY ON
MONDAY 20th JULY 2020 AT 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr Mitchell, Cllr Spargo, Cllr Kierman, Cllr Williams, Cllr Trevaskis, Cllr Healey

1. Apologies received from Cllr Wright, Cllr Cleary and Cllr Anderson.
2. No interests were declared.
3. No members of the public were present to make representation but an email from a local resident was read out in full by the Clerk. The correspondence made reference to matters concerning the current position of potential future planning applications at LJLA and enquired about any objections planned by Hale Parish Council to oppose future expansion into Hale and the Borough.

The resident also asked for the Council to consider reducing spending in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic and to review budgets and consider lowering the precept to reduce the impact on residents who may have lost their jobs or suffered hardship as a result of the pandemic.

It was felt that these important subjects warranted a more comprehensive review and the Clerk was asked by the members to make some interim enquiries and report back to the next full council meeting.

4. **i/** Minutes for the Hale Parish Council held meeting on 5th March 2020 were approved. Those in favour: Cllr's Spargo, Williams, Kierman, Healey, Trevaskis. Those against: Cllr Mitchell (who requested a named vote).

ii/ Minutes for Hale Parish Council Meeting on 16th March 2020 were approved by members as a true record.

iii/ Minutes for Hale Parish Council meeting on 27th April 2020 were approved by members as a true record.

5. All payments for the period March 2020 – June 2020 were ratified unanimously by members. Cllr Mitchell asked whether more detail could be added to the payment schedules so councillors have a more complete reference for approving payments. The Clerk has noted this request. Cllr Mitchell also advised there should be greater detail of salaries paid to employees, with clearer breakdowns for each member of staff. The Chair advised staff salaries were presented as one figure to comply with the GDPR and ensure staff are not exposed to financial risk or fraud that could occur as a result of publishing specific payments going into their accounts.
6. It was noted that the Precept of £49,000 has been received from Halton Borough Council on 1/04/2020.
7. The list of transactions for year 1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020 were approved. Cllr Mitchell made it known that she did not think that the information available was suitable for her to make a considered opinion about the transaction report presented. Cllr Mitchell went on to explain that she felt the documentation presented could not be considered a proper set of accounts and that the Council's decision to employ a Clerk with no experience was a contributing factor in her making that observation. Cllr Mitchell did not feel the accounts would pass the scrutiny of the internal auditor and appeared (REMOVED) that the Clerk had completed this work, and she had not been taken up on the offer to use her daughter who is a qualified accountant (an offer made to the Chair in a private email that other Councillors were not aware of). The Chair explained to Cllr Mitchell that decisions of the Council are made at meetings and that he could not act ultra vires of the Council in appointing Cllr Mitchell's daughter to complete the end of year accounts. Such an action would have been completely contrary to the system of governance employed by the Parish Council and would cause serious issues in respect of the GDPR and matters of confidentiality. The Chair advised the Parish Council appointed a clerk to complete the end of year accounts and the decision of the Council should be respected. The Chair advised that the agenda item was about approving transactions, and not about appraising the clerk or revisiting the recruitment decision made by the Council. The Chair advised members it was not appropriate in a public meeting to undermine employees and that this behaviour could be interpreted as (REMOVED). Cllr Spargo made a statement offering his full support for the Clerk and thanked him for the good work he was producing. Cllr Spargo also noted the many years of experience the Clerk had in running a successful printing company - a role that incorporated many attributes required for an effective clerk. This was upheld by Cllr Kierman.
8. The final accounts summary and comparison against budget for year 1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020 was approved. Those in favour: Cllr's Spargo, Williams, Kierman, Healey and Trevaskis. Those against: Cllr Mitchell (who requested a named vote).
9. The draft Section 2 of the AGAR (Annual Governance and Accountability Return for 2019 – 2020) was considered with an amend to Line 5 (to include an amount of £20,116 in the year ending 31 March 2019 column). The Council also considered the change to the method of asset valuation during the financial year, whereby assets would be listed by value (as per the Practitioner's Guide) as opposed to cost.

Cllr Mitchell asked for clarification on the variation of this year's asset value when compared to that of last year. Cllr Mitchell also noted that the asset value was different to the latest asset register circulated to members a number of months ago. The Chair explained that the document Cllr Mitchell was referring to was an out of date document and that the asset register is a 'live' document that continues to change with each purchase made by the Parish Council. The Chair clarified that the figures on the current draft document are now a true reflection of the current position and the distinction between cost and value have been established and recorded correctly. Cllr Mitchell disagreed and was not satisfied with the explanation provided by the Chair.

10. The Council approved the draft accounting statement of the AGAR. Those in favour: Cllr's Spargo, Williams, Kierman, Healey, Trevaskis. Those against: Cllr Mitchell (who requested a named vote).
11. It was noted that in the current climate and with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic both the Civic Service and Guildswomen working parties would review the situation periodically and re-schedule any planning when appropriate and safe to do so.
12. It was noted that all the documentation for the Annual Audit was compiled and ready for submission to the Internal auditor for review.
13. In the absence of public and press there was no requirement to consider their exclusion from the meeting
14. It was noted that the 3 month contract awarded to the current Clerk, Brian Hargreaves, on 1st May 2020 was due to end on 31st July and that the situation needed to be reviewed.

A motion by Cllr Spargo to offer the Clerk a permanent contract was proposed and unanimously approved with an amendment that the Clerk should undertake all relevant training required for the position at the Parish Council's expense.

Registration for a suitable CiLCA course (run by SLCC) was approved (it was likely this would begin in October 2020 and be held at Deeside). It was understood at the time of the meeting that the registration fee for CiLCA is £350, and this increases to £410 from 1 October 2020. It was also noted that the full four-day course is £340+VAT for members (and maybe more for non-members).

It was further agreed that the terms of the current contract would be issued to the Clerk with the inclusion of a formal annual appraisal to take place in future. The new contract would begin on 1 August 2020 and would be a permanent contract.

The Chairman thanked councillors for their attendance and brought the remote meeting to a close at 9pm.