



# HALE PARISH COUNCIL

Of the Halton Borough in the County of  
Cheshire

MINUTES OF EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING OF HALE PARISH COUNCIL  
2018/19 HELD ON WEDNESDAY 1 MAY 2019 AT 7.30PM IN  
HALE VILLAGE HALL, HALE, HALTON, CHESHIRE, L24 4AE

## ATTENDANCE RECORD

### Members of Hale Parish Council:

Cllr Luke Trevaskis (Chair)  
Cllr Catherine Williams  
Cllr Ann Kierman  
Cllr Gary Wright  
Cllr Malcolm Spargo  
Cllr Carol Mason

### Member(s) of Halton Borough Council:

No members in attendance.

### Member(s) of Public:

Bernardine (Bernie) Mitchell

Meeting commenced at 7.35pm.

### HPC 18-19/XXX APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence received from Cllr Peter Healey and Cllr Sheila Hunter. Absence of Cllr Bernie Cleary was noted without apology.

### HPC 18-19/XXX DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No reported declarations of interest.

### HPC 18-19/XXX EXCLUSION

The Council resolved, in pursuance of the confidential matters to be discussed forthwith, to excuse members of the public and press, on the ground of likely disclosure of information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Bernardine (Bernie) Mitchell withdrew from the meeting.

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## HPC 18-19/XXX STAFFING

The Council noted the resignation of Tracey Bellis.

Disappointment was expressed by Councillors who had hoped the new Clerk would remain with the Council for many years.

The Clerk advised regret that her tenure had been short. Reasons cited for the resignation included an overburdening workload for the contracted hours, a lack of training, a large amount of stress, some inappropriate correspondence from a Councillor relating to pay, and a relentless amount of emails from resident Bernardine (Bernie) Mitchell - some of which could be interpreted as passive aggressive and containing veiled threats.

Councillors tried to reassure the Clerk that the situation would improve, but the Clerk advised she was not in a position to remain in office.

The Council was informed of items of a sensitive and confidential nature that were being shared with residents in the village – compromising the work of the Clerk. Councillors were reminded that it is their responsibility to uphold the reputation of the Council and that it is not possible to share all information that is presented to them with the wider community. It was recommended that this also be passed to Councillors not in attendance – Cllr Sheila Hunter, Cllr Bernie Cleary and Cllr Peter Healey. It was believed some Councillors may be speaking with members of the public to exacerbate ill feeling. Frustration was noted regarding members who appear very vocal during meetings but who do very little from meeting to meeting to actually help improve the directives of the Parish Council.

Councillors suggested some residents should be reminded that there is limited time and resources available to a part-time Clerk and that the Council is there to serve close to two thousand residents as oppose to just one. If a particular resident is exhausting the resources of the Clerk, at a substantial cost to other residents, then this needs to be dealt with in an appropriate manner. Each email and phone call made to the Clerk comes at a cost of approximately £15.00 per hour, so residents who contact the Clerk on a daily basis, substantially reduce the time and resources available for other residents in the Parish.

**Section 14 of the Freedom of Information Act advises that vexatious requests can be refused if they are causing the Council a disproportionate and unjustified level of disruption, are a deliberate intent to cause annoyance, or the Council has expended considerable time and effort in responding to these requests.**

A social media feed was presented to the Council, that included the mention of the Chair. A resident, Bernardine (Bernie) Mitchell, had commenced the post earlier the same day, advising that she was unaware of the time of the meeting, later advising at 6pm that she had emailed the Chair at 4.15pm and still not received a response. The Council noted that Bernardine (Bernie) Mitchell had spoken to at least two different Councillors regarding the meeting, one of whom was present. The Councillor present advised they had indeed informed Bernardine (Bernie) Mitchell of the time of the meeting prior to her sending her

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email to the Chair at 4.15pm. There had also been a notice of the meeting placed on the noticeboard the previous week, so the Council was perplexed why Bernardine (Bernie) Mitchell had begun to cause such public confusion.

Surprise was also expressed that Bernardine (Bernie) Mitchell had attended the meeting, as apologies had been sent by herself a few days earlier to the Clerk advising that she would have to withdraw her support for the Memory Makers group set up to help sufferers of Dementia in Hale as she would not be available on Wednesday evenings for some time and therefore unable to attend. As it was indeed a Wednesday and the meeting was held at the same time as the scheduled Memory Makers group, it was unclear why one could be attended but not the other.

The Council agreed that residents should not be in a position to abuse employees of the Council without repercussions and this was a matter that needed to be revisited at a future date.

A sample weekly clerk timesheet was presented to the Council. Councillors noted the time it took to respond to residents and the increased pressure this was placing on the role of the Clerk, in addition to their other responsibilities.

**It was resolved that when the vacancy be advertised, the role be publicised for at least 16 hours per week. This motion was proposed by Cllr Catherine Williams, seconded by Cllr Ann Kierman, and approved with one abstention.**

**It was resolved that when the vacancy be advertised, the remuneration for the role be set at SCP 25 (£14.96 per hour for 2019/2020). This motion was proposed by Cllr Malcolm Spargo, seconded by Cllr Carol Mason, and approved unanimously.**

**The above resolutions provided an annual salary of approximately £12,446.72 for the new Clerk.**

The difficulties of previous months were noted, especially in relation to recruitment. It was noted that had the Council continued with the salary approved in October 2019, the chain of events that had unfolded since may not have occurred. Lessons have been learned and Councillors were reminded that the position the Council has faced is due to the collective decisions of members. The Council recollected the proposal made by Cllr Bernie Cleary in January to reduce the staffing budget to an amount far below the agreed contractual responsibilities of the Council. The Clerk at the time, Craig Wyna, subsequently resigned following this proposal and the Council, and Parish, has suffered ever since.

Disappointment was expressed that Cllr Bernie Cleary has seemingly made proposals without any understanding of their consequences – potentially risking bringing the Council into disrepute and on the wrong side of the law by not fulfilling commitments to employees. Despite being a Councillor for twelve months, there has been no training attended or any effort made to understand the legal framework the Council must adhere to. It was suggested that Councillors are all trained to get a better understanding of decisions made in meetings and their responsibility to act in the best interest of the Parish.

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It was noted that recently Cllr Bernie Cleary had resigned as Chair of the Staffing Committee and as it was no longer quorate, the Council would not be able to pass the responsibility of employing the new Clerk to the Committee. As such, the Council continued to consider a proposal tabled to resolve the immediate issues faced.

**It was resolved to employ the services of William Whittle for the interim period (from May-July and September-November), a Clerk endorsed by NALC as a trainer for Lancashire Association of Local Councils and a consultant who can assist the Council in the coming months with the recruitment of the new permanent Clerk. The Council approved a rate of £30.00 per hour, for ten hours per week, with a mobile phone allowance of £10.00 per month and mileage expenses of £00.60 per mile.**

The Council noted this seemed a relatively large fee but it was felt that the Council needed much help and support in the coming months and that the short-term hire of an expert would provide the best outcome for the Parish in the long-term. Councillors discussed the extra expense had come as a result of poor decisions made in the past and it is hoped that short-sighted and counterproductive proposals relating to pay will not be made by Councillors moving forward. The Council needs a strong Clerk to deliver the best results for the Parish and it is hoped under the direction of William Whittle, the Council will be in a more cohesive position in future. The Council has explored many routes in recent months, and this was the only last resort open to explore.

Cllr Malcolm Spargo advised he could assist with July surgery.

Meeting closed at 8.45pm

Signed:  Date: 16.05.19.