



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



**MINUTES OF EXTRA ORDINARY MEETING OF HALE PARISH COUNCIL HELD REMOTELY ON
MONDAY 31st AUGUST 2020 AT 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr Mitchell, Cllr Spargo, Cllr Kierman, Cllr Williams, Cllr Trevaskis,
Cllr Wright, Cllr Cleary, Cllr Anderson.

- 1/ Apologies received from Cllr Healey
- 2/ No interests were declared.
- 3/ No members of the public were present to make representation
- 4/ The Internal auditors report for year ending 31st March 2020 was received and accepted by members.
The Chairman thanked the Clerk for his input and stated that this year's successful outcome was a "collective" effort.

Cllr Mitchell expressed a view that she felt that the majority of the audit preparatory work had been completed by the previous Town Clerk prior to his departure from office. The Chairman re-iterated his point that this was a collective effort and acknowledged that while the previous Clerk had contributed in part to the overall proposal the current Clerk and a number of Councillors had completed the extensive work on the formal submission to ensure the unmitigated success of this year's Audit.

- 5/ The Notice of Public Rights to inspect the accounts for the year ending 31st March 2020 were approved unanimously. It was agreed that papers should be posted for a period of 30 working days (Tuesday 1st September – Monday 12th October) in line with :-
 - a) **Local Audit and accountability Act 2014 Sections 25, 26 and 27.**
 - b) **The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234)**
 - c) **The Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/404)**

Cllr Mitchell asked that the Clerk might display laminated copies on the two Village Notice boards (in Baileys Lane and at Hale Village Hall) as the boards are in need of repair and any notices will be susceptible to inclement weather conditions. The Clerk agreed that two additional copies would be displayed in the Village Hall front window and in the front window of Cllr Wright's convenience store in Town Lane. In addition an electronic version of the papers would be displayed upon the Parish Council website.

The Clerk agreed to contact local Joiner Mal Sutton once again to ask about repair/renovation of the two notice boards so that full use can be re-instated.

- 6/ It was agreed unanimously that the approval of Item 5 above constituted an acknowledgement that all outstanding matters arising from the 2019/20 audit report were now resolved and that there are currently no outstanding governance or accounting issues that Hale parish Council need to address.
- 7/ It was noted that the Internal Auditor advised that Hale Parish Council had completely “transformed” and made “amazing progress” and that it can be evidenced by “anybody who compares the findings of 2018/2019 report with that of 2019/2020”
- Cllr Mitchell stated that she “did not doubt he said it” and that these comments were in fact made by the External Auditor but refused to “note” the comments as there was no written evidence to support the comments. The Chairman and Clerk explained to Cllr Mitchell that the Auditor has been asked to provide a written comment which could be used in support of Hale Parish Council in a subsequent report or press release.
- 8/ Members considered Section 1 of the Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020 and the 9 objectives set out within the section. Their deliberation was recorded as follows:-
1. It was agreed that Hale Parish Council ***“Prepared its account statements in accordance with the accounts and audit regulations”***
 2. It was agreed unanimously that Hale Parish Council ***“Made proper arrangements and accepted proper responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge”***
 3. It was agreed unanimously that Hale Parish Council ***“has done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with proper practices in doing so”***
 4. It was agreed that Hale Parish Council ***“during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about the authority’s account”*** The Notice of Rights to inspect although presented later than required was available on the Parish Council website and it was recognised that all requests to view the accounts were available and would always be accommodated at any time of year.
 5. It was agreed that Hale Parish Council ***“considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly”*** A copy of the existing Ecclesiastical Insurance policy document was forwarded to all councillors by the Clerk in response to a request by cllr. Mitchell
 6. It was agreed that Hale Parish Council ***“arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial contracts and procedures to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.”*** Cllr Mitchell expressed a view that she was “not convinced” that the Parish Council were fulfilling this requirement. However it was recognised by the other members that both the auditor (who is independent) and the Clerk had reviewed the financial information and were happy to approve them as a true record. On that basis it was agreed that the requirement was fulfilled. Additional external examination could prove costly and were deemed unnecessary in this instance.
 7. It was agreed unanimously that Hale Parish Council ***“responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external auditors”***

8. It was agreed unanimously that Hale Parish Council ***“disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant”***
9. It was agreed unanimously that Hale Parish Council ***“met all of its responsibilities where as a body corporate it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts”***. Cllr Mitchell enquired about the availability of up to date accounts and reports for the Village Hall charity. It was explained that due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Village Hall being closed for a long period of time the accounting and any issues relating to planned meetings etc are only now being addressed by the Clerk. It was acknowledged that a Village Hall committee Annual meeting was required in the near future. The Chairman re-iterated the reasons for the Parish Council’s preference to follow the remote “video link” model which ensures 100% protection to all attendees of meetings. Cllr Williams expressed the view that a socially distanced meeting in Hale Village hall would be impractical at best given that attendees would need to be separated and wear face coverings in a hall which has bad acoustics and proves very difficult for some people to hear and to be heard. The Chairman noted that Halton Borough Council as an example had limited the number of meetings held since the start of the Pandemic and that any meetings which have taken place did so remotely. Cllr Mitchell stated that although the situation was far from ideal, members of Parliament were returning to parliament shortly and if it was suitable for them it should be suitable for Hale Parish Council. The Chairman advised that we will always work in the best interests of the public, employees, volunteers and Councillors at all times. Cllr Spargo recorded that he was happy to follow the current guidance and would abide by the members preferences.

The Chairman advised that there was a need to update the current details on the Parish Council website and agreed to work in conjunction with the Clerk.

- 9/ The Annual Governance Statement was approved unanimously for submission by Hale Parish Council

The Chairman thanked members and closed the meeting at 8.45pm