

ELDERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Eldersfield Parish Council held on 5th May 2020 by tele/video conference, commencing at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Mr P R Chichester MBE (Chairman), Mrs W Burr,
Mrs D E Holt, Mrs C Joseph, Mrs K McKenzie Budd,
Mrs T A Owen, Dr L J Reynolds

In Attendance: -

**Members of the
Public:** -

1. Tele/video conferencing

Councillors noted that the meeting was being held by tele/video conferencing under The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. and that because of limited bandwidth, the Public had been invited to attend by phone only.

2. To elect a Chairman

Cllr Chichester offered himself as a candidate for chairmanship. It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Chichester be Chairman.

2. To elect a Vice Chairman

No appointment was made. Mrs D E Holt and Mrs K McKenzie Budd said that they would be willing to step in where needed.

3. Apologies for absence

None

4. Members' interests

None

5. Adoption of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The draft Minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2020 were accepted as a true record of that meeting. In view of the fact that current meeting was being held remotely, it was **RESOLVED** that the Clerk sign the minutes on behalf of the Chairman.

6. Matters arising

None

8. Correspondence

The Clerk reported that he had written to WCC on 19th February with respect to the traffic warning lights at Eldersfield Lawn School and on 13th March with respect to flooding of Moored Road, and that no substantive reply had been received to either letter.

9. Reports from District and County Councillors

Neither councillor was present and no reports had been received.

10. Public Comment

None

11. Parish Plan

Mrs Holt advised the meeting that the current COVID19 restrictions had slowed progress on production of the Parish Plan by making it impossible to hold necessary meetings, but that work would resume when the restrictions were eased.

12. Broadband

Dr Reynolds advised the meeting of progress. A network plan has now been developed and all householders covered by the plan and who have previously expressed an interest in the service have been sent a letter. The proposed network will be financed by a combination of government vouchers and the service provider, Gigaclear; it does not require capital investment by individual property owners or residents.

However, if this plan is to proceed, all those who previously indicated that they wanted broadband must complete and return the funding application form provided with the letter and must subsequently subscribe to the new service.

The Chairman again thanked Dr Reynolds and the members of the team for their hard work.

13. Lengthsman

- (a) Council noted the report from the Clerk on the services provided by the Lengthsman since the last meeting for which an invoice of £118.00 had been submitted by the Lengthsman;
- (b) Council further noted that the Scheme has been temporarily suspended by WCC but had since been resumed subsequent to the submission to CALC by the Clerk of a risk assessment.

14. Insurance

The Council considered the offer of insurance received from the Council's current insurer and resolved that the Council renew its policy with Zurich Municipal for the year commencing 1st June 2020 at a premium of £257.60

15. CALC

After a short discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the Council renew its membership of Worcestershire CALC for the year commencing 1st April 2020 at a cost of £393.47.

16. Accounts: Adoption of Accounts

The Clerk gave a brief explanation of the accounts.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Council approve and adopt as the Accounts of the Council for the Financial Year ended 31st March 2020 the draft accounts circulated prior to the meeting.

17. Accounts: Internal Auditor for the Financial Year ended 31st March 2020

The Clerk reported that the COVID19 restrictions had made it impossible for the Internal Auditor to conduct the Annual Internal Audit Report within the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), but that the completion of this Report was not a necessary precursor to the completion by the Council of the other sections. He would seek completion of the Annual Internal Audit Report when the COVID19 restrictions permitted.

18. Accounts: AGAR Certificate of Exemption

It was **RESOLVED** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Annual Governance and Accountability Return Certificate of Exemption for the Financial Year ended 31st March 2020.

19. Accounts: AGAR Section 1

It was **RESOLVED** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Annual Governance and Accountability Return Section 1 for the Financial Year ended 31st March 2020 as circulated by the Clerk prior to the meeting.

20. Accounts: AGAR Section 2

It was **RESOLVED** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Annual Governance and Accountability Return Section 2 for the Financial Year ended 31st March 2020 as circulated by the Clerk prior to the meeting.

21. Account Signatories

Councillors considered that a) in the light of the intention of one of the Council's nominated bank signatories to move away from the area it would be appropriate to appoint one further signatory, and b) it would aid efficiency if where possible the Council's banking operations were conducted by internet, and it was therefore **RESOLVED** that Carole Joseph be authorised to operate the Council's current account 02737822 with Lloyds Bank on condition that any instruction to disburse funds be made on the instructions of no fewer than any two of the signatories authorised by the Council, and that all signatories approved by the Council to operate the said account be authorised to do so by internet.

22. Standing Orders

The Clerk explained that with the passage of time the existing Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and Code of Conduct had become outdated and required revision. The National Association of Local Councils had provided model versions and these he now tabled for consideration.

Mrs Joseph noted that draft Standing Order 5.c stipulated that the annual meeting of the parish council should start at 6 pm if the notice calling the meeting failed to provide for a start time; she queried whether this should not be 7 pm. Members could not recall any instance of an agenda failing to stipulate a start time and concluded that the proposed change was not needed.

Mrs Joseph then opined that female members of the council who became Chairman would not feel 'included' if the reference in the Standing Orders to 'Chairman' were maintained, and she proposed that this word be substituted by 'Chair'. The suggestion was accepted.

It was **RESOLVED** that the existing Standing Orders be replaced with the draft Standing Orders circulated prior to the meeting subject to the word ‘Chairman’ being replaced by the word ‘Chair’.

23. Financial Regulations

It was resolved that the existing Financial Regulations of the Council be replaced with the draft Financial Regulations circulated prior to the meeting.

24. Code of Conduct

It was **RESOLVED** that the existing Code of Conduct be replaced with the draft Code of Conduct circulated prior to the meeting.

25. Complaints Procedure

The Clerk explained that it was considered good practice that the Council adopt a Complaints Procedure and that he had therefore tabled for the Council’s consideration a model procedure published by CALC.

Mrs Joseph suggested that the Council should appoint an outside Ombudsman who would consider complaints against the Council.

The Clerk advised the meeting that such a scheme would be possible but that he was unaware of such a scheme having been implemented by any other parish council. He thought that the Terms of Reference provided to such a proposed Ombudsman would have to be drawn up with great care if the Council were to avoid the possibility of incurring potentially large penalties which would not necessarily be recoverable from insurance. Furthermore, he could recall no instance in his sixteen years of service of a complaint having being made against the Council.

Councillors decided not to pursue the suggestion.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Council adopt as its Complaints Procedure the draft Complaints Procedure circulated prior to the meeting.

26. Investment Policy

It was **RESOLVED** that, in accordance with item 15 of the minutes of the meeting of 11th May 2006, the Council’s investment policy remain that all funds be maintained in a current account and that this Policy be reviewed annually.

27. Risk Assessment

The Councillors considered the Risk Assessment Policy adopted on 14th July 2011 and decided that no amendments were required.

28. Authorisation of Disbursements

It was **RESOLVED** that the following disbursements be made for goods and services:

£198.55	J L Gabbott
£48.20	HMRC
£118.00	J P Moore (Lengthsman: £118 March)
£393.47	Worcestershire CALC
£257.60	Zurich Municipal

29. Future Meetings

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Council be held on Tuesday 7th July 2020, commencing at 7.30 p.m.

30. Any other business

Councillors noted that because of COVID19 no Annual Parish Assembly had been called.

The Clerk advised the meeting that there was a legal obligation that a Parish Assembly be held between 1 March and 30 June each year; that the Parish Council had the power, but not the duty, to call it; and that legislation did not exist for one to be held remotely.

Councillors agreed that they would keep the matter under review.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.38 p.m.

JLG
15.5.20