

NORTHWAY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing Committee held on Wednesday 24th March 2021

Following the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020 (c.7), Councils are unable to meet in person during the COVID emergency. This meeting was therefore held via a Zoom link, with Councillors connecting remotely. The meeting began at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Cllr J Roberts (Chairman) Cllr Mrs S Terry (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr S Ward

In Attendance: Mrs C Woodward, Clerk of the Council

S/01/21 **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies for absence were received.

S/02/21 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest, as required by the Code of Conduct adopted by the Parish Council on 11th July 2012 (Min Ref C/159/12), including paragraph 12(2), were made.

S/03/21 **Minutes of the Previous Meetings**

There had been a set of Staffing Committee Minutes outstanding that had not been approved due to being inquorate. Two Councillors had since left the Council with only Cllrs Ward and Roberts able to approve the Minutes. Cllr Roberts, therefore, PROPOSED that the Minutes from the meeting that took place on 14th December 2016 should be approved as a true and accurate record. Cllr Ward SECONDED.

FOR: Cllr Roberts Cllr Ward

ABSTENTIONS: Cllr Terry

Cllr Terry PROPOSED that the Minutes from the meeting that took place on 7th October 2020 should be approved as a true and accurate record. Cllr Ward SECONDED.

FOR: UNANIMOUS

S/04/21 **Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes**

S/51/20 Health and Safety Officer – Following Council's approval that part of this role be outsourced, the first assessment was due to be undertaken during April.

S/05/21 **Exclusion of the Public & Press under Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings Act) 1960 s1 ss2 Viz:-**

Cllr Roberts PROPOSED that in view of the special / confidential nature of the business about to be transacted i.e. relating to staff personnel, it is advisable in the public interest that the public and press are temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.

FOR: UNANIMOUS

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S/06/21 **Exclusion Items**

COUNCILLORS ONLY

S/07/21 **Exclusion Items**

Under confidential cover the Committee considered Staff wages, as well as some confidentially issues relating to Council emails.

S/08/21 **COVID-19**

The Clerk suggested, in the first instance, the Committee dealt with the possibility of councils being required to re-commence face-to-face meetings after 7th May 2021, as the Government would be deciding on this over the next few days.

Council Meetings - Cllr Roberts felt it would be good to go back to face-to-face meetings if this could be done safely, although the Government were being petitioned to extend the date for virtual meetings. The Committee were very aware that care would need to be taken. Meetings could only be held in the main hall and social distancing rules would need to be adhered to. Councillors would not be permitted to move from room to room or make tea and coffees before the meeting as they used to (although they could bring their own). Masks would be mandatory but could possibly be removed if speaking.

A maximum of fifteen people would be allowed in the main hall at one time - there were twelve councillors and two members of staff to consider which only allowed two extra people. It was suggested that tables could be spread out with a person allocated to each. The Clerk reminded Members that they also had to allow for the possibility of residents attending the meeting, unlikely as this would be. It was suggested that the bi-fold doors should be opened to help ventilate the room and possibly allow some of the outdoor space in dry weather. Cllr Roberts added that, if it was raining, residents could be asked to sit in the atrium and the doors could be propped open, although they might struggle to hear. Alternatively, Cllr Ward suggested that the person chairing the meeting could be seated by the doors with residents in the atrium on one side and councillors on the other to allow everyone to hear better.

The Clerk advised it was being recommended that no papers be tabled at meetings, so agendas and any relevant documents would be circulated beforehand for Members to bring along and take away with them after the meeting.

Cllr Roberts asked whether there would be any Members who would be unable to attend face-to-face meetings, as he did not want the Council to be discriminatory. The Clerk mentioned that there were discussions about the possibility of continuing to use programmes such as Zoom, even whilst meeting together, to allow anyone who might be more at risk or nervous about social contact to still attend. Obviously, this option was also dependant on permission being given by Government. Cllr Roberts felt that if any Members were worried about physically attending meetings it would be worth the Council looking into this possibility (if it was allowed).

It was pointed out that most Councillors, and the Clerk, would have had at least one dose (if not two) of the COVID-19 vaccination by May, however, the Clerk's Assistant would probably not have been vaccinated at all. Cllr Roberts asked whether the Clerk's Assistant could join the meeting virtually but, as mentioned before, this would be dependent on whether Government decided on it being unlawful or not. Cllr Ward felt that, if the Clerk's Assistant wore a mask, and was situated close to the bi-fold doors this would minimise the risk, especially with social distancing rules being adhered to.

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S/08/21 COVID-19 (continued)

Councillors felt that all the doors should be left open when meetings were taking place to eliminate the need for touching of handles and Cllr Terry suggested that each person was issued with hand sanitiser or brought their own. Cllr Roberts felt that there were a few simple rules that people would need reminding of such as wiping down touch points when using the toilets. The Clerk said that the Caretaker had spoken to her about the lack of hand towel dispensers in the toilets, which would be preferable to using the hand driers which were renowned for spreading germs. Currently some loose towels were in the bathrooms but these could aid in spreading germs, as more than one may be touched.

After further consideration regarding the hand towel situation, Cllr Ward PROPOSED that two dispensers were purchased, one for the main toilets and another for the disabled toilets.

FOR: UNANIMOUS

Clerk's Assistant - The discussion was directed towards the Clerk's Assistant and her return to working from the office. After discussions with the Clerk's Assistant, the Clerk was recommending she returned after the easter half term (19th April) for either four half days (mornings) or two full days to begin with and the remaining hours worked from home. Although working from home had worked there were some aspects of the job that were difficult to undertake. The arrangement would still be for her to work from the Ray Shill Room for as long as necessary, this would have an impact on some users being able to start reusing the facility, but Members considered staff safety to be the main priority.

It was noted that, although the Clerk had a toilet allocated, the Clerk's Assistant would need to use one of the other toilets in the building. Members considered what arrangements should be in place for her and other users of the Hub. It was AGREED that the disabled toilets should continue to be made available for hirers and users of the Hub. One of the other toilets should be assigned to the Clerk's Assistant (and a sign put on the door indicating it was only for her use), the other two toilets in the room could be used by councillors, if necessary. The door to these toilets could also be locked and unlocked as necessary.

It was noted that there would be less risk if the Clerk's Assistant came into the Office two full days a week rather than four mornings a week, however, it was down to what was easiest for the Clerk's Assistant.

Hirers - Members moved on to the topic of re-allowing hirers into the Hub and the initial steps that would need to be taken. The Clerk had asked the Caretaker for some input and you had made some suggestions:-

1. Only allowing one hire per day, to start with, unless significant time in between.
2. Shutting the kitchen off to hirers not needing it. A thermos and cups could be made available upon request, the staff could then put these through the dishwasher.
3. Asking hirers using the kitchen (ie Luncheon Club) to use the dishwasher when possible.
4. Locking the kitchen for a period of 48-72 hours after use before allowing another hirer use – otherwise informing hirers that it had been used before them.
5. Not permitting children's parties to start with
6. Having staggered times for hires.
7. Making sure the bi-fold doors are open in the main hall if both rooms are being used at the same time.
8. Asking that masks were worn in the atrium.
9. Putting an out of use sign on the middle sink to allow distancing.

The Clerk mentioned that several groups had made enquiries about returning to the Hub. It was noted that only the main hall would be available for use by groups/members of the public.

Baby massage had previously met on a Monday morning between 10.00 and 11.00 am. Also, on a Monday, AA used the room from 12noon and then, from June, there was a request for yoga to recommence 6.30-7.45pm. Members considered how this could be addressed.

It was felt that the Council should address the issue of yoga closer to June when things might be different. If it were safe by then to allow the Clerk's Assistant back into the main office this would free up the Ray Shill room for use and hirings would be easier to manage. If it was possible for the Caretaker to clean the main hall between uses baby massage and AA could run one after the other.

Moving forward, Cllr Roberts felt that the Council should prioritise and try to accommodate pre-existing, regular users of the Hub over any new requests for use.

The veteran's coffee morning group wanted to recommence meeting on a Tuesday, once a month, starting 11th May 2021. Cllr Terry pointed out that, based on Government guidelines, this could not re-start until after 17th May 2021. Cllr Roberts added that it also needed to be made clear to the group that the kitchen was off limits and people had to bring their own drinks, but there may need to be some flexibility.

Zumba previously ran on a Tuesday morning but, although this group planned on restarting eventually, they did not anticipate it being for quite some time (based on the clientele and worries of safety) and they said that they fully understand the Council not being able to hold the room for them.

Social services had recently started using the main hall on a Tuesday afternoon, they had been informed that yoga would be taking priority once it restarted as there would only be a forty-five-minute change-over between uses. The Clerk was unsure whether social services could use the outside area at all once evenings became lighter. Cllr Roberts suggested that the Council considered this again closer to June.

Cllr Terry hoped that her book club could restart on a Wednesday after 17th May, however she did not plan on restarting Bingo until June or after.

Wednesdays consisted of book club once a month, luncheon club were hoping to run once or twice a month. Cllr Terry felt that this should not be permitted to restart until after June.

Mothers in Mind used to run on Wednesday mornings in term time, they also now wanted to run a breast-feeding clinic – the only morning free was a Thursday morning, however the yoga group was also interested in having an extra morning. Cllr Roberts felt it was more important to try and facilitate the existing Mothers in Mind sessions, than to adding a clinic on a different day, if this caused problems, the Council could offer to review it in June when the Ray Shill Room might be available.

It was noted that Council meetings would also be on a Wednesday evening, as before. There would be a few hours between this and earlier hires (either luncheon club or book club) during which time the Caretaker could clean and sanitise. Cllr Terry suggested that it might be worth waiting until June to recommence face-to-face Council meetings (if permitted by government) when the Ray Shill Room would be available and an extra clean might not be required.

Slimming World previously ran on a Thursday evening and a Friday morning, however, the co-ordinator that had started the group at the Hub was now stepping down. It was not yet known whether another co-ordinator would be taking over or not. Members pointed out that there would obviously be a limit on the amount of people that could be attending this at one time.

Guides and Brownies had confirmed they would be starting to meet in an outdoor setting again shortly. There had always been a bit of an issue with the two groups using the Hub on the same evenings and this would be even more difficult when starting back up post-COVID-19. It was felt that, if Guides wanted to come, they would have to be classed as one unity with Brownies and Guides would need to take responsibility for cleaning. Parents would also be required to wait outside the building.

M5Nine were wanting to start using the hall on a Saturday, as a church they were legally allowed to gather already. It was felt that the group should be required to set up and tidy away, they would also be unable to use the kitchen, if requested they could be provided with a thermos and cups, however they would need to provide their own coffee, tea, milk, etc. or any refreshments. Also, if bringing their own kettle they would need to ensure it was PAT tested.

It was AGREED that no parties should be permitted at the Hub until at least September, when it would be reviewed by Full Council.

The Clerk added that Social Services had asked to have another session in the week, if possible. It was suggested that they might be able to use a Monday evening until yoga re-started in June. Wednesdays could also be free if Council meetings continued over Zoom. Cllr Roberts felt that any additional slot would need to fit around the other bookings, the Clerk agreed to let them know that there would possibly be some availability in the short-term and after June it would be dependent on whether the Ray Shill Room was available.

Cllr Roberts asked whether any new equipment needed to be considered for the Hub. The Clerk wondered whether there may be a safer way for the staff to make drink if/when the kitchen was out of bounds. Cllr Ward suggested that a small fridge might be all that was required. The Clerk was asked to investigate prices for consideration at a later meeting.

Cllr Roberts suggested that all groups were informed, at the time of making a booking, that not adhering to the rules would put them at risk of being refused use the Hub going forward. It should also be made clear that this was to ensure the safety and protection of other users as well as staff.

It was AGREED that all users should be asked to confirm that their risk assessments were still valid and they were still happy to adhere to these standards.

Members also AGREED that they would be happy to allow M5Nine use of the main hall on a Saturday when they wished to recommence meetings (numbers permitting).

Cllr Roberts asked whether anything had changed regarding the play area, the Clerk confirmed that it was still accessible to residents during the current lockdown, however, signs had been displayed advising that the MUGA, skatepark and outdoor gym were out of use.

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S/09/21 **Training**

The Clerk was not aware of any upcoming courses that would be relevant to staff or councillors.

Cllr Treacy had just completed the second half of Being A Better Councillor course.

S/10/21 **National Association of Local Councils (NALC)**

It was re-confirmed that any changes in pay scales would be implemented on 1st April 2021.

S/11/21 **Correspondence received after 18th March 2021**

None

The meeting concluded at 8.06 p.m.