

ELDON PARISH COUNCIL

21st JULY 2020

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN, VICE-CHAIRMAN AND REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES, ANNUAL MEETINGS AND EVENTS ETC.

REPORT OF CLERK

1. INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus Pandemic has had a significant impact on the business of Parish Councils. Members will recall that, at the last Parish Council public meeting on 23rd March, the Clerk was delegated additional powers in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman to take any decisions necessary to facilitate the smooth and continuing operation of the Council during the lockdown and restrictions period.

Regular advice was also received from CDALC and NALC as emergency legislation was brought forward to cover various aspects of Parish Council regular business and in particular:

- The need for an annual meeting and appointment of Chairman, Vice-Chairman etc.
- The need for an annual meeting for Electors
- The conclusion of the annual accounts and submission of the AGAR
- Arrangements for the holding of meetings of Parish Councils during lockdown (the restrictions on holding public meetings continue to date), but legislation permits the holding of “virtual” meetings using software such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, so long as there are opportunities for public access and participation if necessary online).
- The impact on other Parish Council annual or ad-hoc events.

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN, VICE-CHAIRMAN ETC.

Based on advice received from NALC and CDALC it was suggested that whilst arrangements could be made for an annual meeting to be held virtually, it would be in order for office-holders to continue in office until the next annual meeting, or such time as the Council determined during the current lockdown.

The current Chairman, Vice-Chairman and representatives on outside bodies were appointed at the annual meeting of the Parish Council in May 2019 as follows:

CHAIRMAN: Councillor John Gibson

VICE-CHAIRMAN: Councillor Paul Henry

REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES:

- **Bishop Auckland and Shildon Local Councils Committee:** The Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Clerk.
- **Bishop Auckland and Shildon Area Action Partnership Forum and/or its Task and Finish Groups where appropriate:** The Chairman and Vice Chairman.

- **Police and Crime Commissioner Community Panel:** Councillor Wallace (or the Clerk in her absence).
- **CDALC Smaller Local Councils Forum:** The Chairman and Vice-Chairman and/or the Clerk.
- **SCYPAN:** Councillor Scott (or another member of the Council in his absence).
- **Southern Area Gypsy Residents and Travellers Forum:** Councillor Diane Pennington and the Clerk.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and representatives of the Parish Council on outside bodies remain in office until the next Annual meeting of the Council in May 2021 and that the Annual Parish Council meeting be held on Tuesday, 25th May 2021.

4. ANNUAL MEETING OF ELECTORS 2020

The legislative requirement to have an annual meeting for Electors is set out in the Local Government Act 1972. At the time of the lockdown (23rd March 2020) the meeting had not been held, as it is the custom of the Parish Council to hold the Electors' Meeting immediately prior to the Annual Meeting of the Council which was scheduled for 26th May 2020. Due to the restrictions on the holding of public meetings and the initial difficulties and opportunities for virtual meetings to be held, it was agreed that the meeting was not able to take place, but that it be held in the requisite period in 2021.

5. RECOMMENDATION

That the next Annual Meeting for Electors be held immediately prior to the Annual Meeting of the Council on 25th May 2021.

6. ANNUAL ACCOUNTS AND AGAR 2019-2020

Because of the pandemic, and the limited opportunities for meetings to be held to approve the annual accounts and return, the timescales, the timescale for approval and submission was extended by a further two months until August 2020. These must be approved by the Council. The accounts and AGAR have now been completed and signed off by the Council's Internal Auditor and are contained elsewhere on the Agenda for this meeting for approval. As the income/expenditure falls below £25,000 the Council will be asked to seek exemption from submission of the return to the External Auditor.

7. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE HOLDING OF PUBLIC MEETINGS DURING THE LOCKDOWN

As mentioned above, emergency legislation brought forward by the Government now allows Parish Councils to hold "virtual" meetings in order to allow decisions to be taken. Following consultation with the Chairman, the Parish Council has purchased Zoom software at a cost of £115.10 including VAT. The software is more sophisticated than the basic free software in relation to issues such as the length of session. It is hoped that the one year subscription will not be needed beyond mid 2021. Virtual meetings will still require a quorum of members to

participate (hear and be heard) for the meeting to be lawful and for the public to listen and observe online.

8. RECOMMENDATION

That the purchase of the Zoom software be approved and that virtual meetings of the Council be held as and when necessary during the continuing restrictions on the holding of public meetings of the Parish Council, such dates to be arranged by the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman.

9. OTHER PARISH COUNCIL EVENTS AND ISSUES

Members may recall that at the meeting on 23rd March reference was made to a number of Parish Council events scheduled for 2020 as follows:

- VE75 Event - 8th May 2020
- Annual Village Fete – 4th July 2020
- Annual Garden Competition – July 2020

In consultation with the Chairman, the VE75 Event was cancelled. The singer booked for the event has indicated that she would be happy to act at a rearranged date if available. Initially it was hoped that the commemoration might be re-arranged to 15th August which is Victory in Japan day, or to the Saturday (7th November) before Remembrance Sunday, but these may present difficulties in terms on continuing restrictions on indoor public gatherings. In relation to the grant of £1,000 made by The Lottery for the event, which has not been spent, an approach has been made to The Lottery to determine whether the grant could be retained for use at a future community event (perhaps when it is safe to celebrate the end of pandemic)

The annual village fete was cancelled, as again, part of the fete takes place inside the Community Centre. The only booking we had made for the event was Mr Twister, who we had paid a retainer of £50 in advance of the event. In cancelling this act (following advice from CDALC and consultation with the Chairman) it was agreed that we should not seek to recover this sum, given that the booking was made in good faith and we hope to use the services of this act at future events.

It was hoped the annual garden competition might be held in August instead of July. Under the current arrangements up to six people could take part outdoors in the judging, but by August, the best of the flowers and shrubs are likely to be over, so it might be more appropriate if this event is held over to 2021.

In relation to other issues, the Parish Council was contacted by CDALC during the early days of lockdown in relation to closure of playgrounds etc. In line with the advice, the Chairman posted a notice in the Youth Shelter reminding young people that they should not use the Shelter during lockdown.

10. RECOMMENDATION

- That cancellation of the VE75 event be confirmed and the Clerk be authorised, in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman, to hold another celebratory event and seek to utilise the National Lottery grant to fund the same.

- The cancellation of the annual village fete be confirmed and the next fete be held in 2021, subject to there being no continuing restrictions on such public events.
- The annual garden competition be cancelled for 2020.
- The action in posting of the notice in the youth shelter be confirmed.

11. CONCLUSION AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Coronavirus Pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented impact on all our lives and businesses. As we emerge slowly from lockdown to the “new normal” we will need to adapt and change the way we work, whether it be in relation to meetings, service delivery, or, as a small council, how we can better support local residents directly or indirectly.

It is RECOMMENDED that:

1. The issues and actions set out above be noted.
2. The recommendations at 3, 5, 8 and 10 above and in this section be approved.
3. The previous delegations to the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman as approved on 23rd March 2020 be continued until reviewed by the Council.

Tom Bolton
Clerk to the Council