

Icklesham Parish Council

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held at Icklesham Memorial Hall on

Monday 28th June 2021 at 7:15pm

Present: Councillors: J. Justice, I. McConnachie, T Moore, Mrs Stanford, H Sutton, S Tollett, P Turner (Chairman), N Warren

21/111 Item 1. The Chairman opened the meeting and reminded those present that the meeting was being recorded. He invited comments or questions from members of the public on matters relating to the business of the Council.

Jane Taylor of Winchelsea thanked the Chairman for the reply to her email after three weeks or so and said they will be replying to that in detail and reassure all the councillors that the President (Lord Amphill) and CEO (Trevor Leggo) of ESALC were well aware of the issues that they raised she said a full response would be provided regarding their concerns. Ms Taylor then asked when and how the two meetings held in secret and when and where the Agendas had been displayed as there was a legal requirement to display in a place conspicuous to all residents. The Chairman replied that the council had not held any secret meetings and that the papers had been displayed on the notice boards although not the Winchelsea one as the key was not available at the time. Ms Taylor said her question was where and when they were publicised in a conspicuous place available to all residents. Chairman replied that they were publicised on the notice boards in Icklesham, Winchelsea Beach and Rye Harbour, Cllrs Warren, Sutton and Tollett confirmed that they had displayed the papers for the meeting the Wednesday prior to the meeting. Ms Taylor asked why the Winchelsea councillors did not ensure the notice was displayed. Chairman confirmed that the rules say the notices should be published in the locality so one notice in any of our four notice boards is sufficient to satisfy the law. We try to get them on every notice board but there was a good reason why this had not happened in Winchelsea.

Ex-Cllr Corinne Merricks of Icklesham read a statement saying that she was pleased that the notice for the current meeting had been displayed both on the notice boards and on the website. She reminded the Parish Council that it should be open and transparent, and she was disappointed that the Staffing Meeting held on 21st May and meeting held on 24th May were not widely advertised. She said that the Rother councillors were also not aware of these two meetings. She said that it was disappointing that the council meeting being the first held that residents could have attended in person had not been properly advertised. She said that decisions taking at meetings not properly advertised could be unlawful. The Minute of the Staffing Committee on the 21st May should be produced for approval and noting by the Council. The Minutes of the Annual Meeting of 4th May dealt with on 24th May contained some inaccuracies unfortunately the draft minutes had never been put in the public domain and the agreed minutes not publicised until the afternoon of 25th June. This evening's Agenda has no item relating to the declaration of the vacancies created by the resignations of four councillors nearly two months ago. Although the minutes make reference to Andy Beams overseeing co-option as locum RFO these vacancies have not been advertised on the parish website or parish notice boards and it appears Rother were only notified on 9th June. Mrs.

Merricks then raised that the calling notice for tonight's extraordinary meeting contained errors and said that confidential business of the Annual Meeting had been hopefully, mistakenly disclosed to the public. Financial matters Item 6 on tonight's agenda is duplicated having already been discussed at the Annual Meeting Agenda reference 21/96. The Minute state that the payment report until 30th April was not available – this is factually incorrect as this report was enclosed with the Agenda Item 17. It is apparent that the "acting clerk" seems to be having difficulties with straight forward administration as well as procedures perhaps you could explain why and by what mechanism the council has overturned the resolution taken on 4th May to appoint a locum clerk in addition to a locum RFO. What effort, if any, was being made to start the recruitment process for a permanent officer our recent clerk and RFO having given her notice over 3 months ago? The residents of Icklesham Parish Council deserve to be served by a proper officer and Responsible Financial Officer. Does the council agree that these points need to be addressed as a matter of urgency?

Chairman replied that some of the points had already been addressed and confirmed that the advert for the Clerk and RFO was already out. Mrs Merricks replied, "It is not on the website" Chairman replied that it may not be as it takes time to get things onto the website. Mrs Merricks replied that she was pleased to hear it. Chairman continued - particularly when we discovered we were not handed the information to access some of these things when our officers left. The Chairman confirmed that most of what had been raised was being dealt with and admitted that whilst things were not running smoothly the council had had all sorts of problems particularly not being able to access the bank account that had taken weeks to sort out. Mrs. Merricks interrupted again saying that she had not raised the bank account but wanted to know how a resolution could be reversed within 6 months. She asked the Chairman to explain how the decision had been reversed not to appoint a locum clerk and how an acting clerk had been appointed. She asked the Chairman "please could you explain how you reversed that decision?" The Chairman confirmed that the decision had not been reversed but the council had decided not to appoint one locum clerk that had been presented to the council. Mrs Merricks corrected the Chairman saying "you were given the names of two locums, and it was resolved at the annual meeting that we would appoint a locum RFO and a locum clerk. A resolution according to your Standing Orders shall not be reversed within 6 months except by special resolution to be given to the proper officer and you did not have a proper officer so she could not see how the council could overturn the resolution. Whilst the Chairman looked through his papers for the relevant minute Mrs Merricks offered him a copy of the Standing Order and Ms. Taylor reminded the Chairman that "the clock was ticking. Tick tock". Chairman then told the meeting that at the Annual Meeting he was asked to contact ESALC regarding locums and contact the Staffing Committee which he did, and he took two names back to the Staffing Committee. Mrs Merricks once again reminded the Chairman that it was also resolved that that the council would appoint a locum RFO and a clerk. Chairman said that he was satisfied that the locum clerk offered would not have been able to give us enough hours.

Cllr Mrs Stanford then addressed the meeting saying that it had been a difficult time for the Parish Council as she was sure attendees were aware. She said that the biggest problem was that they could not discuss what they had found because it is confidential, but it has caused enormous problems. She said that the Monitoring Officer was well aware of the situation since late last year also the Electoral Officer is well aware and at present, we are waiting to hear from him so that we can advertise the councillor vacancies as obviously the council is anxious to get our numbers back up. She said that with the current numbers they had they were coping quite well thanks to Cllr Warren dealing with the bank etc. She said that they had a situation where there were signatories that she was not aware of, and all those signatories actually resigned so that caused enormous

problems fortunately Cllr Warren had been able to turn things around quickly. She reminded the meeting that she works and does other things and that the Monitoring Officer advised that the council could appoint a councillor as clerk. Cllr Stanford said that the Minutes had actually said that we would appoint a Clerk/RFO, and she certainly thought that that was one person. She said we were offered two and we made the offer to one who was happy to be RFO. He had come highly recommended and had been dealing with year-end accounts which had been challenging for us not having any clerks to deal with it, none the less it has been dealt with but we have had to deal with the urgent matters in the order that they have come up and that is what we have done and as to the criticism regarding agendas and minutes she was not dealing with the whole of the clerk's role because she did not have time to do that. There were two clerks in the past, and she did not see how residents can expect her to cover everything that two people covered in the past. We are trying to do our best. We have a problem with the website because we did not realise our policies on the website were not up to date and were draft, unsigned policies and we have had a lot of work to do on that. She reiterated that they were all trying their best and confirmed that the advert for the clerk was out and that they were hoping to find a very good full-time clerk and that the council had Andy Beams as RFO who will work closely with that person until they can take over the role of the RFO. Cllr Stanford said it was unfortunate that the papers were not in the Winchelsea board because of not having the key especially because of the comments received from Winchelsea residents. She said that she never thought she would serve on a parish council where they had to put a civility notice on their website, which she urged everyone to read, because it is there following the exit interview with the clerk because she said she felt bullied and harassed by residents. Ms Taylor interrupted and said that she thought she had to draw a line there because that was not true. Cllr Stanford continued that as employers the council had a duty to put in place things that help them retain their clerks. Once again Ms Taylor interrupted Cllr Stanford and said "these councillors are attempting to defend the indefensible. Instead of spending a lot of energy and time in front of residents defending what you clearly acknowledge is a bit of a mess at the moment and not treating residents as courteously as you should, you should be thinking how do we get better. The Zoom meeting showed in evidence that you passed a resolution to appoint a locum clerk you cannot overturn that resolution". The Chairman once again confirmed that the resolution had not been overturned and that a locum had been appointed.

John Clark of Winchelsea then raised a three-point question regarding the money being collected from Rye Harbour car park: 1. How much had been collected over the last 12 months. Chairman estimated £18-19,000. 2. Is that money set aside in a separate account for maintenance of car park. Chairman that what the council resolved was that it would part and part because when the car park was taken on the council had to put a budget in place to ensure the running said it was a surprise to him that that did not appear to have been done. 3. Mr Clark said he was nervous regarding the collection of money and is the money paid immediately into a bank. Chairman confirmed yes as soon as we could get there. Mr Clark said he was concerned about people having money at home or about them and being vulnerable to "ne'er do wells". Chairman confirmed it was normally paid in within 24 hours. Mr Clark thought it was longer than that and the Chairman confirmed that since the system was changed that was not the case. Cllr Stanford reminded the Chairman that the clerks had cash at home before they handed it over to the Chairman to pay in. Mr Clark said that he was concerned that large amounts of cash was being stored in their homes. Chairman confirmed that it did not work that way. Mr Clark then asked a further question 4. Has there ever been an occasion when money that has been stored in someone's home has been used and then has been made good using a cheque? Chairman confirmed not that he was aware of. Cllr Stanford added that when the donations are collected it is counted and the paying in book filled in and signed by the

two people present so there is a better system in place. She said that if they had employed a company, it would be a cost to taxpayers and that the Council wanted to use the donations for good things in the parish. Mr Clark said he thought it was a lot of money and that the council should employ a professional to do it. There was then a discussion between Cllr Mrs Stanford and Mr Clark where she said she did not feel vulnerable collecting the donations and that they had a good system in place. Cllr Warren then suggested that the council could instal card machines but that they were expensive he asked Mr Clark how he would feel if the council installed those. There was then a discussion about swiping cards.

Ex-councillor Smedley of Winchelsea raised the point that the Chairman had said he had only recently got the key to the Winchelsea notice board but that he had given the key back within the week of his resignation and also the key to the Icklesham board is suited with the Winchelsea board so that key could have been used. The Chairman said he was not aware of that. Mr Smedley said that he had given the key back to the deputy chairman when he resigned.

Brian Leonard of Winchelsea then asked if he could ask a question regarding Winchelsea traffic calming. The Chairman said no as it was not on the agenda but Mr. Leonard continued that they did not know about the meeting on 24th May and only saw the Minutes last week so he would have asked the question then. He said the working group had met on 17th May and what they were keen to do was to contact the consultants that the council had commissioned, and they wanted to get hold of those consultants they could check with the consultants what their position was and report to the meeting of 12th July. They wanted to know if the consultants were still interested. Chairman confirmed that he had not seen those papers either and was not sure if the acting clerk had found the papers. Chairman said that he could not check the deputy clerk's laptop because it had been in need of repair when the council got it back. Ms Taylor reminded the meeting that it was now repaired. Chairman confirmed that it was now repaired but it was with the RFO to complete the year-end accounts which was the urgent matter to be dealt with at that meeting. Cllr Stanford confirmed that she had found some files and passed them to Cllr Justice who is on the traffic calming working group.

The meeting commenced at approx. 20.10 – the Chairman having allowed over 54 minutes for residents to make statements and ask questions.

21/112 Item 2. Apologies for absence. Andy Beam RFO

21/1113 Item 3. Disclosure of Interests – there were none.

21/114 Item 4. *It was resolved to approve and sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Extraordinary Council Meeting of 24th May 2021.*

Matters Requiring a Decision by the Council

21/115 Item 5 Approval of Annual Governance Statement.

- (a) Section 1 the AGAR audit form 2021. Approved
- (b) Section 2 is the report with all the accounting numbers from the previous year's accounts. Balances brought forward by end of March 2020 £75,613 and the balance in March 2021 £88,769. No concerns are raised whatsoever by the RFO and auditor. Approved for signature.
- (c) Section 3 is annual governance and accountability return which was been signed off by the internal auditor. Approved

Chairman reported that the Internal Audit Report has some queries which had been dealt with. Cllr Stanford reported that there was a query regarding the Risk Assessment, which was not in the relevant Minutes last year, so it was something to revisit and minute this year. The auditor could not find the AGAR from last year which was not displayed on the website. This has now been done. Chairman mentioned the lack of three-year plan and Cllr Warren reminded the meeting that he had raised at the time that it was impossible to plan whilst the covid restrictions were in place and we had agreed to wait until this was clear. It was agreed that because of what has happened over the last 12-15 months the council was right to take that decision.

21/116 Item 6 Financial Matters Chairman confirmed that there was no report as the RFO had only just finished last year's accounts but will now be able to begin this year's accounts. Chairman drew attention to list of invoices paid. Council approved payment to Castle Water for Rye Harbour toilets councillors', Business Stream and Post Officer for PO box address. Cllr Tollett asked what the Rother DC amounts were for Chairman confirmed he had asked RFO to check. Cllr Stanford proposed vote of thanks to the Chairman and Vice for sorting out the bank account. Chairman proposed members approved regular payments to be made by DD or SO for instance for Mark Saunters our contractor. Approved. Cllr Warren confirmed that he had now received the new online banking device.

21/117 Item 7 Date and venue for next full council meeting. Monday 12th July 2021 at Winchelsea Beach.

Meeting closed at 8.25pm