

BRADFORD ON TONE PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Bradford on Tone Parish Council on Tuesday 5th April 2022,
commencing at 7.30pm, in the Chant Room, Bradford on Tone Village Hall**

(in the format to be presented to the next meeting for approval)

Present:

Clrs Venn (Chair), Cllr Ellis, Cllr Smith, Cllr Sidhu, Cllr P Haines, Cllr Herdman
C Morrison-Jones (clerk)
5 x members of the public

Public Speaking:

- Can the proposed route for the re-routing of the footpath be posted on the noticeboard?
- Pothole at Heatheton Park / A 38 junction on white line
- Berry's corner - white lines still not re-marked
- Continued encroachment onto Highways at Three Ways, Back Lane

1. To receive apologies for absence

Apologies received from Cllr Brodie

2. To receive Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Other Interests and consider granting any Dispensations

None

3. To approve minutes from meeting held on 8th March 2022.

The minutes were approved by Members and signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record of the previous meetings.

4. To receive and consider the Public Interest Report (attached) issued by PKF Littlejohn, external auditors, for a failure to submit an Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) for the year ending 31 March 2021

Councillors formally acknowledged receipt of the Public Information Report (PIR) issued by PKF Littlejohn for a failure to submit an Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) for the year ending 31st March 2021. It was also acknowledged that, as a result of receiving this public interest report, the Parish Council will not be eligible to certify itself as exempt from limited assurance review in 2021/22 (if it would otherwise be eligible), as it will have failed one of the qualifying requirements set out in Regulation 9(3) of The Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015.

Councillors discussed the matters arising from the report issued by PKF Littlejohn and thanked the newly appointed clerk for bringing these matters to their attention.

Minutes, Bradford-On-Tone Parish Council. 5th April 2022

Chair

Date

Councillors resolved to endeavour to return the council to a compliant status as soon as possible. Whilst it was acknowledged that Covid and the remote working situations in place may have played a part in the current situation evolving unchecked, the Council accepted that it was culpable for the non-submission of the AGAR for 20/21 and that omissions and errors had been made in the administration and governance of the Parish Council.

Councillors resolved the following general measures be taken to try and rectify the situation:

- i. A new experienced clerk and RFO has been appointed by the Council. Their experience and knowledge of Parish Council procedures will greatly assist the Council action the required improvements
- ii. Councillors to be more aware of their responsibilities and those of the Council. Councillors need to be familiar with the Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and other governance and policy documents relating to the Parish Council.
- iii. Councillors should endeavour to take advantage of training offered by SALC and / or District Council in order to re-affirm and expand their knowledge
- iv. Consider, in the short term, increasing meeting frequency to monthly to enable the progression of the changes required in a reasonable time frame

Councillors also resolved that, in particular reference to specific actions to address in the immediate future, the immediate focus would be on the following issues that have currently been identified:

- a) Ensure that the financial records of the PC are brought up to date and correctly reflect the current position of the PC
- b) To ensure that the PC completes and submits the required AGAR documents for 2021/22 within the required timeframes
- c) Ensure that the PC as an employer is registered with HMRC and the Pensions Regulator
- d) Ensure that the Parish Council submits a VAT reclaim to HMRC
- e) Ensure that meetings are legally convened and abide by the legislation in place at the time of the meeting
- f) Ensure that a statement of Internal Controls is drawn up and approved by Council
- g) Ensure that a statement of Risk Assessment is drawn up and approved by Council
- h) Website
 - o short term to ensure that, moving forward, the documentation required to be displayed and made publicly available by the PC is displayed as required
 - o longer term to consider the rebuild of the website in order to comply with Accessibility requirements and to simplify its use
- i) To review the PCs Standing Orders (last reviewed November 2015)

Minutes, Bradford-On-Tone Parish Council. 5th April 2022

Chair

Date

j) To review the PCs Financial Regulations (last reviewed 20th May 2015)

k) To review the PCs Code of Conduct (last reviewed 20th Nov 2015)

l) Draw up an internal 'check list' of actions that should occur within the Parish Council on an annual basis to aid Councillors understanding of the cycle of the Municipal year and to identify key annual actions.

5. To appoint an Internal Auditor for 2021/22

The clerk reported to councillors that it is a requirement that the PC is internally audited. An internal audit is not simply financial audit but an audit of the functioning of the PC and its processes and its compliance with its statutory requirements.

It does not appear that an internal audit has not taken place since the year end 2019/20 and it is anticipated that, due to the errors and omissions already identified, this time round it will be a complex and involved process which will result in a comprehensive list of recommendations to assist the PC to move forwards.

The clerk had previously circulated the estimated costs involved in appointing an experienced internal auditor for the 2021/22 and councillors resolved to request that Simon Pritchard carryout the internal audit for Bradford On Tone PC for 2021/22

6. Finances:

6.1 Financial update

Due to the lack of bank statements, the clerk reported that she currently could not provide an up-to-date report on the Parish Council's current financial status

6.2 Payments to approve

Chq 1045	BoT Village Hall	Room hire, invoices 8,17,24 & 26/2022	£48.00	
Chq 1046	D Greenslade	Play area invoices 539 & 543	£6047.38	Inc VAT of £1007.90
Chq 1047	PKF Littlejohn LLP	Administration charge for chasing for notification of exemption from a limited assurance review for the year ended 31 March 2020.	£48.00	inc VAT of £8
Chq 1048	PKF Littlejohn LLP	Additional charges in regards to the Limited assurance review of Annual Governance & Accountability Return for year ended 31 March 2021	£336.00	Inc VAT of £56.00

6.3 To review the Parish Council Asset List

Councillors confirmed that the assets lists presented by the clerk for year end 20/21 and year end 21/22 were a true representation of the assets held by the Parish Council at date of circulation of the list (19th March 2022)

It was noted that additional items purchased for the play area on 31.3.22 would probably be considered infrastructure improvements rather than assets, but this

Minutes, Bradford-On-Tone Parish Council. 5th April 2022

Chair

Date

would be reviewed at the May meeting.

6.4 To review the Parish Council bank account authorised signatories and signing rules

The clerk reported that the PC does not appear to have been receiving regular bank statements for the past two years. The clerk thanked Cllr Ellis (as an authorised signatory) who has been into Natwest, Taunton and as a result it has been verified that the signatory list was last updated in 2012 and that the PC currently has 8 authorised signatories, 5 of whom are no longer associated with the PC.

Councillors resolved to update the Parish Council’s mandate with NatWest as follows

- i. To remove Derrick Bott, Jane Cape, Colin Dinsdale, Kenneth Mear and David Richards from the authorised signatory list
- ii. To retain Colin Ellis, Peter Haines and Dennis Venn on the authorised signatory list
- iii. To add Leigh Sidhu, David Smith and Claire Morrison-Jones to the authorised signatory list
- iv. To add Claire Morrison-Jones as the authorised account administrator
- v. To change the current signing rules from 3 to 2 signatures required to authorise a cheque payment

Councillors noted that, maybe in the future the PC could consider adopting electronic banking payments, but the immediate need is to address the mandate currently in place.

7. Play Area:

7.1 Annual Safety inspections

The Clerk drew to the attention of Councillors that a safety inspection should be carried out as soon as the installation of equipment was complete. Councillors resolved to approach the installer of the equipment to see if he was able to provide an inspection, if not an outside inspector would be approached. It was acknowledged that in previous discussions it had been noted that the PCs membership of SPFA may well cover the cost of an annual safety inspection.

It was also noted, that for insurance and health and safety purposes an annual professional safety inspection would be required to ensure the equipment and area are safe and maintained correctly.

Councillors noted that whilst the PC held liability insurance, there could be potential for ‘cross over’ of responsibility for liability issues between the PC and landowner. Councillors resolved to ask the land owner for a copy of their public liability cover and also to ensure that the PC holds a record of the lease agreement believed to have been undertaken between the land owner and Council in May of 2021.

7.2 Weekly safety inspections

To supplement the annual professional safety assessment, in order to regularly check and record the status of the equipment and area, the clerk advised that there should be a weekly safety inspection carried out, recorded and the record retained by the PC. A sample weekly inspection sheet had previously been circulated to councillors within their agenda information packs. Cllr Smith offered to take the lead on play ground matters and draft an inspection sheet and organise a regular inspection rota.

Councillors raised the issue of future funding requirements for the play area. Whilst it was hopeful that whilst the area was a new installation there would be few maintenance costs, the clerk advised that the Council should budget an annual amount into earmarked reserves to cover future maintenance costs.

- 8. To resolve that due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the business to be transacted in agenda item 9, it is to be conducted in confidential session with the public and press excluded**

Councillors resolved to approve the motion proposed above

All members of the public left the meeting at this point

- 9. Employment matters**

Councillors discussed the impact of the identified additional workload on the clerk and concluded that it could not be achieved within the contracted six hours per week. As a result, councillors resolved to pay the clerk for the overtime required to address the problems identified earlier in the meeting and also to proactively work with the clerk to enable the Council to return to compliance.

- 10. Date and time of the next meeting:**

Annual Parish Council Meeting to be held on Monday 16th May 2022 at 7.30 pm in the Chant Room, Bradford on Tone Village Hall.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.31pm