

Strumpshaw Parish Council Minutes

**Meeting held 10th August 2021 at Strumpshaw Community Hall, Mill Road,
Strumpshaw, Norwich, NR13 4FS**

Present: Maureen Hammond (Chairman), Paul Dexter (Vice Chairman), Sheila Ashford, Tina McAulay, Olly Page, Richard Palmer (coopted at this meeting)

In attendance: Hilary Hammond (Deputy Clerk)
Grant Nurden (District Councillor)
Sarah Cartwright, Bob Hunt, Lynda Hunt (Community Hall Committee)
Two members of the public

1. Apologies for absence:

Andrew Proctor (County Councillor)
Sue Prutton (District Councillor)
Megan Wilby

2. Retirement of Councillor David Varley

The retirement of Councillor David Varley was noted with sadness. The Deputy Clerk reported that the vacancy has been advertised with a closing date of 31st August 2021.

3. Co-option of Councillor

Richard Palmer was co-opted as a Councillor in place of Eric McCormick. Richard Palmer signed the Declaration of Office.

4. Declarations of interest in matters on the agenda

Maureen Hammond and Hilary Hammond declared that they are married, which the Council particularly noted in relation to agenda item 10 (appointment of temporary Responsible Financial Officer).

5. Resignation of Megan Wilby from the post of Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

The Council noted that Megan Wilby has resigned as Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer with effect from August 29th 2021. The Chairman expressed the Council's appreciation of the work that Megan had undertaken, which was outstanding in view of her lack of experience when she was appointed. The Chairman also said that, in November 2020, Megan had reluctantly agreed to work an extra hour a week but that she was finding that there is still more work than she can accomplish in the hours for which she is paid. Megan did not wish to work additional hours.

6. Possibility of the Council using the Scribe accounting system

The Deputy Clerk drew attention to the Scribe accounting system, which is designed for small local councils, and which also provides a hall management package. The Deputy Clerk said that many local councils use Scribe and find it helpful. The Scribe staff suggest that the use of the accounting package can save at least 3 hours a month of the Clerk's time. Grant Nurden said that Brundall Parish Council use Scribe and could be approached for comment on its effectiveness. The Council noted that a demonstration of Scribe has been arranged for Thursday 12th August. The Council agreed that a report should be made to the September Council meeting about Scribe, including its costs. (Proposed Tina McAulay, seconded Olly Page).

7. Scope, extent and salary range for the post of Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)

The Chairman had circulated a report about the Council's options in recruiting a Clerk and RFO. This included the background to the increase in work for the Clerk's post following the opening of the Community Hall, and the provision of the allotments. She stressed the cost in Clerk's time and salary of holding a Council meeting and the need for accuracy to avoid duplication of work.

The Chairman stated that advice had been sought from the Norfolk Association of Local Councils (NALC). NALC advised that each Council should determine its own needs, but that they considered that up to 8 hours a week would be appropriate for a Council such as Strumpshaw. NALC also carried out a job evaluation and recommended that the starting salary for this post should be SCP 14 (£11.96 an hour at current prices). NALC recommended that the Council should add up to 3 scale points for specific recognised qualifications.

The Council considered the financial implications of appointing a Clerk and RFO for 7 or 8 hours a week. They noted that the full year additional cost for a 7 hour a week appointment would be £932, while an 8 hour a week appointment would cost an additional £1,758, both at SCP 14, at 2020 prices and including pension on costs. The Council noted that the cost of an 8 hour a week appointment could result in an increase of 19% on the precept: they considered that this was not affordable.

The Council noted that the use of the Scribe accounting package may result in less pressure on the Clerk and RFO's time. They also noted that there would be an annual fee to use the package, which was thought to be in the region of £20 a month.

The Council noted that it is normal Local Government practice for a post to be advertised with a range of salary points, that a 6 month probationary period is normal practice, and that the post would be part of the Norfolk Pension Fund. This would require the post holder to contribute 5.5% of salary and the Council to contribute 23.5% of salary.

The Council noted that the Finance Committee will need to consider the impact on the 2022/23 budget of an increase of £932 at current prices, including pension on costs, to pay for the increase in hours to 7 a week.

Sheila Ashford proposed and Paul Dexter seconded the recommendation in the report, which is that that Council should advertise for a Clerk and RFO to work for 7 hours

week, with a review of hours one year after appointment. The salary range offered should be SCP 14 to 18 (£11.96 to £12.95 an hour at current prices) plus up to 3 spinal points for specific, recognised qualifications. The Council voted in favour.

8. Authority to determine the job description and advertisement for the post of Clerk and RFO

The Council authorised the Chairman and Vice Chairman jointly to determine this job description and advertisement.

9. Membership of the appointment panel

The Council appointed the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Sheila Ashford to be the appointment panel.

10. Appointment of temporary Responsible Financial Officer

The Council noted that it is mandatory for it to appoint a Responsible Financial Officer and that this post cannot be held by a Councillor. In the absence of other possibilities, the Council appointed Hilary Hammond as the temporary Responsible Financial Officer from 30th August 2021 until the appointment of the new salaried Clerk and RFO, supported by Paul Dexter in view of his professional background. The Council noted the close relationship between the Chairman and the Deputy Clerk referred to in agenda item 4.

11. Signatories for, and operation of, the Council's bank accounts

The Council noted that Maureen Hammond has the power to view and operate the Council's bank accounts.

The Council approved the addition of Paul Dexter to the online banking system for the Parish Council's bank accounts.

The Council noted that Hilary Hammond will not have the power either to view or to operate the Council's bank accounts.

12. Reconsideration of the quotations for grass and fences at Strumpshaw Community Hall

The Council received a report from the Deputy Clerk. The quotation from Anglia Garden and Landscapes that had been accepted at the 20th July Parish Council meeting had been assumed by the Community Hall Committee to include VAT. This was not the case as Anglia Garden and Landscapes is not registered for VAT. The result was that the costs given to the Parish Council were £1,130 less than the actual quotation of £6,780.

In view of the age of the other quotations, the companies that had quoted unsuccessfully were asked if they wished to revise their quotations, particularly because of the rapid increase in the cost of materials. One company did not respond despite being asked four times.

The Council considered quotations totalling £6,780 from Anglia Garden and Landscapes and up to £6,350 from Jack Angel. (The quotation from Jack Angel included a range of prices to prepare the grassed area, provide topsoil and sow grass seed, ranging from £1,500 to £2,000. The comparative quotation was calculated using £2,000 for this element). Neither company is registered for VAT.

The Council noted that the grass and fencing for the external area will be funded from the funds for play paid through a S.106 agreement from the Oakland Mews and William Black Way development. They also noted that picket fence to the north east of the Community Hall will be funded from Community Hall reserves.

Richard Palmer proposed and Olly Page seconded the recommendation that the quotation from Jack Angel should be accepted. The Council voted in favour.

13. Any planning applications received by 3rd August 2021

No planning applications had been received.

The meeting closed at 8.40 p.m.

Maureen Hammond
Chairman