
MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

Monday 2nd June

COUNCILLORS IN ATTENDANCE: C. Baker, S. Bays, R. Burnham, V. Jenkinson, V. Nuthall, T. Ramsden, R. Thomas, L. Turvey, T. Young

Meeting opened at 7.15pm

Opening.

Meeting opened by Chairman Nuthall and handed over to Vice Chairman Ramsden

Cllr Ramsden clarifies that the meeting was called following new councillors and staff members joining Stokenchurch Parish Council. The following discussion would be reviewing the Civility Pledge, Code of Conduct, and Dignity at Work. Cllr Baker confirms the importance of the council working together and being aware of how each member treats each other, focusing on the aim that we are known to be a council that can get on.

Civility and respect pledge

Cllrs Ramsden reviewed each point on the pledge and confirmed if Cllrs and the clerk agree and understand.

Treat all councillors, clerk and all employees, members of the public, representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their role. All agreed

Put in place a training programme for councillors and staff. Cllr Ramsden confirms that training is available to all, and asks new councillors; Bays and Turvey, and the Clerk if they are aware of the available training. All agreed on what training is available. Cllr Bays has suggested this to be rephrased

Sign up to Code of Conduct for councillors. Cllr Ramsden and Cllr Nuthall confirm this is signed on behalf of the whole council. Cllr Ramsden highlights the importance of doing it at the beginning of a new council.

Have in place good governance arrangements, including staff contracts and Dignity at Work Policy.

Commit to seeking professional help at the early stages should civility and respect issues arise. Cllr Ramsden highlights that this is important and that this works both ways, ensuring that all Cllrs know the procedure of who they go to and that we can all turn to somebody when needed, and we all have a duty of care.

Commit to calling out bullying and harassment if and when it happens. Cllr Ramsden and Cllr Nuthall confirm that an email to the Clerk is the first step in the procedure for when bullying is identified. Cllr Nuthall states that if it is a councillor complaint, then the individual must go to the monitoring officer and report them for the Code of Conduct. Cllr Nuthall discusses the importance of the council getting on and everyone is treated with respect, and ensuring that all councillors know their first point of call is the clerk, and in turn it will be reported to the monitoring officer. Cllr Nuthall confirms the procedure for any staffing issues would be reported to a councillor who would then put this through to the chairman. It is all discussed that all policies and procedures are currently being worked through and updated individually. The Clerk confirms she will pass on the policies and procedures to new staff members, assistant clerk Tracey Martin, and responsible finance officer Derek Wilson.

Continue to learn from best practice in the sector and aspire to being a role model/champion council e.g., via Local Council Award Scheme. Cllr Nuthall mentions the training plans available to Clerks, CILCA, and that Stokenchurch Parish Council has always wanted to aim for a Gold Star Clerk, which in turn would mean the council could apply for Quality Council

Status. Cllr Bays highlights how, by reviewing other councils' policies and procedures along with BMALK, we could implement and improve our own by bringing these to the council's attention.

Support the continued lobbying for the change in legislation to support the Civility and Respect Pledge including sanctions for elected members where appropriate. Cllr Nuthall mentions that this then leads us to the next part, Dignity at work. Cllr Ramsden confirms we are all agreed with the Civility and Respect Pledge. Clarification is discussed for point 2 on the pledge. Training is available to councillors and staff members, but nothing is enforced, and this is at the councillors' and staff members' discretion.

Dignity at work

The council discusses the Dignity at Work policy and confirms that it covers bullying and harassment to staff members and it now also includes councillors. Cllr Nuthall confirms that the duties and obligations carried out by the council, it will support staff members and ensure that complaints about behaviour are dealt with in accordance with it. Cllr Ramsden proposes all councillors are to read the form and are to sign that they have read and agree with the form in the next meeting, 2nd July. All agreed. Cllr Nuthall brings attention to page 3, which highlights examples of what may be considered as bullying and harassment.

Code of Conduct

Cllr Baker states that the code of conduct applies to all meetings held by the council, that respect is always given and that nothing is directed at any one member of the council or colleague, which will allow better discussion and debate within the council. The council discusses the standing orders, and the importance of only one discussion happening at one time, Cllr Ramsden praises the chair for how they manage the council.

Cllr Burnham brings to the discussion, allowing the public and parishioners to talk within meetings and voice their opinions during matters. The council praises the Chair's diplomatic approach to concerned parishioners. Cllr Nuthall agrees on the importance of parishioners' voicing their opinions and concerns, and allowing them to connect with their Parish Council and Buckinghamshire Council.

The council discusses the standing orders, and how by having ten very different people they can bring a lot of discussion and different opinions to the table, creating a better council.

Cllr Ramsden raises the topic of social media, particularly Facebook. Parishioners have the right to voice their opinions on Facebook, however, it is not expected that Councillors respond to Parishioners on social media. Parishioners can contact the Clerk with their concerns and are able to come to meetings. If a councillor sees something on Facebook, they may choose to submit this as an agenda item, but it is not expected. Cllr Nuthall confirms the guidance is that no councillor is obliged to respond, and that a draft policy is currently being amended that guides councillors not to respond at all. The correct steps for Parishioners to voice their concerns are to the clerk or by attending a meeting. The council agrees that if a councillor posts something, it may be perceived by Parishioners as speaking on behalf of the Parish Council and therefore the best practice is to avoid this.

Point 5 brought into discussion: *Do not bring your council into disrepute.* The council agrees that their Facebook is their private Facebook; however, they understand that their personal actions may be seen by parishioners, so it is important that they act in a respectful manner. Cllr Young mentions the conflict of information that councillors are told; that what they do outside of the council has no reflection on them within the council, in comparison to the information highlighted in this discussion and within the policies.

Cllr Nuthall brings Page 4 victimisation into discussion, that many councils have had occurrences of victimisation and harassment from the public, and knowing that you are not alone. So, ensuring we have a good understanding of the procedures to help in any instances of this.

Cllr Ramsden states that councillors remember they are 1 of 10. Cllr Nuthall confirms that she is 1 of 10, she is a councillor who happens to chair the meeting.

Cllr Thomas brings to the discussion the document he created, 'Stokenchurch Parish Council: What do we do'. This document will go on the website. Cllr Nuthall updates the council on the progress of the website, and that it will be launched imminently.

Closing

Cllr Nuthall and Cllr Ramsden confirm actions for clerk to carry out following the meeting. The above policies and pledge are to be amended where highlighted and are to be read by each councillor ready to sign, minuted and adopted in the July meeting (Wednesday 2nd July).

Cllr Nuthall welcomes the new clerk, Portia, and highlights the excitement of all new staff joining Stokenchurch Parish Council. The clerk discusses how the different aspects of each of the new staff members work well together already, and the excitement to start creating smoother systems of work for the council and parishioners. A discussion was held about the presence of a clerk within the office.

The council discusses the village fete on Saturday 7th and the attendance of any council members. The council is not doing anything as representation of the council, however, some councillors may be attending as general parishioners.

Meeting closed: 20.20