



Walton Parish Council

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Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held at St John's Church Community Hall 16th January 2024

The meeting commenced at 1900hrs

Councillors present: H Allison, S Harris, J Greene, V Lacey, A Williams, C Hewitt, R Bennett,
Cllr Hardie arrived at 19.03hrs

123 Apologies for absence

Two apologies were received ahead of the meeting from Cllrs Hazeldine and Saberi

124 Declarations of Interest

*Councillors were reminded of their responsibility to declare disposable pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests which they have on any item on the agenda no later when the item is reached. Declarations are a personal matter for each member to decide and the decision to declare, or not, is the responsibility of the Councillor. **Action:** No interests were declared*

125 Matters to be considered with the exclusion of the press and public

[using Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s. 2]

To consider whether any items on the agenda should be considered in closed session because of the nature of the information to be disclosed, whether pertaining to an individual, a contract or legal advice. **Action:** no items for closed session

126 Public / Parishioner Participation

126.1 There were no parishioners in attendance or non-parishioners who had been invited to speak.

126.2 PCSO Report: this had been received and circulated to all councillors in advance of the meeting. There were no further comments.

126.3 Borough Councillor M Scott arrived after the agenda item at 19.20 hrs. There was no Borough Councillor report.

127 Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 05th December 2024, were amended at point 110 to clarify that the Locum Clerk's contract was completed on 10.11.2024 her appointment being for six months. The minutes were confirmed as a true record. They were signed by the Chair.

128 Appointment of Temporary Clerk until a permanent Clerk is appointed.

In line with advice from CHALC, it was agreed that Councillor Hewitt would act in the role of Temporary Clerk. She will be supported in some administrative tasks by volunteer councillors. Action continues to find a suitable candidate for the permanent role.

Proposed by Councillor Williams, seconded by Councillor Lacey. The proposal was carried by a majority vote with one abstention.

129. Employment Committee

A verbal report was presented by Cllrs Harris and Hewitt on the recruitment process for a Clerk thus far, including next steps in early February. It was confirmed that nominees drawn from the Employment Committee plus a domain expert Parish Clerk would undertake selection processes and advise the Parish Council on the preferred candidate. The Employment Committee's recommended candidate would be introduced to all councillors' subsequently, ideally before taking up post. In discussion, clarification was provided on best practice in methods of recruitment and selection that the Parish Council would follow, and the essential requirement for competence to be built via Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to the level of SILCA for any appointee without that qualification. It was also explained that specific councillors would mentor the appointee according to their areas of competence. Councillor Williams presented salary calculations informed by NALC pay ranges and NALC terms and conditions. The approach was approved. Proposed Councillor Williams Seconded Councillor Lacey. The proposal was carried.

130. Budget

Councillor Hewitt introduced three potential budget scenarios circulated to councillors in papers. These included the recommended option. Discussion followed on all aspects of the budget. Points were raised by Cllr Hardie on proposed sums for Learning and Development, and Election expenditure. Election expenditure at that time had not been forwarded to Parish Councillors and, consequently, could not be discussed. The proposal to accept the preferred budget option was carried by a majority vote. There were no votes against and one abstention. Proposer Cllr Williams. Seconder Cllr Bennett.

131. Precept

Councillors Hewitt, Williams and Lacey outlined precept options indicating the assumptions, estimates and known cost increases that had demonstrated an emerging deficit and the requirement for a 17% increase. After clarification, assessment and debate the proposal to accept the recommended precept was carried by a majority vote. Proposed Cllr Allison, Seconded Cllr Lacey. There were no votes against and one abstention.

132. Complaints Policy

Drafts version 1 and version 2 of the unapproved Complaints Policy, previously circulated to councillors, were introduced for consideration. Draft 2, (incorporating proposed revisions from the Quality Review of Draft version 1 to reinforce the rights of Parishioners) was adopted with a majority vote, 1 against and no abstentions. Proposed Councillor Williams. Seconded Councillor Hewitt.

133. ThenMedia / IT issues

Discussion took place on data security, informed by concerns about external interference with WPC domain email addresses, an outline of the recent experience in training in the University Sector from Councillor Greene, and advice from Councillor Hazeldine. This item was for information and did not require a vote.

134. Walton Parish Emails

Councillor Harris opened the discussion on the relative benefits and disbenefits of adopting a 'gov.uk' domain informed by her attendance on a CHALC /NALC online learning session and referenced comprehensive notes sent to all councillors prior to the meeting. The matters of cyber security and ability to retain GDPR compliant email audit trails, together with access and control were seen to be critical and decisive. Councillor Hardie indicated he would refuse to adopt a secure Parish Council email but expressed concerns about being excluded from email communications consequently. Otherwise, there was consensus by councillors on the approach, subject to confirming the costs of the secure gov.uk domain. Councillor Hazeldine was asked to investigate costs. The item will be on the February Agenda.

135. Creamfields Donation

Councillor Harris updated councillors on her efforts to confirm the status of a Creamfields' donation. She had recently been provided with correspondence from Cream confirming a payment had/ would be made. Communication with Cream took place in January so payment into the Parish Council would not show until the January statement.

136. Online Banking provider update

Councillor Hewitt introduced the report and recommendations on alternative providers to NatWest Bank. NatWest presents practical hurdles to migrating from a paper system and significant practical challenges to securing paper statements, replacement cheque books and paying-in books etc. on a timely basis. This friction has disrupted our capacity to do business efficiently. Essential, functional requirements include local access to a branch, free banking, and a dual signatory facility for making online payments. These criteria limit the choice of service provider.

Ethical providers were considered of high importance, but none were available or affordable locally. Consequently, the Business Case proposal to immediately migrate to Lloyds Bank was supported unanimously by councillors.

137. Finance

It was noted that there were no receipts. Approval was given for five payments issued on 05th December 2024 as follows:

05.12.24 001588 Hayley Beardsall	40.00
05.12.24 001589 Anita Williams	44.83
05.12.24 001590 Christina Hewitt	17.65
05.12.24 001591 Ray Hallam	79.99
05.12.24 001592 WODAC donation	100.00

138. South Warrington Liaison Group/Southeast Warrington Urban Extension (SEWUE)

Cllr Harris's Report on the first meeting of 18/12/24 was noted, together with the possible budget share for WPC. The next SEWUE meeting was set for 22/01/25 between 13.30 and 15.30 at Stockton Heath Library.

139. Strategic Plan

Councillor Lacey explained the Draft Plan's Context, Purpose, and Structure.

In the current draft version, there are five strategic headings which attempt to focus on essential outcomes for the Parish which are:

- Improving the Amenity of Walton for its Parishioners
- Ensuring Effective Governance
- Reducing Harms to the Parish, including threats to the environment
- Events
- Ensuring Effective Financial and Assets Management

Continuing or future projects, activities and initiatives are set out under these headings from the middle of the Draft Plan. There is scope for further headings or varied headings if the business of the Parish requires.

The Introduction to the Plan describes the emerging national context and references the planned radical reform of Local Government outlined in the Devolution White Paper (HMG 16th December 2024).

The current version of the Plan was issued for quality review in December, but progress on review was disrupted by recent events, diverting effort from the Plan to immediately urgent work. The current Draft Strategic Plan will be issued by email to councillors for information and discussion at the February meeting.

140. Reports from Advisory Groups

140.1 Planning

No written report and there had been little planning activity due to the Christmas and New Year period. There was, however, discussion of emerging applications and a resubmitted application from the Stag Pub to develop uses of the former bowling green. The PC has a position to oppose the application after representations by a Walton resident. Councillor Hardie was asked to provide his Planning Report, as usual, for the February meeting

140.2 Village Betterment

Proposals were agreed for expenditure on Village Betterment to the limit of £2000:

- refurbishing benches - £500
- converting the red phone box into a planter- £1500

Proposer Cllr Williams Seconder Cllr Allison. The proposal was carried by a majority vote

140.3 Events Advisory Group

No report

140.3 Donations Advisory Group

No report

141. Reports from Portfolio Holders and Representatives of Outside Bodies

141.1 Footpaths and Towpaths

No report

141.2 Highways, Vegetation and Street Lighting

The following had been reported to WBC: bridge damage and flooding.

Matters to be reported are

- a) flooding of Pool Lane caused by overflowing water from the reservoir carried through the gully under the A 56; flooding of the A56 near the exit road from Walton Lea
What3words: flies.danger.sends
- b)all directional signs on A56 in need of cleaning

c) manhole on A56 in front of the former Ship Inn site has developed a large pothole around it which has caused damage to vehicles. What3words: overnight.admis.zones.

Cllr Harris to report.

d) No communication with the PC thus far about the verges on Hollyhedge Lane

e.) No repairs to canal bridges Warrington Road and Holly Hedge Lane

141.3 Walton Hall Estate

No Report

142 Report on Actions taken and correspondence received since the previous meeting

142.1 The Report on Actions and correspondence was noted.

142.2 After Agenda item 138, Councillor Hardie hand-delivered to the Chair x2 items of correspondence in opened envelopes. Continuity of business (discussion of item 139) precluded their review by the Chair at that time. The contents included a bill from WBC dated 25th December 2024. Councillors and the Chair were unaware of this information during the debates and votes taken on item 130 (25/26 Budget) and item 131 (Precept).

Cllr Hardie subsequently explained that whilst he was away, Mr Hallam had posted 3 letters for the PC through his letterbox which he opened and read on Thursday morning.

142.3 Councillor Hardie raised a matter from an email string classified Private and Confidential and circulated in December. The item was deferred to the February meeting for a Part Two discussion under the heading Data Protection.

142.4 The Chair has written to Simon Twigg WBC about accountability for for trees on verges. Mrs P Moore has contacted us to report the Stetchworth Rd grit bin was empty which was refilled by Councillor Hardie. This was reported to WBC on Councillors email case WBC -HWY- 67626924.

143 AOB – Drone Surveillance

Councillor Bennett described his recent disquieting experience of drone surveillance followed by a trespass on the roof of his premises by the drone pilot who was challenged by Cllr Bennett and his son. Elsewhere locally, farmers subjected to the same drone surveillance had subsequently suffered theft, Councillors expressed their concern for the safety and security of Councillor Bennett and his family. Councillors asked to be briefed on the emerging picture.

144 To Set Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 6th February 2025 at St John's Community Church Hall, Old Chester Rd, Walton Commencing at 19.00 hrs.