

**West Rainton Parish Council**  
**Minutes of Parish Council meeting held at**  
**St. Mary's Church Meeting Room, West Rainton**  
**Thursday 16 June 2016**

**Present:**

Councillors M Boettcher, E Bulmer, I Clifford, C Cochrane, M Gilbank, I Haddick, P Morson, S Patterson, A Wallage (Chair).

20 x members of the public (MoP)

**In attendance:**

County Councillor Kellett

Parish Clerk - Graeme Keedy (from item 2)

NOTE: Cllr Bulmer audio recorded the meeting for personal use.

**1) Emergency appointment of Interim Parish Clerk**

The Chairman explained that the Parish Clerk, Kate Cuthbert had left the employment of the Parish Council at short notice due to a change in personal circumstances.

Cllr Wallage advised that prior to the meeting she had had an informal discussion with G Keedy, Project Officer (and former Clerk to the Council) about the current circumstances. Mr Keedy had offered to act as Interim Clerk should Parish Council so wish, pending the appointment of a replacement for Miss Cuthbert.

Parish Council resolved that G Keedy be appointed as Interim Parish Clerk. G Keedy joined the meeting at this point.

**2) Apologies for absence**

Apologies had been received from Cllr P Lowrie (due to pre-arranged leave commitment). The apology was approved.

No apology had been received from Cllr A Swinburn and this was noted as an unapproved absence.

**3) Declarations of interest**

It was agreed that declarations of interest would be dealt with as and when the need arose.

Signed:

Date:

#### **4) Public participation**

In a highly charged discussion, many members of the public present made vociferous comments about the poor condition of the cemetery grounds as a result of a lack of grass cutting over a prolonged period.

The Chairman and Parish Clerk explained the circumstances which had led to the current situation and the steps being taken to resolve the issue as soon as it had been recognised. This did little to appease members of the public.

Suggestions were put forward that grass cutting contractual arrangements be reviewed and the current contractors replaced. A query was raised relating to a deviation from the Council's standard practice for the letting of the annual grass cutting contract.

The Parish Clerk explained the background to the contract arrangements for 2016, pending the letting of a much broader environmental maintenance contract. He also emphasised the potential difficulty in securing an alternative contractor at this peak time.

The discussion extended to include individual perceptions of the levels of competence of the Parish Council and its contractors; and a view that levels of staff resources at West Rainton were disproportionate to other local councils - Great Aycliffe being specifically cited. A MoP became quite disruptive. Cllr Clifford proposed that the MoP be asked to leave the meeting. The Parish Council subsequently resolved to ask the MoP to leave but they refused to do so.

Cllr Wallage drew this agenda item to a close and advised that Agenda Item 9 pertained to cemetery issues.

A MoP advised that the White lines removed at the Junction of South Street/Marks Lane were not to be reinstated by Durham County Council.

#### **5) Minutes: Annual General Meeting - 19 May 2016**

Parish Council resolved that the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 19 May 2016 be approved as a correct record.

#### **6) Minutes: Parish Council Meeting - 19 May 2016**

Parish Council resolved that subject to the addition of the name of Cllr A Swinburn to the list of members attending, the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 19 May 2016 be approved as a correct record.

#### **7) Recruitment of new Parish Clerk**

The Parish Clerk referred to papers previously circulated comprising job description, person specification and draft vacancy advert and outlined a proposed recruitment process.

Signed:

Date:

## **7) Recruitment of new Parish Clerk cont ...**

Parish Council resolved that:

An interview panel of three Councillors with full delegated authority from the Council to appoint a Clerk be formed. The Panel to report the outcome of the appointment process to Council at the meeting to be held on 21 July 2016.

The Panel would comprise:

Cllr Wallage (Chairman), Cllr Clifford (Vice Chairman), and Cllr Lowrie.

## **8) Update on Project Officer role**

G Keedy left the meeting at this point to enable open discussion. It was agreed that Cllr I Clifford would minute this item.

Cllr Wallage referred to the previously circulated report which accompanied this item. No written update had been able to be provided by Project Officer due to heightened activity necessitated by the unexpected departure of the Parish Clerk.

Cllr Wallage highlighted that some aspects of project work would be delayed due to other tasks including annual accounts and external audit requirements, involvement with Parish Plan and overseeing the recruitment process. It was also reported that some tasks would take longer than expected – an example being VAT returns as an enquiry to HMRC had revealed that no claims had been made for four years.

Project Officer had advised the Chairman that increased hours and domestic changes would impact on the practicalities of home working over the summer period. He had identified some local office accommodation for rental at a very competitive weekly rate and had requested that Parish Council consider him utilising this.

A MoP questioned the necessity for additional hours. The Chair advised that Parish Council had been through a challenging time in 2014 due to the lack of a proper handover from the previous Clerk. This was strongly challenged by the MoP who advised that there had been a proper handover by the former Clerk but that this was made by the Clerk to former Cllr Sowerby. This position was confirmed by Cllr Gilbank. The Chair apologised for any misunderstanding and advised that what was meant by this reference was the difficulties that had arisen because there had not been a proper handover from Clerk to Clerk and there was gap of several months when the Council did not have a Clerk.

Signed:

Date:

## **8) Update on Project Officer role cont ...**

Parish Council resolved:

To extend the contract of the Project Officer until 30 September 2016, and further review the position at the 15 September 2016 meeting.

and,

To enter into rental agreement with West Harton Churches Action Station for the provision of office accommodation for a temporary period of up to 12 weeks at a rate of £20.00/ week.

Cllrs Wallage and Clifford subsequently signed the service level agreement setting out the terms and conditions.

## **9) Cemetery update**

Project Officer advised that Cemetery Development Services had now obtained utility searches relating to gas and electricity. Water and telecoms were awaited.

Project Officer also tabled a revised quotation from Leamside Nurseries submitted to reflect increased costs as their 2015 quotation (still in force) had not been reviewed.

Standing Orders were suspended by the Chairman to facilitate further dialogue with residents on this emotive topic.

Following discussion and helpful suggestions from members of the public, Parish Council resolved to:

Finance (from within overall available budget) whatever further work was necessary to ensure that grass cutting was brought up to standard by the existing contractor.

Accept the revised quotation of £230.00 plus VAT from Leamside Nurseries for grass cutting for the period they were willing to continue working with the Parish Council this season.

and,

Co-ordinate volunteer assistance to clear and remove grass cuttings from the site after the first cut following this meeting.

## **10) May 2017 Parish Council Elections**

Parish Clerk sought the views of Parish Council relating to the numbers of councillors in its composition. This was in the context of the number of resignations experienced, difficulties in proceeding to elections and the ability to maintain full membership.

The timing of introducing this item was to ensure any proposed changes could be considered by DCC and put in place by the time of the May 2017 elections.

Signed:

Date:

## 10) May 2017 Parish Council Elections cont ...

Following discussion, it was proposed by Cllr S Patterson that:

“The status quo in terms of numbers of councillors comprising West Rainton Parish Council be maintained.”

This was seconded by Cllr P Morson. Following a vote by show of hands, this was carried. Six votes for, three against.

## 11) Parish (Village) Plan update

Cllr Wallage reported that no comments had been received from councillors on the proposed Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Durham Community Action (DCA) previously circulated. Cllr Wallage outlined the purpose of the Steering Group and advised that she considered some clauses in the SLA relating to its role and responsibility needed clarification.

She added that an informal meeting of the Steering Group had taken place on 8 June and this included feedback from the early rounds of local consultation.

Parish Council resolved to delegate responsibility for the finalisation of the SLA with DCA, which needed to be signed by the Chair on behalf of the Parish Council, to Cllr Wallage in consultation with the Parish Clerk.

Cllr Wallage undertook to provide regular updates to Parish Council on progress and to circulate the agreed final version of the SLA.

## 12) Finance report

**Part A: For information:**

**Income: Co-op Funerals - £200.00**

**Andrew Grey Funeral Directors - £200.00**

- **Expenditure**  
**Expenditure previously approved by Parish Council due this month**

	<b>Payee</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Amount</b>
1	K Cuthbert	Parish Clerk Net Salary – June 16	£171.70
2	G Keedy	Project Officer Net Salary – June 16	£355.80
3	Post Office	Combined HMRC liabilities on employee salaries.	£131.60
4	D Lewins	Gatekeeper Fee – June 16	£80.00
5	National Association of Local Councils	Awards Scheme Registration fee(inv. no. 13652)	£60.00

Signed:

Date:

6	Cemetery Development Services	Site Burial Survey & production of new burial plan	£6,300.00
7	Durham County Council	Supply and install of waste bin at Heritage Garden	£311.16
8	Leamside Nurseries	Cemetery Grass cutting – June ( pending)	£156.00

**Part B: Expenditure requiring approval**

	Payee	Purpose	Amount	Budget Provision Y/N
9	G Keedy	Reimbursement: 24 x 2 <sup>nd</sup> class stamps 6 x 1 <sup>st</sup> class stamps "Signed for" letter to HMRC	£18.78	Yes
10	Jones Boyd Accountants	Payroll services Jan - March 2015	£84.00	Yes
11	Northumbria Water	WR Cemetery water charges 1 Mar 16 – 31 May 16	£10.44	Yes
12	Co Durham Association of Local Councils	Annual subscription 2016-2017	£461.24	Yes
13	Leamside Nurseries	Plant Purchase	£31.20	Yes
	<b>TOTAL</b>			

**Part C: Bank Balances – For Information**

Total Expenditure included above	£8171.92
Anticipated current a/c bank balance if all paid	£34168.17
Reserve Account Balance	£15023.74

The Parish Clerk sought approval to pay all itemised expenditure.

Parish Council resolved to agree payment of all expenditure and approve the financial report.

Signed:

Date:

### **13) Draft Annual Return 2015 /2016**

Parish Clerk introduced the item and explained each part of the Annual Return.

He advised Parish Council that the Annual Internal Audit report had not been able to be completed at this stage. He had reported this to BDO (External Auditor) and been advised that this was in order but that it should be completed without delay.

#### **Section 1 Annual Governance Statement**

Parish Council resolved to agree to approve the Annual Governance Statement.

This section was signed by the Chairman and Parish Clerk.

#### **Section 2 Accounting Statement**

Parish Council resolved to approve the Accounting Statements.

This section was signed by the Chairman and Parish Clerk.

### **14) Members Learning and Development**

Parish Clerk advised that he had identified Councillor Induction training sessions being delivered by the Northumberland Association of Local Councils, the nearest venues being Amble and Wylam on evenings in June.

Parish Council resolved not to progress.

Details had been received from the County Durham Association of Local Councils about Finance training to be held on 8 September.

Parish Council resolved that Cllr M Boettcher attend along with Cllr S Patterson or M Gilbank (subject to their availability).

### **15) General correspondence**

MoP: concerns re letter purporting to have been sent from Mark Gilbank, Chair of West Rainton Parish Council requesting the removal from display of the English flag. Cllr Gilbank denied this had been sent by him.

**Parish Council resolved to refer this misrepresented communication from the Parish Council to the Police for investigation.**

MoP x 2: concerns re condition of cemetery grounds.

**Parish Clerk had responded.**

County Durham Association of Local Councils:

New salary scales for staff effective from 1 April 2016 – **noted.**

National Association of Local Councils newsletter – **noted.**

Finance training – 8 September 2016 - **Clerk to submit nominations as per item 14.**

Signed:

Date:

**15) General correspondence cont ...**

Public consultation – new County Durham Plan – **noted.**

Smaller Councils Forum – 29 July 2016 – **Cllr Boettcher to attend.**

**16) Police report**

Parish Council resolved to note the written report submitted and tabled.

**17) Date and time of next meeting**

Thursday 21 July 2016, St Mary's Church meeting room.

GK 15 July 2016

Signed:

Date: