

FELSTED PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of informal discussion held by Conference telephone call on 1 April 2020 at 7pm

Present Councillors Graham Harvey, Andy Bennett, Alec Fox, Richard Freeman, Frances Marshall and Roy Ramm. Clerk Diane Smith and Assistant Clerk Heather Read.

1. **Apologies for absence**

Cllrs Penny Learmonth and Joyce Stoddart attempted to join the telephone conversation but were unsuccessful in their efforts.

2. **Regulations covering parish council meetings**

The Clerk explained that the long-established laws governing the holding of PC meetings required Councillors to be in physical attendance for a meeting to be quorate. This was not possible in the current coronavirus situation. The emergency 'Coronavirus Bill', which was going through Parliament, would include powers for the Secretary of State to temporarily amend the rules and regulations governing PC meetings and procedures for the duration of the current situation. This new legislation was expected to be published in the next 1-2 weeks.

3. **Devolve power to the Clerk for decision making**

Under current legislation a PC can devolve the power to make decisions, outside of a PC meeting, to the Clerk. Any such decisions made using this power would be subject to prior consultation with as many councillors as possible. All councillors present agreed that this should be done. The Clerk would circulate an e-mail to all councillors and request that they respond individually to provide a paper trail for the decision.

4. **Update on actions taken to date in response to the coronavirus situation**

In line with Government guidance:

a) PC Office closed on 18 March 2020. Clerk and Asst Clerk working from home. RFO forwarding post. PC meetings suspended from 18 March. When meetings resume hand sanitiser should be available for attendees to use.

b) Children's play area and public toilets closed on 18 March. Playing field car park closed 25 March.

c) Allotments remain open as classified as 'exercise facility'.

d) Litter Pick on 28 March cancelled. Green waste weekly collection from Bannister Green cancelled. VE75 Beacon lighting cancelled. Members agreed that the Beacon should be lit when the pandemic ends (coincide with schools re-opening?).

5. **Matters arising from March PC meeting**

a) Village grass cutting and churchyard grass cutting contracts – Due to be renewed on 1 April 2020. By mutual agreement (PC and JCM Services) this has been extended for a further year to 1 April 2021 (at the same cost). First cut undertaken last weekend.

b) Felsted Nature Area – Owl boxes erected. Bat boxes received and being kept in PC office.

c) Road with no name – UDC putting application on hold during current situation.

d) Parish Councillor vacancy – 2 applications received. Co-option will be put on hold during the current situation. Applicants will be informed.

6. **PC Emergency Helpline**

Cllr Roy Ramm had manned the Helpline number since it was set up on 18 March. Cllr Graham Harvey agreed to take over the responsibility for the Helpline in 7-10 days time. Cllr Ramm reported that more than 30 volunteers had come forward to offer their services (including some with particular 'qualifications'). Teachers from Felsted School were among the volunteers and the School had also put one of their minibuses, with local driver, at the PC's disposal to enable transport requests to be met safely. Members wished to record their thanks to everyone involved and agreed that official letters of thanks should be sent out at the end of the crisis. The Helpline had received a comparatively small number of calls for help, mainly from older residents in self-isolation, and had paired them up with a volunteer to

provide the assistance requested. The Clerk had, independently, received thanks from two residents who were receiving assistance from the Helpline service which had made a significant difference to them during this difficult period.

Felsted United Charities were considering offering assistance to residents during the crisis and Cllr Frances Marshall agreed to look into where help might be most needed.

7. **Staffing arrangements going forward**

a) Clerk and Asst Clerk will continue to work from home and receive normal salary

b) RFO – Not eligible for furlough as not on PAYE records on 28 February 2020 (started 1 March 2020). To be paid for reduced hours (2 hours per week plus more if additional hours worked) to cover post duties and other assistance that might be required.

c) Volunteer Co-Ordinator – Invoice to be submitted for hours worked in February and March 2020. No further Speedwatch sessions or Litter Picks planned so no further payments due.

d) Public toilet/Car park unlocking – Invoice for normal pay for March. Both facilities now closed so no further payments due.

e) Village Attendant – Continuing to work on light duties, including emptying litter and dog bins and checking defibrillators. Invoices to be submitted as normal. It is the responsibility of the VA to make any decision to stop working and, if applicable, inform the PC at that time.

8. **Finance**

a) Accounts for payment – Members had received a copy of the Unpaid List and agreed that the payments should be made. A payment for the cost of printing the first edition of Felsted Focus was also agreed although the invoice had not yet been forwarded to the PC. Cllr Frances Marshall would write out the cheques and obtain the necessary counter signature from Cllr Graham Harvey before posting out the cheques.

The Clerk agreed to list Nature Area payments separately at the end of the Unpaid List in future.

The Nature Area Metro account signatories were currently Cllrs Graham Harvey and John Moore (the third signatory Alan Mackrill had recently resigned). Because Cllr John Moore was in self isolation and this would be breached by him signing cheques, it was agreed that during the crisis, Nature Area payments would be paid out of the main PC account. Funds would be transferred between the NA / PC accounts at the end of the crisis to regularise the situation.

b) Cheque signatory changes – It was noted that Cllr Frances Marshall had been added to the main Barclays PC cheque account signatories and the Barclays Nature Area Deposit account. Action to implement the signatory changes on the Metro Nature Area account would be suspended for the time being (see item 8a) above).

c) Year End External Audit 2019-20 – All normal arrangements had been suspended pending further Government guidance/legislation.

9. **Planning applications**

Concern was expressed that planning applications should not get passed without full consultation during this difficult time. The Asst Clerk would contact UDC to confirm what procedures UDC were putting in place, to deal with planning applications, during the crisis.

10. **Other matters**

a) PC website – Cllr Andy Bennett had been regularly updating the PC website and e-mailing news items with local information in response to the crisis. Website visits had increased from a daily average of 75 to 300. All Councillors were encouraged to pass on any relevant information to Cllr Bennett for inclusion on the website. Cllr Roy Ramm and the Clerk will submit items with updates on the Helpline and Linsells home delivery service respectively. Members wished to record their thanks to Cllr Bennett for his work on the website. and to Cllr Roy Ramm for manning the Helpline.

b) Conference call system - Members agreed that the system had worked well although there had been some access issues for some people.

11. **Next 'meeting'**

The conference call ended at 8.07pm. The next 'meeting' (conference call) will be held on Wednesday 15 April at 7pm (or earlier if required).

