

WEST MERSEA TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

HELD ON FRIDAY 20 MARCH 2020 AT 9AM

PRESENT: Councillors: Carl Powling (Mayor)
John Akker
Julie Baker
Peter Banks
David Bragg
Robert Jenkins
Sophie Weaver
Chris Wood

IN ATTENDANCE: Asst to Town Clerk Carol Fountain

This meeting was held in light of the Covid-19 virus emergency

20/064 TO ACCEPT APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence received from Councillor Wargent.

20/065 TO RECORD DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A non pecuniary declaration was made by Councillors Akker, Banks, Bragg, Jenkins and Wargent as they are all in the high risk category and could potentially benefit from the service.

20/066 PUBLIC SESSION

No members of the public in attendance.

20/067 TO DISCUSS AND AGREE EMERGENCY FINANCIAL PROCEDURES:

- (a) Revised authorisation process
- (b) Potential implementation of online payments process

After discussion it was agreed the office would scan the blues and invoices to send via email to all Councillors. On receipt of two email authorisations by return, the payments can be release online by Councillors Banks, Jenkins or Powling.

Proposed: Councillor Banks, Seconded: Councillor Wood. ALL IN FAVOUR.

20/068 TO DISCUSS AND AGREE COUNCIL MEETING VOTING AND OTHER OPERATING PROCEDURES

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP (via email) suggested that Council meetings continue to operate. Decisions can be made by email.

Councillors Banks and Powling researching ideas for video conference meetings, i.e., Skype.

Councillor Akker suggested having a working group for Covid-19. This is already in hand and will be discussed further down the agenda.

Councillor Akker was asked to leave the meeting as he had recently returned from abroad and should be self-isolating. Councillor Akker left at 9.21.am.

A proposal was made to hold Council meetings by virtual media and make decisions via email if necessary.

Proposed: Councillor Banks, Seconded: Councillor Wood. ALL IN FAVOUR.

20/069 TO DISCUSS AND AGREE THE FORTHCOMING ANNUAL MEETING

Councillor Banks awaiting confirmation from NALC. Councillor Powling confirmed that Colchester Borough Council has postponed their Annual meeting.

A proposal was made to postpone the Annual meeting and Mayor election until autumn 2020.

Proposed: Councillor Weaver, Seconded: Councillor Baker. ALL IN FAVOUR.

20/070 TO DISCUSS AND AGREE THE FORTHCOMING TOWN MEETING

Following discussion it was agreed to cancel the Town Meeting.

Proposed: Councillor Jenkins, Seconded: Councillor Bragg. ALL IN FAVOUR.

20/071 TO DISCUSS AND AGREE OFFICE AND OTHER STAFF OPERATING PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

Following discussion it was agreed to close the Council office to the public with effect from Monday 23 March.

Proposed: Councillor Wood, Seconded: Councillor Banks. ALL IN FAVOUR.

Councillor Powling stated that EALC put powers of decision to the Clerk in conjunction with the Committee Chairman and one other Councillor re monetary decisions.

Proposal to change the Financial Regulations 4.1 on a temporary basis to be £5k not £500. Cap of £5k and all items to be within budget.

Proposed: Councillor Banks, Seconded: Councillor Weaver. ALL IN FAVOUR.

20/072 TO REVIEW FEEDBACK ON COMMUNITY SUPPORT INITIATIVES AND IMPLEMENT POLICIES TO PROVIDE COMMUNITY SUPPORT

A meeting was held by the Free Church to discuss community support initiatives during the Covid-19 pandemic. All Councillors were invited to the meeting and Councillors Jenkins and Powling attended. Councillor Powling suggested to the meeting attendees that West Mersea Town Council will coordinate on behalf of Mersea Island.

West Mersea Town Council had information cards and volunteer cards printed at a cost of £200. 145 volunteers delivered information cards to all households. The cards have the phone number of the hotline. Phone calls will be handled by volunteers. Volunteers will hand out 'hello' cards to residents requesting help.

Councillor Wood suggested all volunteers are DBS checked.

Councillor Wood also suggested that the voicemail message states not to be used for emergencies.

Councillor Jenkins stated that the hotline number is not a substitute for 111 or 999.

A management committee is to be formed which will include a Doctor, Pharmacist, Cemetery Clerk, military person etc.

There is no requirement for the volunteers to be in the Council office. Phone calls can be taken remotely.

Councillor Jenkins praised Councillor Powling for the speedy work and achieving so much in a week.

Councillor Wood raised concerns over GDPR. Councillor Powling confirmed that Sir Bernard Jenkin MP has stated that GDPR and FOI requests can be dropped due to state of shutdown and emergency.

Councillor Wood stated that the database containing individuals' details be destroyed after use. All calls must be logged. Councillor Jenkins confirm this would be the case and that the Clerk was very thorough regarding security.

Councillor Baker has concern over the completion of action requirement and supervision or overseeing of completion eg if only half the medication is picked up from the chemist will this be passed on and who will finalise completion.

Councillor Banks confirmed that all calls would be logged on a system and this is a task for the central coordinator to complete.

Councillor Powling confirmed that two phone lines are accessible at the moment and this can be extended to 20+ if necessary. All calls go to answerphone and are listened to in turn. The phone lines are in a hunt group, initial line busy, next line rings etc. The two phone lines cost £10 per month.

Councillor Wood offered to run a training session to all coordinators.

Councillor Powling suggested that Hayley Powling is the West Mersea Town Council coordinator. Councillor Jenkins agreed with the suggestion as this is an emergency. Councillor Wood agreed as it remains under the control of the Council but suggested a contingency plan for illness.

Councillor Wood to meet with office staff today to discuss basic training on taking calls. Councillor Wood stated that no medical advice or financial advice to be given by volunteers.

Financial aspect will need investigating, Councillor Powling to pursue a procedure with the Lions to see if they can help. How are individuals going to pay for their shopping? How will the vulnerable obtain cash when they run out? Card readers were discussed. Councillor Powling liaising with local stores regarding shopping.

Councillor Wood left the meeting at 10.39am.

Councillor Powling purchased 400 toilet rolls for community use or for carers to purchase. Following discussion it was agreed that West Mersea Town Council purchase the toilet rolls at a cost of £86 + VAT for distribution as appropriate to the needy/Porch Pantry.

Proposed: Councillor Banks, Seconded: Councillor Jenkins. ALL IN FAVOUR.

A proposal was made for Hayley Powling to be the full time coordinator as a temporary measure.

Proposed: Councillor Banks, Seconded: Councillor Bragg. Councillor Powling abstained.

After discussion it was suggested to split the island into sections. Key coordinators/volunteers for each section.

A discussion took place and a proposal was put forward for the Clerk, in conjunction with the Mayor, to use funds in connection with the community support initiative.

Proposed: Councillor Banks, Seconded: Councillor Weaver. ALL IN FAVOUR.

Discussion took place regarding the proposed press release for the local papers. The press release needs to be clear and precise. Social distancing, not self-isolating if not necessary.

Councillor Jenkins read out a proposed press release, which was agreed by all.

There being no other business, the public meeting closed at 11.08am.