



AUDLEM
PARISH COUNCIL

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MINUTES OF MEETING OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF AUDLEM PARISH COUNCIL (APC)

Held on Thursday 28th April 2022 at 7.30pm, Audlem Public Hall

Present: Cllrs D Winskill (Chairman), J Bower, P Cawood, R Warburton

In Attendance: Mrs J Weaver (ChALC), G Seddon (minutes) and 38 members of the public.

Cllr Winskill welcomed Jackie Weaver, Chief Officer Cheshire Association of Local Councils, who was attending in an advisory capacity. He also welcomed the public who were obviously equally concerned about the recent running of the Parish Council as the four Councillors present.

200/21 Apologies

An apology was received from Cllr J McGregor

201/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

202/21 Public speaking open forum and public participation

Responding to a question about the current Chairman of the Council and whether he had resigned, Cllr Warburton read Cllr McGregor's letter of resignation from APC, which was to take effect from 22nd May 2022.

It was stated that everyone present was there to support the Councillors.

However, a number of concerns about APC's finances were raised by the residents attending the meeting. These included:

- the movement of money from APC's bank account and its subsequent transfer back and what controls are in place to stop it happening again. *It was explained that the police had looked into this and found no suspicious activity;*
- how many signatories are there for cheques? *There is only one at the moment- Cllr Mc Gregor, which is extremely concerning. It is also a lengthy process to make changes to the bank records (See item 205/21 below);*
- is there a debit card and who has it? *Yes, Cllr McGregor;*
- why has APC only got one person in charge of its finances? *It's because of the recent resignations of the Clerk/ Responsible Finance Officer and Councillors. APC will make sure that it won't happen again;*
- what precautions are in place to stop money disappearing? *It is difficult to put any in at the moment, which is very concerning;*

- there used to be a separate Responsible Finance Officer(RFO), should this be considered again?

Mrs Weaver explained that all Parish Councils have stringent Financial Regulations. She went on to say:

- because the previous, experienced Clerk/RFO had left and her replacement had left after a short time after and not been replaced a lack of control had resulted;
- it can take up to six months to change bank mandate forms for an organisation;
- change will be slow as the new Councillors will have to find out APC's financial position before anything else can be done.
- the loss of experienced Councillors and the rapid turnover of their replacements had made it difficult to have preventative measures in place;
- the situation with signatories will be resolved with the bank;
- there is a risk with APC's finances, but this should be resolved soon.

203/21 Councillor Vacancies

There are currently seven vacancies on APC. A further vacancy will appear when Cllr McGregor's resignation comes into effect.

APC had been advised by Cheshire East the day before this meeting that five casual vacancies had previously been notified to Cheshire East and that no call for an election had been received. Therefore these vacancies could now be filled by co-option. These vacancies would be advertised in the normal way with a closing date of 13th May and that a number of applications had already been received.

The Councillors would decide at their next meeting on the next steps.

Cllr Winskill reminded residents that there would be an election in May 2023.

204/21 Parish Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer

Cllr Winskill explained that the previous Clerk/RFO had resigned in January 2022 and APC had arranged for a Locum Clerk to start in February, who was to be appointed until a permanent Clerk/RFO could be appointed. However, Cllr McGregor, who had been dealing with this, stopped the process the day before she was to be appointed without any explanation or reference back to the other Councillors. There had been no meetings since February until tonight and there is still no Clerk/RFO. APC has already set in motion the procedure to appoint an interim Clerk/RFO as soon as possible, however this can only be approved at a Parish Council meeting.

205/21 Parish Council Finances

There is no information available at the moment about APC's financial position. There is an urgent need to appoint signatories to the bank account. Cllr Winskill proposed that more Councillors be added to the list of bank signatories. It was seconded and unanimously RESOLVED that Councillors Cawood, Warburton and Winskill be added to the list of bank signatories.

206/21 Annual Meeting

Having been told by Cheshire East Council that APC is able to co-opt five Councillors at the next meeting, Cllr Winskill proposed that the Annual Meeting take place in May in line with the APC's Standing Orders..

Cllr Winskill thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed at 8.15pm.