



# **POLICY & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2022 ~ 7:00 P.M. ~ TO BE HELD VIRTUALLY**

Please let the Clerk know if you intend to join the meeting by emailing [clerk.shevingtonpc@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:clerk.shevingtonpc@yahoo.co.uk) by Monday, 31 January so that you can be sent an invitation and joining instructions.

## **AGENDA**

- 1. Apologies** – to receive apologies from Committee members.
- 2. Declaration of Interests** - to receive any declarations of interest (personal and/or prejudicial) with regard to items on the Agenda.  
Unless already entered in the Council's Register of Members' interests, members are required to disclose any personal interest, (which includes any disclosable pecuniary interest), they may have in any of the items included on the agenda for the meeting in accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council on 28 June 2012 and amended on 25 October 2012. Members are reminded that if they have any personal interests of a prejudicial nature or a disclosable pecuniary interest they must not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must leave the room. Any member needing clarification must contact the Clerk.
- 3. Village Issues** – *for information*  
To receive reports relating to the legitimate business of the Council from Committee members and Council officers (Committee members are asked to advise the Clerk in advance of any reports – including the subject matter they wish to make.)
- 4. Minutes of the Last Policy & General Purposes Committee Meeting (1 December 2021)**  
- to consider, agree and approve the signature of the previously circulated Minutes by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting (enclosed).
- 5. Local Government Boundaries Commission Consultation on Wigan Council Ward Boundary Changes** - *for discussion and agreement*  
The Local Government Boundary Commission are currently undertaking a consultation on their proposals for ward boundary changes within the area covered by Wigan Council. Information can be found on the Commission's website.  
Their proposals mean that the location of the boundary between Shevington with Lower Ground and Standish wards will change, causing the former to be increased in size. The change will have no impact on the Parish boundaries – they will remain the same.  
*Members are invited to discuss the Boundary Commission's proposals and agree a response to the consultation.*

**6. Britain in Bloom Entry – Memorial Park – for agreement and recommendation**

RHS Northwest are proposing to run the Britain in Bloom North West Campaign in 2022. They are asking that entries are emailed into the office before **Thursday, 31 March 2022**. The cost of entry in the Local Authority – Small Parks category has increased from £85 to £100.

Entering Memorial Park has cost implications for the Parish Council with regard to the additional costs that would be incurred in relation to grounds maintenance.

Members are invited to consider whether an entry should be submitted this year and recommend the best way forward to the Council.

*(Co-opted Committee members may vote on this.)*

**7. Shevington United Charities – for agreement and recommendation**

The terms of office of the three representative trustees of the SUC appointed by the Parish Council ended in mid-January. Two of the trustees have stated that they do not wish to be re-appointed. Mr Ken Shaw, who is currently the Treasurer, has stated that he would like to continue. It is a condition of the SUC constitution that the trustees live or conduct business within the Parish. They do not have to members of the Parish Council.

This Committee cannot appoint the new trustees. This can only be done by a meeting of the Parish Council. However, the Committee can make recommendations to the Council about how new trustees may be identified, as this is a matter of policy.

*Members are invited to discuss and recommend the best way forward.*

**8. Forest Fold Allotment Matters – for discussion and agreement**

This item was deferred from the January Council meeting.

The Allotments Working Party met with representatives of the FFTA on Thursday, 13 January. A report on the meeting was circulated to members for the Council meeting in January and contains requests and recommendations from the meeting with the FFTA. The report was accompanied by a second report and proposals for rent increases. Please refer to these papers.

*Members are invited to consider the requests and recommendations and agree the best way forward.*

**9. Text for Council Tax Letter – for agreement and recommendation (enclosed)**

Enclosed is an updated version of the inclusion in the Council Tax letter for 2021-22.

*Members are invited to consider it and recommend it to the Council for retrospective approval.*

**10. March Newsletter – for agreement**

- The following are proposed for inclusion in the March edition of the newsletter:
- Christmas Shop-Front Award Presentations
- Shevington & District Community Association Activities
- Upgrades at Elnup Wood
- Parish Council Budget & Precept for 2022-23
- Plans for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee

*Members are invited to consider and agree these. Suggestions for other items are invited.*

*(Co-opted Committee members may vote on this.)*

**11. Working in a Paperless Way – for consideration and agreement**

At the Finance Committee meeting in January a member put forward the suggestion that other members might be willing to consider receiving meeting papers by email only. Several members already do this and this is increasing as standard practice with public bodies.

With one exception, all members receive papers for meetings by email and read and work on them electronically. Several members are then either sent paper copies by post or they are delivered by hand by the Clerk.

Members' receiving papers electronically only has several advantages for the Council:

1. Savings on the costs of photocopying, paper, envelopes, postage and the mileage travelled by the Clerk when delivering.
2. Time used by the Clerk when photocopying, making up packages for circulation and delivering the packages can instead be used to carry out other functions which have increased in number over the years – often as the result of new external legislation with which we have to be compliant.
3. The Parish Council would still need the HP printer that is used for the initial printout, but the ageing Ricoh photocopier (which the Parish Council own) could be dispensed with and the maintenance contract with Ricoh could be terminated, resulting in another cost

saving (£200-300 per year). We have been warned that we are nearing a stage when replacement parts for the photocopier will no longer be available due to obsolescence. Some members may not be comfortable with using only electronic documents. In view of this, perhaps the Committee might be willing to consider the possibility of allowing members (both elected and co-opted committee members) who wish to print off papers on their home printer to claim for this.

The Council last year approved an amount for this activity for the FFTA. In this case the funding comes from allotment rents and is paid at a rate of 4p per printed side.

Members are entitled by law to claim approved expenses. If members are minded to agree to the suggestion, those members who wish to use hard copies could claim for these by submitting a claim form to the Clerk at agreed times. The claims (which would be anonymised) would then be approved by the Council in the usual manner under the agenda item 'Payments, etc'. There is no need to budget additional funds for this. The hard copies would be funded under a new 'Councillors' Expenses' cost centre, which would be funded by viring an agreed amount out of the 'Stationery, office' cost centre.

This process has the added advantage for members who like to work with paper copies: they would receive them sooner than they do when they are printed elsewhere and delivered to the house.

*Members are invited to consider the suggestions and agree the best way forward.*

## **12. Meeting Remotely – Petition – for information**

Currently, local councils in England cannot hold their formal Council meetings remotely. This was temporarily relaxed during the Covid lockdown in 2020/21 but that ended in April 2021 when the temporary statutory regulations expired. (Local councils in the devolved nations did not lose the right to hold formal Council meetings remotely.) The Government has argued that a permanent provision would require a change to primary legislation and there is not sufficient Parliamentary time to enable this to happen. The Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) and Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) made an application to the High Court (supported by the Government, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC)) that existing legislation allowed for that permanent provision. The High Court disagreed, saying that it was for Parliament to change the law. Since then, LLG and ADSO, together with other similar organisations (plus individual councils and councillors) have been lobbying the Government without success. The LGA and NALC have also been supporting councils throughout this time.

We do not wish to impose remote meetings on councils. They should have the choice to decide how they run their meetings depending on local circumstances. They know best. The period of lockdown showed that remote meetings bring so many benefits to local democracy and residents, apart from the obvious public health safeguards. It is no longer just a response to Covid.

Local democracy benefitted from:

1. Increased attendances at remote meetings by both councillors and the public
2. Significant cost savings for some authorities arising from much less travel to meetings
3. The environmental benefits of less travel, particularly in the large county authorities
4. A better work/life balance for councillors
5. Improved equality of access to meetings for all and opening up opportunities for more people to stand for election as councillors
6. More transparency and openness for the public to see council meetings
7. An option to move meetings online when there are constraints, for example bad weather such as snow or flooding.

A recent post on social media received 100 responses of which 98 supported the option of remote meetings. Whilst this is a very small sample, ADSO and LLG (and the organisations supporting them) are confident it is representative of the general feeling across the country. Therefore, they have set up a petition on [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) calling on the government to create Parliamentary time to agree a change in the law to allow councils in England to hold formal meetings remotely, if they wish.

NALC, LALC and the SLCC have asked councillors to consider signing the petition.

*Members are invited to note the above information and sign the petition, if they wish.*

**N.B:** Other Council meetings may take place remotely. Most decisions taken at a meeting held remotely have to be ratified at a face to face Council meeting, which is why decisions taken at virtual Committee meetings were referred to face to face Council meetings for approval.

## **13. Planning Applications – to consider for comment**

At the time of the preparation of this agenda there were no relevant planning applications to bring to the attention of the Committee.

**14. Dates of Next Meetings:** 23 February (Council); 2 March (P&GP and Finance Committees)

**POTENTIAL CONFIDENTIAL ITEM**

**15. Employee Vacancy** – *consideration and agreement* (enclosed)

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

*K Pilkington*

Clerk to the Parish Council