

# Woodchurch Parish Council

**Subject : - Options for Council structure in the light of the Village Plan and challenges in recruiting new members**

**Author - Cllr Rob Woods**

## **Definitions - For the purpose of this report**

- a) Delegations = where the Council agrees that decisions are taken by the Clerk or a Committee of the Council (as with the Staffing Cttee etc)
- b) Working Group = A group established by the Parish Council or its Committees to carry out tasks as defined by the Council or the Committee. No decision making powers and simply present the Council or Committee with findings.
- b) Nominees - Named Councillors taking responsibility for routine (often maintenance) activities eg defib maintenance.

## **Purpose of the report**

To examine a range of delegations and nominations (with options) and make recommendations

## **Challenges**

- The Council is committed to achieve a range of projects in its Village Plan.
- The Council currently has 4 member vacancies such that a quorum with decision making power is not always possible
- Without a full complement of Councillors, there is added pressure on the Clerk and the remaining Councillors to perform
- Some Village Plan commitments may be difficult to achieve on time, if at all.
- A positive response to the public criticism (in Survey) that the Council should interact more effectively with residents

## **Recommendations**

1. To agree an emergency Committee of the Whole for 4 months (subject to review) as a short term expediency with a draft Terms of Reference (Appendix 1)
2. To agree to create a Planning and Highways Committee with delegated powers (draft App2) when more Councillors are recruited
3. To create a Communications Working Group with a Terms of Reference (draft App3)
4. To consider creating a part time Community Engagement role for a period of 12 months with options
5. To continue with the current Committee arrangements and the principle of nominating members for various activities at the Annual Meeting of the Council

## **Recommendation 1 - A Committee of the Whole (Council)**

Guided by the Clerk, the Committee of the Whole would focus purely on overseeing the Village Plan and its commitments. The Committee to sit two weeks before the Full Council meeting in a meeting open to the public.

## **Reason for this recommendation**

The Council needs time outside agenda driven meetings to focus on achieving the Village Plan commitments, especially those synonymous with community engagement eg.

- engaging with the village youth
- mobile phone connectivity issues and
- developing a community led environment policy.

The Committee to convene 2 weeks before full Council to allow its recommendations to be presented to full council. By definition, The Clerk will always be involved in these meetings

As an alternative I did consider a additional full Council meeting per month for 4 months but took the view that a less formal meeting may encourage more people with an interest in specific projects to attend and contribute.

Additionally, a member who sends apologies for the Committee meeting could make comment in full Council.

The Council may also direct that the responsibility for some projects is transferred to other groups or committees when the time is right.

#### **Points to consider**

- Are members prepared to come together twice per month for a short period of time ?
- The Clerk is already busy. Is the additional time requirement for the Clerk acceptable to him ?
- Does the value of increasing engagement and achieving the Plan override any additional salary payments?
- If so, where do we find the budget for it?

#### **Estimated cost**

Clerk added time with on costs £200

Clerk additional Travel expenses £50

Hall Hire - 4 additional meetings £60

**Total £310**

**Recommendation 2 - To delegate the Council's responsibilities for Planning and Highways activities to a Planning and Highways Committee, subject to an increase in member numbers. This would be a Standing Committee, meeting monthly and including up to 3 co-opted members specialised in or with a major interest in these areas. (Draft Terms of Reference App 2)**

#### **Reason for this recommendation**

The Village Plan contains several references to ongoing and new Planning and Highways activity, Additionally the Council will have to deal with the Local Plan process over the next 12/18 months. Previous experience suggests that several public meetings and/or surveys will need to be organised and a significant amount time spent on preparing reports for submission to ABC.

The proposal is for a Committee comprising 4 members plus 3 co-opted members

This would not only help to develop specialism in these often complex areas but also demonstrate the Council's aspiration to encourage residents to become more involved in key issues in the village.

It would also cut time in full Council meetings if the Committee's minutes simply need to be noted.

It is not envisaged that the coopted members would have voting rights - although members may decide otherwise.

#### **Points to consider**

- Hitherto, it has not been the Woodchurch way but, given the pressure on time, are members now prepared to formally delegate activities to a new Standing Committee?
- The need to "dovetail" the Committee meetings in to the monthly meetings programme to ensure full Council still has sight of the Committee's decisions (action - Clerk)
- As in the above recommendation, is the additional time requirement for the Clerk acceptable?
- If so, where do we find the budget for it?

#### **Estimated cost 2024/5 (assumes a min of 2 more members recruited by October 24)**

Clerk added time with on costs £300

Clerk additional Travel expenses £75

Hall Hire - 6 additional meetings £90

**Total £465**

**Recommendation 3 - A Communications Working Group with the draft terms of reference (App 3) to meet quarterly or as required**

#### **Reason for this recommendation**

Several key projects in the Village Plan require the Council to communicate and engage with the community's residents, businesses and social groups in a range of different ways .  
The responses to the Village Survey also suggested some residents felt they were unaware of the Council's role and some felt the Council could communicate better with residents. With a larger complement of members the Council could create a Communications Working Group to examine ways of improving its communications and branding.  
The working group would be informal and residents with an interest in specific issues could be invited to offer advice.

Additionally, if Council considers that face to face communication will play a major part in its objective of increasing the feeling of inclusion and belonging in the community, then an "on the ground" paid, part time Community Engagement Officer may be another option. (see Rec 4 below)

### **Points to consider**

The Working Group established to oversee the Village Survey produced a successful outcome and could easily be resurrected

Any communication with the public needs to be vetted by the Clerk. The Working Group is not intended to replace the Clerk but to complement him

Working groups don't need to be publicised in advance and the Clerk need not necessarily attend working group meetings, ergo there is no additional salary cost involved.

The Council may want to be assured that a symbiotic relationship exists between the Clerk and Chair of the Working Group

### **Estimated Costs -**

#### **Without staff input**

Zero

#### **With Staff input**

Clerk added time with on costs £200

Clerk additional Travel expenses £50

Community Engagement Officer added time £180

**Total £430**

### **Recommendation 4 - To consider a part time Community Engagement Officer (CEO) role for a period of 12 months (possibly extendable)**

The CEO could possibly be an extension of the Clerk's role subject to interview or a new appointment for someone with a professional insight in marketing, events or community development.  
(See draft responsibilities - App4)

Ideally the Council would seek someone with strong connections in the village and surrounding areas and with the motivation and ability to speak to as many sectors of the Community as possible. The role as I see it, would provide support to community members, helping them to understand the role of the Parish Council, enabling them to engage in development plans and activities and ensuring the Community feels empowered and, importantly, listened to.

The reason for the temporary period I have proposed is that it will not only give the Council an opportunity to assess the CEO's impact but also, some aspects of the Village Plan may require a greater focus on community development in subsequent years

The most obvious is taking a Neighbourhood Plan forward if residents agree that the benefits outweigh the cost. We don't know yet.

If members consider this to be worthy of further discussion, there are 2 options

Option 1 - CEO complements the Communications Working Group and the Clerk

Option 2 - CEO reports direct to the Clerk such that a member-led Communications Working Group members is not required.

### **Points to Consider**

The cost of another employee and how we pay for it

Additional time (cost) of the Clerk managing another employee - in addition to the 2 new potential Committees.

### **Estimated cost 2024/5 - Assumes CEO in place by October 2024 with a salary circa £13.50 ph and working a max of 10 hrs pw -**

Salary plus on costs £4000

Travel expenses £50

Clerk - additional time for staff management - £50

**Total £4100**

### **Recommendation 5 - To continue current practice**

- Of agreeing nominees for eg KALC meetings and Defib maintenance at the Annual meeting
- To continue the current arrangement of 2 Councillors (LQ/RW) in liaison with the RFO/Clerk on Finance and Policy matters.
- To continue with the agreed Staffing and Appeals Committees

### **Zero additional cost**

**Cllr Rob Woods**

June 2024

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Draft Terms of Reference for an Emergency Committee of The Whole Council**

The Emergency Committee of the Whole will have no delegated powers and shall make recommendations to Full Council on the following matters.

1. Approval of its Minutes as true and correct records
2. Receive DPI dispensations; details of all dispensations received to be reported back to the Council, at the next available meeting.
3. In conjunction with the Clerk:  
To determine the barriers affecting the progress of the Woodchurch Village Plan 2024-2025 and recommend actions to overcome them.

The Committee may appoint sub committees or working groups if necessary and will define the purpose of the sub committees or working groups

Membership of the Committee is open to all members of the Council.

Meeting arrangements:

Meetings to be held monthly throughout the year. Meetings to be held in public and to have a public session on the agenda.

Amendment to Terms of Reference:

These terms of reference will be reviewed by the Council after 4 months

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Planning and Highways Committee Draft Terms of Reference**

The Planning and Highways Committee shall be delegated to make decisions on behalf of the Council in the following matters: Decisions may be taken in a physical meeting or a virtual meeting where the law permits

1. Approval of its Minutes as true and correct records
2. Receive DPI dispensations; details of all dispensations received to be reported back to the Council, at the next available meeting.
3. Approval of expenditure on items included in any future devolved Committee budget up to the amount specified in the budget
4. To comment on behalf of the Council on all planning applications received from the planning authority
5. To comment on behalf of the Council on Local Development Framework plans, Structure Plans, Mineral Plans, Waste Plans, Regional Plans and any other plans or studies as considered appropriate
6. To comment on behalf of the Council in response to any consultations in relation to highways matters including off and on-street parking, footpath diversions, modifications or adoptions depending on deadlines.
7. To comment on behalf of the Council on highways safety issues including speeding controls and traffic calming
8. Street naming, depending on deadlines

The Committee may make recommendations on any matter which may be delegated to it by the Council from time to time

The Committee may refer specific matters to the Council for a final decision if it so wishes.

The Committee may appoint sub committees or working groups if necessary and will define the purpose of the sub committees or working groups

Membership of the Committee is open to all members of the Council. The membership is 7 maximum. To ensure a majority of Councillors over co-optees, the minimum number of Councillors will be 4

Meeting arrangements:

Meetings to be held monthly throughout the year. Meetings to be held in public.

Amendment to Terms of Reference:

These terms of reference will be reviewed each year at the annual meeting of the Council

### **APPENDIX 3**

#### **Draft Terms of reference: Communications Working Group**

**NB Wording in red can be removed depending on the options agreed by members**

Purpose:

To forward plan and manage the Council's communications in accordance with legislative requirements, regulations and guidelines.

Scope:

- a) To contribute to the management and production of news items and articles for distribution to residents,
- b) Review and manage the Village Website, via the Parish Clerk ensuring it is fit for purpose and presents the appropriate image of the Parish Council, making any recommendations for change to the Council
- c) Review and manage the Council "brand" to ensure it is fit for purpose and presents the appropriate image of the Parish Council, making any recommendations for change to the Council
- d) Review and manage external informal and formal communication of the Councils work (via minutes, agendas etc) to ensure it is fit for purpose and presents the appropriate image of the Parish Council, making any recommendations for change to the Council
- e) Examine information and evidence to make recommendations for communication improvements
- f) To advise on and undertake village surveys

Membership of the Group is open to all members of the Council. The membership is 7 maximum. To ensure a majority of Councillors over co-optees, the minimum number of Councillors will be 4. The group will select a Chair from within the group of Councillors.

The Clerk (**and the Community Engagement Officer**) may be invited by the Chair of the group to attend group meetings

Meeting arrangements:

Meetings to be held throughout the year as and when required. Meetings need not be held in public.

Reporting:

The Group will report progress to the Council and present recommendations for approval.

Amendment to Terms of Reference:

These terms of reference will be reviewed each year at the annual meeting of the Council

#### **APPENDIX 4**

##### **Draft Responsibilities - Community Engagement Officer**

Responsible to The Clerk

Responsibilities:

To develop strong and effective relationships with community members, businesses, stakeholders and other agencies

To play an active role in the engagement and support of a range of voluntary and community organisations

To advise the community on the results of the Village Survey 2023 and the content of the Village Plan 2024

To help facilitate community involvement and support the delivery of the Woodchurch Village Plan

To listen to community members and stakeholder concerns and suggestions to enhance the community voice

To advise the Clerk (**and the Communications Working Group**) on stakeholder concerns, needs and suggestions