

Minutes of the Full Council

held in the Council Chamber, Emersons Green Town Council

1900hrs on Thursday 9th June 2022

- Present:** Councillors Simon Budd, David Somers, Rachael Hunt, Roberta Sunderland, Colin Hunt, Stephen Bassett, Caroline Johnson, Patricia Morgan, Matthew Palmer, Simon Jones, Sally Hill, Richard Nichols, and Alka Mehta-Graham (co-opted at item FC_2022.32).
- Absent:** Councillor James Hunt, Sadik Al-Hassan, and Christopher Edwardson.
- In attendance:** Town Clerk, Ian Lyons, and Assistant Clerk, Richard Hull.
- Public:** One member of the public attended the meeting.
- Apologies:** Councillors Sadik Al-Hassan, and Christopher Edwardson.
- Notes:** The meeting began at 1900hrs. All motions are unanimous unless stated otherwise.

INTRODUCTION

FC_2022.25 Welcome and Introductions.

Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) welcomed everyone present at the meeting and explained the emergency procedures.

FC_2022.26 Apologies for absence.

Minutes: The Town Clerk announced that written apologies had been received from Councillors and they would be noted in the minutes.

FC_2022.27 Declaration of Interest – Localism Act 2011.

Minutes: The Chair reminded members of the requirement to declare an interest, where necessary, and that members are solely responsible for updating the forms held by South Glos Council.

FC_2022.28 Public Participation.

Minutes: No member of the public requested an audience with the Council.

FC_2022.29 Minutes.

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), supported by Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor), and resolved that:

Resolved: The amended Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on the 12th May 2022, copies having been circulated, be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Mayor.

Minutes: The minutes were signed at the meeting by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor).

FC_2022.30 Outstanding items from the minutes of the Town Council held on 12th May 2022.

Minutes: The Town Clerk informed the meeting that correspondence had been received from Avon and Somerset Police, concerning speed limits in the Parish boundary. In the circulated letter, it stated that a representative from the Police would research the subject matter and attend the next meeting of the Full Council to answer questions. Ahead of the meeting, Councillors were asked to forward any specific questions to the Clerk, so that the Officer could prepare detailed answers.

CO-OPTION OF A NEW COUNCILLOR

FC_2022.31 Application for Co-option.

Minutes: An application for co-option was received by the Council from Alka Mehta-Graham, to fill the vacant position in the Badminton Ward. After this, the applicant was invited to address the Council by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor).

In a five-minute speech, Alka stood to address the Council and described having many connections to the local area, and the motivations for the application to become a Councillor.

To begin with, Alka spoke of having an interest in promoting health and well-being, and engagement with local businesses, and described having experience with other volunteering roles, such as St John's Ambulance. After this, Alka mentioned that Cllr Rachael Hunt had provided inspiration to apply. After that, Alka went on to talk about personal skills, and qualifications, that would complement the Council, particularly in I.T. and Human Resources (HR).

Following this, Councillors were invited to ask questions, and Cllr Sally Hill asked which committees Alka was interested in. In reply, Alka expressed an interest in the Personnel Committee, due to having professional experience in HR, and a Masters's Degree in this subject.

FC_2022.32 Co-option to the vacant position in Badminton Ward.

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), supported by Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor), and resolved that:

Resolved: The Council co-opt Alka Mehta-Graham to the vacant position in the Badminton Ward.

FC_2022.33 Declarations of Office.

Minutes: Having signed the Declaration of Office, Cllr Alkha Mehta-Graham officially joined the meeting to represent the Badminton Ward.

FC_2022.34 **Committee Allocation.**

Minutes: After some discussion, no changes to committee membership were made.

FINANCE-YEAR END

FC_2022.35 **Balance Sheet.**

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), supported by Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor), and resolved that:

Resolved: That the document: *Emersons Green Town Council Current Year Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2022*, copies having been circulated, be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Mayor.

Minutes: The document was signed by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor).

**ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY
RETURN (AGAR) 2021/22 FORM 3**

FC_2022.36 **Internal Auditors Report.**

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), supported by Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor), and resolved that:

Resolved: That the AGAR document: *Annual Internal Audit Report 2021/22*, copies having been circulated, be accepted by the Council.

FC_2022.37 **Annual Governance Statements.**

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), supported by Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor), and resolved that:

Resolved: That the documents: *Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2021/22, and Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2021/22 for Emersons Green Town Council*, copies having been circulated, be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Mayor and the Town Clerk.

Minutes: The documents were signed by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), and the Town Clerk, Ian Lyons.

Action: Town Clerk to send the AGAR, and supporting documents to the external auditor

COMMUNITY & GRANTS

FC_2022.38

To consider a grant payment of £400 to The Brightwell (West of England MS Therapy Centre) to continue providing therapeutic services to people with long-term neurological conditions in Emerson's Green parish.

Minutes:

Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) consulted with the Town Clerk to provide a recommendation to Full Council. As a result, the Town Clerk directed members to the following statement in the Clerk's Report:

“REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Both the Town Clerk and the Finance Committee have conducted due diligence for this organisation, and the application meets the terms and conditions for an award. In addition, the Council has previously awarded four grants, between 2014 and 2018, for £250 - £300, which have been used responsibly. In the past, these grants have directly benefited residents living within the Town Council boundary, and the service will be available to any resident that needs this service. The amount requested is in proportion, given the level of match funding from other sources for a project of this size.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This meeting represents the second round of applications for the financial year 2022/23. The award can easily be achieved within the current budget of £40,000, which includes £20,000 for s.137. The total level of grants awarded year to date, including liabilities, is currently at £7914. This is the first payment requested under s.137 this year.” After this:

Motion:

It was moved by Cllr Colin Hunt, supported by Cllr Sally Hill, and resolved that:

Resolved:

The Full Council approve a s.137 grant payment of £400 to The Brightwell (West of England MS Therapy Centre) to continue providing therapeutic services to people with long-term neurological conditions in the parish.”

Action:

Assistant Clerk to arrange payment.

FC_2022.39

To review the grant application process.

Minutes:

The Finance Committee requested a review of the grant application process on the 26th of May 2022. Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) asked the Town Clerk to provide the meeting with advice. As a result, the Town Clerk directed members to the following statement in the *Clerk's Report*:

“RECOMMENDATION

- Streamline the grant application process by:
- Setting deadlines for grant applications – two per annum.
- Move this topic to Full Council.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- Streamlining the grants process will improve the efficiency of the Council officer's time.
- To avoid an increase in staff salary costs.
- To aid with budget monitoring.
- Moving this topic to Full Council will reduce each grant from three meetings to just one.
- Moreover, this would allow all Councillors to engage with the grants process and network with other voluntary groups in the community, which they may find rewarding.
- Councillors may consider it to be an advantage when some meetings are focused on the topic of grants.
- From the public's perspective, it would speed up the process for them to receive money.
- Furthermore, this may also increase public participation at Full Council and inspire others to engage with the democratic process.
- Similarly, it will provide the opportunity for grant presentations to be made in the evening when working members of the public are more likely to be available. “

After this, a thorough debate took place, with arguments for and against.

For instance, Cllr Richard Nichols raised concerns that some groups may be discouraged from applying. Cllr Roberta Sunderland shared this view, and also worried that planning so far ahead might be difficult for some groups. In addition, it was stated that the aims of the Council are more important than efficient administration. After that, Cllr Rachael Hunt made the point that it was not unusual to have deadlines in other groups, and having an established routine may aid in promoting the scheme, suggesting quarterly as a compromise. Cllr Matthew Palmer commented that setting target dates may be too risky. Cllr Colin Hunt commented that grant application 'ping-pong' between committees was a waste of resources but suggested the issue could be deferred. Finally, Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor) made the point that a change to the system may result in the debate being stifled.

With no motion being proposed, Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) concluded the debate.

FC_2022.40

To consider the demand for community storage.

Minutes:

Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) requested this agenda item on the 30th May 2022.

To start with, Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) introduced the item for debate and explained the limited capacity for community groups in the area to store equipment, such as tents.

Cllr Colin Hunt raised concerns that there would be many pitfalls with such a scheme, and that insurance would be an issue. After this, Cllr Rachael Hunt suggested that it would be better to facilitate other groups, through the grants process, rather than take up the minimal space available at the Town

Council office and potentially compromise the security arrangements or increase staff costs.

With no motion being proposed, Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) concluded the debate.

FC_2022.41 To consider the demand for a refugee meeting space.

Minutes: Cllr Caroline Johnson requested this agenda item on the 30th May 2022.

To begin with, Cllr Caroline Johnson introduced the item for debate and explained that a voluntary organisation was appealing for a meeting space to facilitate refugees from Ukraine. In the meantime, the organisation had already been signposted to St James Church, which might be more suitable, particularly when meeting with children.

After this, Cllr Rachael Hunt agreed that other locations would be able to provide better support, and networking, such as the library. Likewise, Cllr Richard Nichols agreed that the Council could better support these organisations by providing financial support if needed.

At this point, the Town Clerk pointed out that the meeting room is already available for groups to book, subject to a fair use policy, and that a motion was not required for that. There would be no additional costs to the Council if the meetings were to take place during working hours or if a Councillor volunteered to host a group at any other time.

With no motion being proposed, Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) concluded the debate.

Action: Council employees to make bookings if required.

COMMITTEE MATTERS

FC_2022.42 Finance Committee.

Minutes: At the request of the finance committee, a debate took place to consider dissolving the Finance Committee and signing the final minutes as a true record.

To begin with, Cllr Simon Jones sought clarification that the intention was to move items to Full Council, and then questioned whether more responsibility should be given to the committee instead.

In response, the Town Clerk explained that, if the Finance Committee was dissolved, the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs would continue to take place through the Town Clerk, and meetings of the Full Council, in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations Policy dated May 2021. Similarly, the Financial Regulations, and scheme of financial delegation, could be updated at any time and were already under review.

After that, Cllr Roberta Sunderland raised concerns that, without the Finance Committee, the Council would lose the opportunity for in-depth discussion and greater scrutiny.

Next, Cllr Caroline Johnson suggested a compromise of meeting quarterly. Similarly, Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor) spoke in favour of an idea to re-schedule Finance Meetings to take place prior to Full Council. At this point a motion took place.

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Rachael Hunt, supported by Cllr Colin Hunt, that the Finance Committee be dissolved.

Minutes: Upon being put to the vote the Motion was **LOST**.

Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) declared the result as 2 in favour, 2 abstentions, and 9 against.

FC_2022.43 **To receive any updates from committees.**

Minutes: Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor) provided an update on the Planning Committee, and explained that the last meeting had not taken place because it was not quorate. The two planning applications that were due to be reviewed were non-controversial. After this, Cllr David Somers (Deputy Mayor) also provided an update on the Open Spaces committee, which had made progress with planting and other improvements to roundabouts, the commons, and various grass verges. Similarly, a tree survey had been carried out by Ian Monger, and an environmental report had been received from Ed Drewitt.

In the absence of the Finance Committee Chair, the Town Clerk summarised the minutes of the last meeting.

FC_2022.44 **To receive any updates from Working Groups.**

Minutes: Cllr Roberta Sunderland provided an update on the working groups, mentioning that attendance was low. Nevertheless, progress had been made in many areas, such as wildflower seeding, birdboxes, allotment surveys, and hedgehog houses. In other activities, a Town Council calendar, and orchard planting, were being planned. In other developments, the resource Parish Online was being used to map the open spaces.

FC_2022.45 **I.T. & Data Security.**

Minutes: The Town Clerk reminded members that their account passwords should be updated on a regular basis. After this, a brief explanation was given of the latest working arrangements for file sharing.

FC_2022.46**Financial Regulations.****Minutes:**

The Town Clerk asked members to consider a plan for updating the financial regulations and directed members to the following statement in the *Clerk's Report*.

“RECOMMENDATION

- Delegate the Town Clerk to conduct a review of the Financial Regulations Policy and make recommendations at a future meeting of the Full Council.
- Ask Councillors to review the document and make suggestions to the Town Clerk.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- All the Council's policies should be reviewed at regular intervals.
- Current policy is impractical.

In particular, the *Scheme of Financial Delegation* requires an update. For instance, there is no redundancy plan for the assistant clerks to deal with matters in the absence of the Town Clerk, or even in an emergency. Similarly, even the smallest expenditure requires authorisation from the Clerk, which is inefficient.

Advice on this matter had been sought from Deborah White, Chief Officer at Avon Local Councils' Association, and a letter had been circulated to members.”

After this:

Motion:

It was moved by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), supported by Cllr David Somers, and resolved that:

Resolved:

The Town Clerk conduct a review of the Financial Regulations Policy and make recommendations at a future meeting of the Full Council.

Action:

Town Clerk to conduct a review.

FC_2022.47**Exclusion of the Press and Public.****Minutes:**

Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) noted that no members of the public were present.

FC_2022.48**Annual Leave.**

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor), supported by Cllr David Somers, and resolved that:

Resolved: The annual leave dates requested by the Town Clerk, *Annex A to Clerk's Report dated 8th June – Annual Leave*, copies having been circulated, be approved by the Council.

FC_2022.49 **Staffing Levels.**

Minutes: The Town Clerk asked members to consider a study of the Council's human resources, and directed members to the following statement in the *Clerk's Report*.

“RECOMMENDATION

- Resolve that the Town Clerk conducts a study of the human resources available to the Council and make recommendations to a future meeting of the Personnel Committee.
- Ask all Councillors to attend the Personnel Committee, currently scheduled for the 13th of October, to discuss the recommendations in depth.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- To improve the service we provide to the public.
- To improve our engagement with the public.
- To comply with employment legislation.
- To comply with working time regulations.
- To assess the sustainability of current working practices.
- To address the current working time deficits.
- To resolve the issues with employing agency workers and contractors, such as the cleaning contract.”

After this:

Motion: It was moved by Cllr Steven Bassett, supported by Cllr Matthew Palmer, and resolved that:

Resolved: The Town Clerk conducts a study of the human resources available to the Council and makes recommendations to a future meeting of the Personnel Committee.

Action: Town Clerk to conduct a study.

FC_2022.50 **Dates and timings.**

Minutes: Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) announced that the next meeting of the Full Council was scheduled to take place:

Thursday 14th July 2022 at 1900hrs in the Emersons Green Town Council Chamber.

Cllr Simon Budd (Mayor) concluded the formal business of the meeting at 2025hrs and announced that an informal 'round-table' discussion would take place afterwards.