

Parish Council – 11th January 2022

Agenda Item 12.1 – RISK ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON COUNCIL BUSINESS AND TEMPORARY AMENDMENT TO FINANCIAL REGULATIONS - DELEGATED AUTHORITY FOR BILL PAYMENTS

Background

Cases of CoVid-19 has increased significantly since the last Parish Council meeting in November 2021. The UK government is regularly reviewing the need for further restrictions although none have yet been announced on indoor gatherings, although some have been introduced by the devolved governments of Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland.

A number of councillors have indicated that they may elect not to attend Council/Committee meetings whilst the prevalence of CoVid-19 remains high. It is also possible that some councillors may need to self isolate.

There is currently no legal provision for Parish Council/Committee meetings to be held online.

Risk Assessment on impact of COVID-19 on Council business

There are 3 inherent risks to the Council:

- Meetings cannot be held due to UK govt restrictions
- Insufficient councillors can attend a meeting which becomes inquorate
- Parish Clerk unable to attend meetings

In the event that the Parish Clerk is unable to attend a meeting (eg due to self isolation), the meeting will normally be rearranged for the earliest possible date. If there are business critical issues that need a Council/Committee resolution, the Chairman of the meeting will discuss the options with the Parish Clerk including: the Clerk clerking the meeting virtually, holding the meeting with no clerk present, using a Locum Clerk etc.

All Chairman are asked to review any risks that might arise from meetings being unable to be convened. Initial considerations and contingency arrangements are set out below;

a) Planning & Devt

- Councillors will be sent details of planning applications and asked to respond to the Parish Clerk with comments in writing.
- The Parish Clerk will liaise with the Chairman of the P&D Committee, and where there is a clear consensus, will send comments to Wealden DC.
- Members of the public will be advised (through website and noticeboards) of applications and how to respond to Wealden DC directly.

- b) CIL
- Existing work programmes to continue. Any new programmes to wait until meetings can resume.
 - Parish Clerk/CIL Chairman to review if there is a risk of any CIL receipts not being spent within the “5 year” period.
- c) F&GP
- Next meeting not due until April 2022. No immediate issues
 - Parish Clerk/Chairman of FGP to review any risks to end of year returns and how to mitigate.
- d) Environment Committee
- Existing work programmes to continue. Any new programmes to wait until meetings can resume.
 - No immediate risk identified, although remainder of work programme for 2021/22 still to be agreed
- e) Council
- Contingency arrangement already in place for grant applications/budget/precept, in the event that 11th Jan Council cannot take place.
 - Delegated authority exists within Financial Regulations for payment of bills/invoices but these are limited. RFO has authority to agree payments of up to £200, if already approved as part of budget. Also, in event of extreme risk to Council (Fin Regs paragraphs 4.1-4.5 refer).
 - Contractual salary payments to the Parish Clerk can continue to be made.
 - All other Council business will be deferred until a meeting can be convened.

It is recommended that the following temporary amendment be made to the Council's Financial Regulations to allow any bills/invoices to be paid:

Proposed Amendment to Financial Regulations

Due to the current uncertainty surrounding the incidence of CoVid-19 and the possibility that some or all meetings might be curtailed, the following temporary amendment will be made to Warbleton Parish Council Financial Regulations, section 4.1 and 4.5:

The Clerk's delegated authority will be increased to £500.

This increased delegated authority will only apply in the event that a Parish Council or Committee meeting is cancelled due to CoVid-19 and no further meeting to authorise the payment can take place within 2 weeks.

This temporary amendment will expire on 30th April 2022. Any proposal to extend further will form part of the annual review of the Financial Regulations and must be agreed by the Parish Council.

Steve Williamson
Chairman
F&GP Committee

2nd January 2022