

## **Swaffham Town Council**

Minutes of the on-line virtual **Human Resources & Governance Committee** held on **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020** at **12noon** using the link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/keDg2F1trZ>

Cllr Members Present: Cllr W Bensley (In the Chair)  
Mr G Edwards, Mr C Houghton, Mrs J Skinner, Mr K Sandle

Observing: Cllr I Pilcher, Cllr P Darby, Cllr S Matthews,  
+ other unidentified individuals

Town Clerk: Mr R Bishop  
Deputy Clerk: Mrs C Smith

1. **Apologies and reasons for absence.**

None, all present.

2. **Declarations of Interest.**

None received.

3. **To agree the minutes of 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2020.**

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record by the chairman.

4. **Outstanding Actions agreed at previous meetings**

The Town Clerk reported that this was an interim meeting to clear up some of the outstanding issues from the extraordinary period caused by the global pandemic of Covid-19, as the scheduled meeting for 6<sup>th</sup> April had to be cancelled. A further meeting planned in four weeks' time on 1<sup>st</sup> June would bring all routine issues up to date.

5. **Health and Safety Update**

5.1 Risk Assessments carried out by home workers were circulated, no issues were raised.

5.2 Home working insurance situation – the Town Clerk reported that the Town Council policy covered staff and equipment working from home.

5.3 IT system breach – details on the breach had been circulated. ICO had been asked to report why this had happened and give a timescale of when this information would be available.

**Admission to Meetings Act Public Bodies) 1960:**

**CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS following the exclusion of the Public and Press:**

6. **Late or Urgent Matters at the Chairman's Discretion**

Cllr G Edwards requested that issues are responded to by the Town Clerk regarding his email of 21st April at 12.48pm. The chairman has accepted that this is a late item and the Town Clerk has agreed to answer issues raised in the email.

Outside Team Member – it was noted that one member of the outside team would not return to work until after the lockdown period had finished, he had elected to remain at home unpaid.

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Admin Staff – Councillors discussed the role and tasks assigned to the new admin post and agreed that the post should continue. The probationary period may have to be adjusted as these were unprecedented times and work could not be assessed in the usual way.

**It was agreed that the new admin role would continue and probationary period to be adjusted as appropriate.**

Relief in Need – Cllrs discussed the administration of Relief in Need.

**The Town Clerk agreed to find out the weekly time commitment to administering Relief in Need.**

Role of HR Committee – Cllrs discussed the role of the HR committee. There was a difference of opinion regarding how involved the HR committee should be with day to day staff management or whether it should act as a policy and strategic management body. Staff contracts were discussed, and it was agreed that these would be reviewed by the committee. The contracts would also be reviewed by the HR consultant. Exit Interviews – Councillors discussed the benefit of exit interviews.

**It was agreed a review of Staff contracts would be carried out by HR consultants and the HR committee. A timescale to be agreed when normal working practices are re-established, and all admin staff are located back at the Town Hall.**

Exchange of emails including members of staff - concern was expressed that a Cllr had received a reprimand that emails had been circulated to members of staff inappropriately, and then the Town Clerk had done the same thing and sent an email circulated it to staff. The Town Clerk stated that the email he had circulated was appropriate as he was answering a point raised and which staff had already been circulated.

Policy for Emails and WhatsApp Guidance – Cllr Anscombe had circulated a draft Communications policy to be considered.

**It was agreed to circulate the policy for Emails and WhatsApp guidance to all Councillors and the two Clerks.**

**7. Timesheet analysis; including updates staff sick/absence records.**

These details were not circulated electronically as they contain personal information. The Town Clerk reported verbally, and the only issues concerned the Town Clerk's mounting TOIL, this would be discussed later in the agenda.

**8. Toil/flexitime procedures re-covid 19**

The Town Clerk reported that as the outside staff had had four weeks at home Toil levels could be cleared. A short summary of work done by other staff would be circulated as there was a perception that there was not enough work. Some staff had seen an increase in workload and the Town Clerk reported his Toil was running at 34 hours. It was stated that this was over the maximum allowed in the Town Council Policy, the Town Clerk offered to take his toil immediately if this was an issue.

*At that point, the meeting was interrupted by someone (female) using an expletive in a remark, inviting the Town Clerk to go away. It was not established who made this remark, but it was clear that people other than Councillors were listening in to the meeting.*

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The TOIL system was discussed, and it was reported that the time taken off was at less busy times balancing the hours that had been accrued at more busy times. It did not represent an extra cost to the council. This should not be confused with the overtime budget, currently running at £3,000 under budget, TOIL actually saves the Council money. As the policy was not always adhered to and there were concerns that the 48 hour a week working time directive may be breached on occasion, it was proposed to review the TOIL policy. As the pressure applied for the Town Clerk to take time off, when the workload was continually high, was not a healthy place to be. Concerns were also raised that the Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk were sometimes not in the office on the same day. This was particularly likely on a Friday. It was proposed to review the deputy cover with the Town Clerk once working patterns had returned to normal.

**It was agreed to review the TOIL policy and Deputy Cover once normal working practises had been resumed.**

**9. Holiday/Sickness Procedures re Covid-19**

The Town Clerk reported that sickness reporting systems were still in place and that any member of staff self-isolating due to a family member having Covid-19 would be deemed to be on sick leave. The Town Clerk also explained that earned holiday could be affected by those outside staff not working and at home. The Council were able to ask staff to take annual leave in the lockdown period as long as they gave 7 days' notice. It was proposed that staff would be asked to take the annual leave already booked in the lockdown period with no discretion to defer.

**It was agreed that staff should take the annual leave already booked in the lockdown period. There was no discretion for deferring holiday to later in the year. It was also agreed that there would be no loss of earned holiday for those outside staff who were not working for a short period.**

**10. Furlough, unpaid leave and staffing arrangements.**

The Town Clerk reported that there was no clear advice from National bodies or Government regarding the parish sector claiming financial support to pay the salary of furloughed staff. The general advice was that councils had already precepted for the salaries and to claim government money would effectively be a form of double taxation. The only possible case was where salaries were paid by business activity, so it could be argued that the Market Superintendent salary could be claimed. The HR advice stated that the claim could be made but this was a grey area where HM Revenue and Customs could challenge this claim retrospectively, when the crisis is over. Councillors considered that the costs of administration behind putting the claim together would mean making a claim would not be worthwhile.

**It was agreed not to claim for the Market Superintendent furloughed wages in the weeks the market did not run.**

Arrangements for a return to office working were discussed, the Town Clerk reported that staff had been asked to identify issues and measures such as a phased return were suggested. It was also reported that the Prime Minister was expected to address the issue of coming out of the lockdown at his briefing this coming Sunday. It was proposed that the Town Clerk draw up a plan to return to work in the coming week as the situation could change quite quickly.

**It was agreed that a plan to return to work would be drawn up by the Town Clerk in the next week.**

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**11. General discussion including complaints, confidentiality, disciplinary procedure, equal opportunities and dignity at work, grievance and stress policies and procedures.**

The Town Clerk invited the Deputy Clerk to comment on emails that had been sent in relation to the return of a food market. The Deputy Clerk expressed concern that one email had accused staff of threatening a stall holder with sanctions if they did not return to the Market. The accusation was refuted by the Deputy Clerk and the Councillor asked to apologise, with a copy of the apology to be sent to all who had received the original email. The Councillor offered to make an apology if the accusation had caused offence, but he would need to review the original email as he was unsure which email the Deputy Clerk was referring to. He also stated that this was unimportant when compared to the threat of violence the Mayor had received.

The Town Clerk expressed concern that although there had been a decision to open the market some Cllrs were continuing to argue about the implementation of the decision. The delegated authority of the Town Clerk and Deputy Clerk was constantly questioned and the consensus e-mail decision making process had clearly run its course. One email stated that a member of the public was putting together a petition to hold a vote of no confidence in the Town Council and the Town Clerk. The member of the public accused of this had contacted the Town Clerk by e-mail and assured him that this was untrue. The Town Clerk stated that the sheer volume of vitriol and hatred within the Council was difficult to deal with, particularly during a time of crisis. All points of view needed to be respected and debate by email could not continue now that virtual meetings were in place. The Chair of HR concluded that all staff and Councillors needed to be respected.

**12. Standing Orders**

The Deputy Mayor reported that new suggested policies for dealing with virtual meetings had been added to the standing orders documentation for Cllrs to look at. This may help with the running of meetings going forward. Some of the issues that had become apparent in the current meeting of timings, how to speak and how to request to speak may be solved by looking at and adopting the practises identified in the new policy. These would be circulated to Councillors for consideration at a full council meeting.

**13. To receive other issues for forthcoming meetings and confirm the dates and time for the next meeting, the last of this Council:**

- Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June.

Meeting closed at 2.30pm

\_\_\_\_\_Chairman

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