

FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL  
**Minutes of the 412<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020 via Zoom**

Present: Cllr P Thompson (Chairman)

Cllrs	K Badham	I Blazeby	J Dann	P Dodds
	P Earles	G Mackey	M Platt	J Roberts
	R Shaw	A Snape	D Toinko	M A Williams

In attendance: Acting Town Clerk RFO & HR Officer

Apologies for absence accepted: Cllrs R Coleman A Lutley

No apologies received: Cllr M Halligan

**4958 To note any Declarations of Interest relating to items on the agenda**  
There were no Declarations of Interest.

**4959 Town Mayor's Announcements**

- (i) The Chairman advised that he had attended the Dunstable Civic Service in early March.
- (ii) The Chairman thanked staff and Members who were working hard to enable the meeting to take place and their contribution at the difficult time of the coronavirus pandemic. He went on to thank the volunteers who had been assisting with the Community Lifeline Initiative, as well as Cllr Mackey, Reverend Lucy Davis, Curate Andrea Maffei, Phillip Pugh of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Silas Wood the Methodist Minister, Richard Luscombe from The Forum and the Flitwick & Ampthill Good Neighbours. The Chairman added a particular thank you to staff Susan Eldred and Zoe Putwain who were working hard in the community at this time.
- (iii) The Chairman spoke about the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Council which was usually held in May with regards to the election of a Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Committee Chairmen. In line with emergency legislation, he suggested that people remained in current posts until the Council were able to resume normal meetings, at which time, Members could vote on roles for 2020/21. He added that if Members were in favour of holding the AGM sooner via Zoom, he would be willing to stand down at the normal time in May.

**4960 To confirm and adopt the Minutes of the 411<sup>th</sup> meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to **Resolve** that the Minutes of the 411<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020 having previously been circulated be taken as read, signed and adopted as a true record.

**4961 Standing Orders**

**a) To formally authorise remote Town Council meetings during the coronavirus pandemic**

The Chairman suggested a timescale be set for this item with agreement for remote meetings to be held via Zoom for a period of six months, which would then be reviewed. Cllrs Mackey and Williams agreed that it was sensible to attach a time limit to the authorisation of remote meetings as these were part of an emergency procedure only.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to **Resolve**  
to formally authorise remote Town Council  
meetings for a period of up to six months, at which  
time the situation would be reviewed.

Vote: all in favour.

**4962 To discuss the following Standing Order – “No business may be transacted at a full Council Meeting unless at least one-third of the whole number of members of the Council are present and in no case shall the quorum be less than nine.”**

- (i) Cllr Badham proposed that under Standing Order 26a, the Council suspend Standing Order 26b in order that Members amend Standing Order 3v should they choose to do so. This would ensure that a legal decision was made.
- (ii) A debate took place with different Members having opposing views on lowering the quorum. Cllr Mackey commented that he believed lowering the quorum put local democracy at risk and that it would be a dangerous decision because it was important for as many Members as possible to take part in decisions of the Council. Cllr Dodds commented that he thought it would depend on what Council business was to be discussed. The Chairman felt that normal Council business could not be progressed whilst the country was in lockdown, however he believed one meeting, the Full Council meeting, could take place once a month remotely. Cllr Williams believed that it would be a bad decision to lower the quorum as a majority was needed.
- (iii) Cllr Toinko was in favour of lowering the quorum especially since the process that took place in order for the emergency Full Council meeting to take place in March. Cllr Dodds commented that the March meeting was an exceptional circumstance and that things had now moved on and people were used to the idea of a meeting via Zoom, which was obvious looking at the meeting's attendance that night.
- (iv) Cllr Blazeby asked why a minimum of nine Members had been specified in the current Standing Orders when other local Councils had a third of Members being the requirement. The Acting Town Clerk advised that other Councils, such as Ampthill, had far less Members (e.g. twelve in total), and that she believed nine for Flitwick, which had seventeen, was to ensure democracy. The Chairman commented that Councils like Ampthill had a different Committee Structure to Flitwick and that a quorum of nine was historic. Cllr Blazeby asked why a quorum of nine had been specified without a rationale.
- (v) Cllr Dann asked the Acting Town Clerk what had changed since she went on Maternity Leave with regards to the quorum specified in the Standing Orders. The Acting Town Clerk commented that the Interim Town Clerk had suggested Members adopt the Model Standing Orders from NALC but to keep the quorum of nine, which had been done by the previous Town Clerk for many years. Cllr Badham advised that the most recent Standing Orders had been adopted in April 2019. Cllr Mackey informed Members that in previous years, a quorum of 50% was required for Full Council and a third for Committee Meetings. The Acting Town Clerk commented that a minimum of three Members was required at Committee meetings. Cllr Toinko did not feel that the Council should deviate from the Model Standing Orders of a third.

- (vi) Cllr Roberts was in favour of lowering the quorum to a third, however believed a time limit should be attached to the decision. Cllr Badham also supported the idea of lowering the quorum due to the probable staggered relaxation of lockdown restrictions that would follow from the Government.
- (vii) The Acting Town Clerk asked if Members would support a face to face meeting when able to do so with adequate social distancing rules being followed and for those Members who were still isolating, to join on a screen via Zoom. Some Members signalled that they would be in favour of this happening. Cllr Badham commented about being careful with this in terms of democracy.

(Cllr Toinko left the meeting briefly due to technical difficulties and Members suspended discussion until he returned.)

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to **Resolve** that under Standing Order 26a, the Council suspend Standing Order 26b.

Vote: 11 in favour, 2 against

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to **Resolve** to reduce the required quorum for Town Council Meetings to a third of the Council for a period of six months, at which time the situation would be reviewed.

Vote: 9 in favour, 3 against & 1 abstention

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to **Resolve** that under Standing Order 26a, the Council unsuspend Standing Order 26b.

Vote: All in favour

#### **4963 Questions**

1. CBCllr Mackey advised the Town Council Members that the Central Beds Council (CBC) Chief Executive was adopting emergency powers on all Planning matters. He added that an Advisory Panel of three Members had been set up, but decisions were with Mr Carr. CBCllr Mackey had written a letter of complaint to the Secretary of State and Cllr Badham added that he had complained too.

(The Acting Town Clerk left the meeting at this time.)

Cllr Dodds asked if any of the decisions would directly relate to Planning for Flitwick. CBCllr Mackey advised that this was one of the issues as nothing had been specified; what decisions could go to the Chief Executive for a Chairman's Decision or the time these powers would be granted etc. This raised further concerns of items being subject to Judicial Review. CBC had the same capabilities to hold remote meetings and therefore Members felt that delegation of powers was unnecessary. All Members agreed for a letter of complaint to be sent.

2. Cllr Dann asked if Members were in favour of the May election of senior roles within the Council to still go ahead. He suggested that people let the Acting Town Clerk

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know their preference. The Chairman advised that the NALC advice had been for Members to remain in their current roles for the coming year but that he was happy to stand aside in May should the Council wish to hold an election then. He added that he would also be happy to remain in post for the duration of the lockdown but would then step down once a 'normal' meeting could be held and the election of senior roles could take place at that time. Cllr Blazeby stated that there was technology that meant votes/polls could be taken remotely. It was agreed for the Acting Town Clerk to write to every Member with the two options and ask for their preference within 7 days in order for arrangements to be made should the majority choose to proceed with the remote meeting in May.

Meeting closed at 8.55pm.

Signed .....  
(Chairman)