

# OFFWELL PARISH COUNCIL

## MINUTES OF THE REMOTELY HELD PARISH COUNCIL MONTHLY ORDINARY MEETING ON MONDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2020 AT 7.30PM

via Zoom platform as per legislation contained within section 79 of the Coronavirus Act 2020

**Present:** Cllrs. A. Small (Chair), M. Brake, P. Hopkins, C. Whithear, M Mulrain,  
(remotely) J. Tristram

**In Attendance:** A Jenkins (Clerk), DCC Cllr. M. Shaw, EDDC Cllr. H. Parr  
(remotely)

**Members of Public:** 0

Chair welcomed all Councillors, to the Council's first ever Zoom virtual remote meeting, made necessary by the current CV-19 situation which requires social distancing measures. He advised Councillors that the meeting is being recorded.

### OPEN SESSION

No members of the Public had joined the meeting

### COUNCIL BUSINESS

#### 1. **Revisions to Standing Orders**

The Clerk advised that DALC had recommended revisions to the Parish Council's Standing Orders which take into account amended Council practice following The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 which allow local councils to hold remote meetings. The regulations give automatic authority to hold remote meetings and amend standing orders as required and these regulations remain in force until May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 or earlier if repealed and require a number of temporary changes to Standing Orders.

The proposed revisions to the Standing Orders had been circulated to all Councillors with the agenda. Cllr. Whithear proposed adoption of the revisions, seconded by Cllr. Mulrain, all in favour.

#### 2. **Apologies**

Cllr. S Patch

#### 3. **Declaration of Interests**

None

#### **4. Minutes of the Meetings held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

The minutes were declared a true record of the proceedings, proposed by Cllr. Hopkins, seconded by Cllr. Brake, those present (Cllr. Small and Cllr. Whithear) in favour.

#### **5. Matters arising from the Minutes**

The Clerk advised that due to the Coronavirus Pandemic and the Lockdown, there had been no meeting of the subcommittee to discuss further progress on the new website. He understood that Cllr. Brake had been continuing to work on the new website and would liaise with him and advise further at the next meeting.

#### **6. Revisions due to inability to hold the Annual Meeting in May 2020**

The Clerk asked council to note that the Annual Meeting of Council was not held in May 2020 as originally scheduled due to the revised arrangements for such meetings as specified within Clause 78, Coronavirus Act 2020.

Council to note, therefore, that - in accordance with the legislation contained therein - the requirement for Council to elect a Chairman of the Parish Council was made unnecessary; similarly, the election of the Vice-Chairman of Council. Those currently serving remain in those roles until May 2021.

Other Councillors indicated their willingness to also continue in their present roles until May 2021.

#### **7. Reports**

##### **a) Police**

The Clerk advised that he had received a report from PCSO England for the period 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 to 5<sup>th</sup> July 2020 which showed that there had been no crimes recorded and 4 Public Safety and 1 Transport incidents.

He had been advised that there was a new Police Officer at Honiton PC Salter who is the new Neighbourhood Beat Manager. There is now PC Salter, PCSO England and SC Hardy to cover both the town and parishes.

##### **b) District and County Councillors:**

EDDC Cllr. Parr advised that District Council Meetings and information sessions are taking place on Zoom, and some parish and town councils are holding meetings on Zoom.

As regards the Council's financial position- EDDC is no different to other authorities which are reporting similar financial positions as a result of the pandemic and in many cases they are stating a worse position. Options are available and the Council has the ability to rectify the financial position giving the Council's S151 Officer confidence that the Council is still a going concern.

She advised that the full report to Cabinet could be viewed at:-

<https://democracy.eastdevon.gov.uk/documents/s8868/Covid-19%20Financial%20Update.pdf>

DCC Cllr. Shaw had sent an August report which had been circulated to all Councillors.

He mentioned that most of his 2020-21 Locality Budget is still available for local community groups and parish/town councils to apply for. Also advised councillors of the new Devon Highways initiative – Doing What Matters where Highways would be seeking Parish Councils views on what the Council believed are the priorities within the Parish.

##### **c) Clerk**

The Clerk gave a full report (copy attached) for the period since the last meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

**d) Offwell Neighbourhood Support Group**

Cllr. Mulrain gave a report from the Support Group on the work they had done supporting Parishioners during the pandemic.(copy attached). Councillors and the Clerk expressed their appreciation and thanks to Dawn, Lynn and Mike for their hard work and tremendous support to the Community during this Coronavirus crisis.

**e) Highways Matters**

Cllr. Mulrain advised that he had attended a recent Traffic group zoom meeting where the new Devon Highways initiative – Doing What Matters had been discussed and gave Councillors a summary. He also advised that Highways would shortly be carrying out road repairs in Offwell using the new innovative Dragon Patching machine which should greatly improve Highways capability in carrying out road repairs even in cold winter weather conditions.

He had also raised the issue of litter along the lane to the Sutton Barton Recycling site. Highways had said that this was the responsibility of EDDC. The Clerk said that a parishioner had recently offered to pick up any roadside litter she noticed when out walking her dog if the Parish Council would supply litter picking sticks. Due to the health and safety implications with the narrow lanes and no footpaths, the Parish Council could not support this suggestion, The Clerk said that he had spoken to Andrew Hancock,Service Lead for StreetScene at EDDC to clarify the matter of roadside litter and had asked for them to review their frequency of roadside litter collection on the lane to the recycling centre.

Cllr. Hopkins raised the matter of the bollards and drainage on the roadside at the junction of Fern Lane with the A35 and questioned what the position was as they had been there for some months. It was creating a problem for farmers using Fern lane with large vehicles. The Clerk said that he would speak to Highways England as he believed that it was an A35 drainage issue.

**f) Any Other Reports**

The Clerk advised that Carol Hayes had given a report on the valuable work and role the Village Website had done in keeping the Parish informed with all important official information and local information throughout the pandemic period. (copy attached)

**8. To consider matters pertaining to Coronavirus and Offwell Parish**

The Clerk and Cllr. Mulrain said that the Support Group would maintain and keep the database updated with any householder changes and the Council and Support Group would continue to work with the Website to support Parishioners and keep them informed.

**9. Correspondence**

The Clerk advised that all correspondence received had been circulated to Councillors.

**10. a) Current Financial Position**

The Clerk advised that there was £7,525.71 in the current account (after allowing for uncleared cheques but not allowing for the 10c payment below).

There was still £3,362.09 in the CIL Account as no CIL monies had been received in April from EDDC.

It should be noted that the Council has resolved to make a commitment to spend £2,250 from this CIL monies on playground equipment for the Project.

**b) To consider and ratify payments and expenditure made under the Clerk and Chair's delegated authority since the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020.**

The Clerk had circulated to Councillors a list of payments and expenditure as follows, made under the Clerk and Chair's delegated authority since the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

**March 2020**

Payment to A Dimond Stationers (Stationery & 12 first class Postage Stamps)	£ 72.84
Payment to A Dimond Stationers - (Printing of Support Group Leaflets)	£ 81.39
Payment to A Jenkins (Clerk) (reimbursement for 156 first class postage stamps purchased on the Clerk's personal card as Post Office would not accept a Council cheque)	£109.20
Payment to TRIP (reissue of donation cheque to replace original misaid in post)	£100.00

**April 2020**

Payment to A Jenkins (Clerk) (Salary for month of April)	£265.92
Payment to HMRC (NIC & PAYE)	£ 52.80

**May 2020**

Payment to Community First Trading Ltd (Renewal Premium for Council's Insurance)	£247.76
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**June 2020**

Payment to DALC (DALC/NALC Annual subscription fees)	£ 98.24
Payment to A Jenkins (Clerk) (Salary for month of May)	£318.72

**July 2020**

Payment to EDDC (Dog bin emptying annual charge)	£312.00
Payment to A Jenkins (Clerk) (Salary for month of June)	£318.72
Payment to DALC (Attendance of Cllr Smith at DALC Good Councillor Course on 17/07/2019)	£ 66.00
Payment to Kilmington Parish Council (Cross charge for attendance of Cllr Hopkins at DALC Good Councillor Course held at Kilmington Parish Council on 30/09/2019)	£ 25.00

Payment to A Jenkins (Clerk) (Reimbursement for ZOOM IT Platform Monthly Charge purchased on Clerk's personal card)	£14.39
Payment to P & M Jolly (Planting costs for the Offwell Haycart)	£109.70

Cllr. Hopkins proposed ratifying the payments made, seconded by Cllr. Mulrain, all in favour.

### **10c Expenditure to be approved**

- 1) Payment of £318.72 for the Clerk's salary for the month of July.  
Proposed by Cllr. Tristram, seconded by Cllr. Whithear, all in favour.

### **10d Forthcoming expenditure to approve**

None

### **10e To review the Internal Auditors report in respect of the 2019/20 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).**

The Clerk reported that the accounts for the year 2019/20 had been finalised and the internal audit completed.

The external auditors were the same as last year. Smaller authorities where the higher of gross income or gross expenditure did not exceed £25,000 in the year of account ended 31 March 2020, are able to certify themselves as exempt from a limited assurance review under Section 9 of the Local Audit (Smaller authorities) Regulations 2015.

There is no requirement to have a limited assurance review or to submit an Annual Governance and Accountability return to the external auditor, provided that the authority has certified itself as exempt at a meeting of the authority and a completed Certificate of Exemption is submitted notifying the external auditor.

The Clerk presented the annual internal audit report to Councillors who noted the report. Cllr. Small proposed acceptance of the internal Auditors Report seconded by Cllr. Brake, all in favour. The Clerk to send a letter to Mr Terry Cuthbertson, MBE, the internal auditor thanking him for his work and continuing in this role.

### **10f To consider, and if thought fit, approve sign the Annual Governance Statement Section ONE of the 2019-20 AGAR (Version 2, with exemption)**

Councillors reviewed the system of internal control prior to completing the Annual Governance Statement. Cllr. Tristram proposed approval of the Annual Governance Statement, seconded by Cllr. Mulrain all in favour. The Chair and Clerk to sign the statement on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

### **10g To consider, and if thought fit, approve and sign the Annual Accounting Statements Section TWO of the 2019-20 AGAR (Version 2, with exemption)**

The Clerk then presented to Councillors the signed and dated Accounting Statements for the year 2019/20 and explained the accounts. Councillors considered the accounting statements. Cllr. Hopkins proposed approval of the Accounting Statements, seconded by Cllr. Small, all in favour. The Chair to sign the accounting statements on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

**10h To consider the proposal that Offwell Parish Council seeks exemption from the External Auditing of its 2019-20 accounts as per the regulations for AGAR Version 2.**

Cllr. Whithear proposed the Council certifying itself as exempt from the limited assurance review, seconded by Cllr. Tristram all in favour. The Chair and Clerk to sign the Certificate of Exemption on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020 and the Clerk to then submit the Certificate to the external auditors.

**10i To consider and set the dates for the Period of Exercising of Public Rights**

The Clerk said that he would have to check the date when the Notice could be published on the website but planned to set the dates for the period of Exercising of Public rights as the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 to 17<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

**11 Planning applications**

The Clerk advised that any planning applications during the delegated period had been dealt with under the procedure adopted at the 17<sup>th</sup> March meeting and the Council's expressed views had been submitted to EDDC.

The Clerk advised that application 20/1080/FUL land to rear of Tumbleweed had been approved subject to conditions.

**12 Councillor vacancy**

The Clerk advised that he would check with DALC the current co-option procedure and advise at the next meeting.

**13 Litter & Weeds in Parish**

The Chair advised that he had received a complaint from a Parishioner regarding the untidiness/amount of weeds in the Village.

Cllr. Tristram said that he had been cutting back the weeds surrounding the telephone box.

Councillors discussed the matter but felt that the village was not unduly weedy. However, they would look and see if any further weeding is required.

**14 Agenda items for next meeting**

New replacement Noticeboard

**15 Date and Time of next meeting**

The Clerk advised that the Council would revert to the published council meeting dates for 2020 but with the meetings being Zoom virtual remote meetings until further notice.

The next meeting will be on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> August at 7.30pm.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

**Signed..... Dated.....**

## **Clerk's report for Offwell Parish Council Meeting 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

At the last meeting of the Council on the 17<sup>th</sup> March, Councillors anticipating the impending Government decision to impose a lockdown which would prevent any Council meetings taking place, resolved to extend the delegation of Council decisions to the Clerk working in association with the Chair.

This delegation to the officer of the Council was allowed under The Local Government Act 1972 and allowed the Council to continue to legally function and fulfil its responsibilities.

The Chair and myself had in the week ahead of the meeting already considered how the Parish Council could respond to the Pandemic crisis and support the Parish community. ORSA had offered to help and Cllr. Mulrain, Dawn Mulrain and Linda Whithear had offered to act as coordinators for an Offwell Neighbourhood Support Group which would offer support and assistance to parishioners. The Council at the meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> March supported the formation of the Support Group by the Parish Council and the coordinators.

The immediate focus of the coordinators and myself was to establish a database of all households and residents in the Parish, with their contact details and in particular their landline telephone numbers so that contact could still be maintained in the event of a breakdown in broadband internet and mobile network access. Please refer to the separate report from Councillor Mike Mulrain on behalf of the Support Group.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and thanks to Dawn, Lynn and Mike for their tremendous support to the Community during this Coronavirus crisis. Their work in helping establish and manage the Offwell Neighbourhood Support Group has been invaluable. There was a huge response from parishioners to the appeal for volunteers to help out and offer their time to shop, deliver and support those self isolating and in need.

The Village website was a vital community resource for the relaying to residents and councillors of important official information received during the period since March.. I received hundreds of communications over the last few months from Government, Public Health England, Devon County Council, East Devon District Council and other bodies, and much of this guidance and information was passed on to Carol and Dawn for publication on the Website. The website also kept the Community informed about the Support Group and local businesses who could offer services/support to residents.

Please refer to the separate report from Carol Hayes.

I wish to thank Carol, the Offwell Village website editor and Dawn for their continuous and valuable work and contribution in managing and updating the Village Website during this period. The website is an important resource for the Community keeping everyone informed and I would ask that everyone regularly visit the website as it is continually updated with important official information as well as with local information and news.

In addition to the information on the website, I also issued a number of email updates out to everyone on the database and have kept the ORG/Village Hall Charity informed on advice and guidance received in respect of Village Halls and their reopening.

The pandemic and lockdown has resulted in changes as to how all Councils were and continue to be able to operate during this period. It was necessary for the Government to pass legislation to allow Councils to meet remotely and virtually by means of IT platforms.

NALC (National Association of Local Councils), DALC (Devon Association of Local Councils) and SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks) have been in continual discussion with Government and other bodies on

these legislative and other changes affecting how Councils operate and their governance. Information and guidance has and is continuing to be cascaded down to Parish and Town Council Clerks. I have kept in contact with both DALC and SLCC and sought their advice on a number of matters.

I have also been in contact with EDDC Officers about the EDDC Community Support Hub which was set up and also Cllr. Helen Parr, our District Councillor on a number of related and other matters. I wish to thank Helen for the assistance she has given during this period.

Legislation changes by the Government was also necessary in respect of Council Audit processes and AGAR's ( Annual Governance and Accountability Returns) and the rules, publication and submission dates were all changed. A further complication has been how to conduct the internal audit process in a safe and secure Covid 19 manner for both the Internal Auditor and myself. The internal audit has now been completed and I wish to thank Terry Cuthbertson, MBE for his work and assistance in this matter. I would also ask that Council officially thank him for his work and continuing to undertake this role on a voluntary basis.

There were a number of planning applications received during the delegated period which were considered by Councillors in accordance with the procedure adopted at the Council Meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> March.

The legislative changes by the Government allowed all Councils including Parish Councils to now meet remotely and virtually by use of IT video meetings. There are a number of different IT platforms that can be used and NALC, DALC and SLCC conducted much research into these and the benefits for and against each of them.

I conducted further research and in association with the Chair decided to use the Zoom IT Platform, as this allows members of the public to join and participate in the meeting by different means – Desktop and Laptop computers, Mobile phones and Landline telephones.

I took into account that many people in Offwell may not have internet access/IT knowledge and felt that the ability to join /participate in the meeting by telephone was essential.

Another important consideration in having this telephone access capability was that parishioners must keep themselves as safe and Covid 19 secure as possible during this pandemic and be able to access the meeting from the safety of their own homes. I felt that this was very important as I did not wish anyone particularly the elderly or those who are isolating or shielding to put themselves or others at risk by visiting other persons homes and sharing/ touching computer/IT equipment in close proximity with no social safe distancing.

The particular Zoom platform we have chosen allows up to 100 participants. There is no notice required and the meeting ID and password required to join the meeting is shown on the agenda, which has been posted on both the Parish Noticeboard and on the Village Website as is the normal practice.

I appreciate that many parishioners may not have used Zoom before or may not have any IT devices, knowledge or indeed any broadband connection. I have therefore also put on the noticeboard, brief instructions (as attached) on how parishioners can join the meeting by all the different means. This has also been posted on the website and I have also emailed this information out to all parishioners on our database.

I am aware that many would prefer the traditional face to face meetings but the official guidance and advice from NALC, DALC and the SLCC is that Councils now meet virtually and remotely by use of the IT video platforms. This is to ensure that everyone (Councillors, Staff, District and County Councillors and Members of the Public) are able to attend the meeting and stay Covid 19 secure and safe. This is particularly important in Offwell where there is a high percentage of the residents in the perceived vulnerable elderly age category.



I envisage that Council Meetings will continue to have to meet remotely and virtually until at least the end of the year, if not longer, but I will continue to monitor any further guidance on the holding of Council meetings as it is issued.

These last few months has been a difficult and challenging time for all but Offwell has shown that there is an excellent community spirit in the Parish.

Whilst Offwell has been fortunate so far in having suffered little virus impact, the Parish is now better positioned should further outbreaks reoccur with The Offwell Neighbourhood Support Group and the various County & District Council policies/strategies now in place.

Finally, I wish to thank the Chair and other Councillors for their support during this period.

Adrian Jenkins

Clerk to Offwell Parish Council

25<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## **Offwell Neighbourhood Support Group - Report Coronavirus Strategy**

Earlier in the year, when the risks and impacts of the Coronavirus became apparent, it was deemed necessary that we should create a support group in Offwell to manage its impact and identify areas where help could be provided.

A small group, consisting of members of the ORSA group and the Parish Council was formed, and the Offwell Neighbourhood Support Group was formed. The objectives of this group were as below:

# to provide support to villagers having difficulty with shopping and collecting medication.

# to facilitate emergency domestic repairs during lockdown.

# to provide a communication platform to keep villages up to date with developments via the Offwell website and the village E-mail facility.

# to promote communication with the more vulnerable members of the community through friendly phone calls.

The support group produced a communication setting out the process to be followed, and details of the contact number to be used to request help. This communication (copy attached) was sent to all 208 residences in the village either by E-mail or by post to those households where the E-mail address was not known. The communication asked people to confirm their contact details and invited anyone who felt they could be of assistance to forward their details and areas where they could assist.

The process was that villagers who required assistance should call the contact number which was manned by Lynn Whithear and requests for help were then passed to one of our forty or so volunteers to carry out and report back on completion.

There have been 20 plus requests fulfilled in this way to date.

The communication aspect of the support group has been carried out via the E-mail database and the Website these have been maintained by Carol Hayes and Dawn Mulrain and include a wide range of topics related to the virus.

We have been fortunate in Offwell that the virus has had little impact but we intend to maintain the current process to guard against complacency and to be ready should further outbreaks reoccur.

Mike Mulrain

## Website Covid Report by Carol Hayes, July 2020

During the first months of lockdown the Offwell Website regularly updated information from EDDC, DCC, Neighbourhood Watch, Devon & Cornwall Police, PCC, Devon Alert (inc. coronavirus-related scams), information for carers, families, refuse, transport and business.

The website also listed local news websites and the NHS website for daily updates. The **Coronavirus page** now contains an up-dated 'list of symptoms' and a summary of the Government's 'Covid-19 Recovery Strategy' published on 11<sup>th</sup> May. This publication covers the three phases of the Government's long-term Covid response.

With the large volume of information sent out by local and central government the **Offwell email database** is used by the website team to select and highlight specific and useful website updates.

The **Offwell Neighbourhood Support page** covers the local community response details plus Honiton websites that offer home delivery support and local news. (Mike Mulrain will report on the Support Group itself.)

**The Grazing Cow** Farm Shop and café has its own page as it continues to provide local home delivery to 'vulnerable' residents in the village. This service will continue after 1<sup>st</sup> August. Those who are shielding will still be able to access 'priority' home delivery from supermarkets (if they have already registered) but the Government will stop providing free food parcels to East Devon residents from the end of July. While this will not, I suspect, affect anyone in Offwell it may mean that we will highlight the need for on-going donations to the Honiton Food Bank.

**Restaurants/Take-away and Home Delivery.** This page has been updated for July and will continue to be up-dated as and when circumstances change. This includes information about Windmill Garage home delivery service.

**St. Mary's.** During lockdown St. Mary's website page has not only been able to inform churchgoers about on-line services, both locally and nationally, it has also provided information about other churches in the Benefice, namely St. Cuthbert's, Widworthy and St. Michael's, Farway.

The churchwardens continue to post service details on the website.

The following, originally intended as physical displays in church, have been posted on-line during April, May, June and July:

**Reflections on Easter:** hymns, bible readings, poems and prose

**VE Day 75 – Offwell Memories:** Four residents' wartime memories

**Reflections and Private Prayer:** on-line selection of prayers and poems for private reflection. These reflections are now displayed in church for those wishing to visit St. Mary's during opening times on Sundays and Wednesdays.

During the coronavirus pandemic **The Link** for April/May, June and July/August, has been published on-line in full colour. The Link includes bible readings and reflections, school news, gardening advice, on-line courses, book reviews, Offwell Woodlands news, local businesses and advertisers plus updates on village events including the Flower Show. Over the past months The Link has also included articles on church

history and heritage, church re-opening, church surveys and the loss of choral singing. The Link will continue to be published bi-monthly on the website for as long as the PCC request it.

Thanks should go to Melanie Jolly for her hard work and production talents in making The Link such a comprehensive and enjoyable read.

Martin Shaw's monthly **County Councillor's reports** continue to include informative and up-to-date information on the DCC Health and Social Care Covid committee.

As the national news provides daily updates on the pandemic, albeit somewhat confused and contradictory, the Offwell website will continue to prioritise Covid information and services as they affect the local community. This is a fairly straightforward process for the website editor as most local services keep their websites updated and well-informed. The only local service that I have needed to contact recently for extra clarity is Honiton Surgery. It continues to be necessary for patients with on-going conditions to be proactive about their follow-up checks (normally by 'phone), bloods and clinical tests.

Providing Coronavirus support has not been a problem for Offwell in the practical sense. There is a serious challenge, however, regarding the psychological, emotional and spiritual life for everyone who lives in the village and/or attends Offwell School. Coming together for church festivals, school events or the annual Flower & Produce Show is an integral part of community health and wellbeing. Churches are already disbanding their choirs, dismissing their organists and ending regular Sunday services. This does not only affect regular churchgoers, this is an existential challenge facing us all.

Signed.....

Dated.....





