

# WASHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL



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## Washington Parish Council Personnel Committee Meeting

**MINUTES** of the Personnel Committee Meeting held on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023

**PRESENT:** Cllr B Hanvey (co-opted), Cllr P Heeley and Cllr A Lisher.

**ALSO:** Z Savill Clerk to the Council

**Members of the Public:** None

**ABSENT:** Presiding Chairman Cllr S Buddell and Cllr J Thomas

The meeting was opened at 19:30hrs

**P/23/11/1 To Elect a Chair of the Committee**

The Committee proposed and it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Heeley chairs the meeting. An election of the Chair of the Committee was deferred to the next meeting. Cllr Heeley accepted and was duly elected.

**P/23/11/2 To Receive and accept apologies for absence.**

The Committee **RESOLVED** to **ACCEPT** apologies from Cllr Buddell and Cllr Thomas. Cllr Hanvey was co-opted to the meeting for quoracy.

**P/23/11/3 To Record declarations of interest from members in any item to be discussed**

None.

**P/23/11/4 To Approve Minutes of the last Meeting**

The Committee **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023 were a correct record and duly signed by the acting Chair.

**F/23/11/5 To Review the Council's current pension scheme and the option of joining the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).**

Supporting papers were previously circulated and considered read. Members reviewed the draft 2024/25 budget allocation for the Council's contribution to the staff pension, currently 3% into the NEST (National Employment Savings Trust) scheme. The actual figure would be

*Raw*  
*SJB*

subject to the staff appraisal in the new year, as per the terms of the Clerk's employment contract.

Members also considered the Clerk's request to consider the option of joining the LGPS which, unlike NEST, guaranteed a retirement pension income. It was noted that the scheme was significantly more expensive for employers, with contributions currently fixed at 19.2% and falling to 18.2% until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.

The Chairman set out the disadvantages of the LGPS to a small Council like Washington with a relatively small tax base compared with the predominantly larger councils in the district which were members of the scheme. He described the scheme as costly with no flexibility to fix contribution rates as with the government's NEST scheme. It was noted that the Council had not prepared itself to meet the costs of the LGPS, and was facing a £10,600 deficit to balance next year's budget following several years of reducing reserves to freeze the precept. Staff costs had steadily increased, including a significant salary increase in the current year as well as increases to electricity costs and the new introduction of contributions to broadband.

Following a discussion, the Chairman proposed that the Finance working party looks at a proposed total 5% contribution on the Clerk's current and predicted salary, and to see if it can be achieved in the draft 2024/25 Budget. It was agreed that the LGPS was too expensive to justify the required increase in precept. Cllr Harvey agreed but commented that a 2% increase in pension was insufficient. The Chairman's proposal was carried with one abstention.

**P/23/11/6 To Review and Recommend the 2024/25 budget allocation for staff costs.**

Members discussed the 2024/25 budget allocation for staff salary. It was noted that 2.5% was the historic provision for increases in this cost centre, and this was exceeded in actual increases each year, including two at 10% or more since 2020. The Chairman pointed out that a 5% increase would be required if the Council was to maintain the levels required for the Clerk's current position in the latest NALC spinal point 24/25 salary scale (set in April 2023), used by the Council as a reference point for salary reviews. The actual figure would be subject to the staff appraisal in the new year, as per the terms of the Clerk's employment contract.

Following a discussion, the Chairman proposed that the forthcoming Finance Committee working party looks at allocating a 5% uplift in the staff salary, instead of the usual 2.5%, to see if it can be achieved in the draft 2024/25 Budget. The Committee **RESOLVED** unanimously to agree the proposal.

**P/23/11/7 To Review and Agree the frequency of Council and Committee meetings for recommendation to the Council**

A motion was previously put forward by a member that the Council considers reducing the number of meetings, to reduce the pressure on the Clerk.

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S-J-B



Supporting papers were previously circulated. It was noted that Local Government legislation requires that a parish council holds an annual meeting (of the council) and at least three meetings in every year. In most cases a council will need to meet more often, with the frequency depending on its size and activities. This council holds an average of 39 meetings a year, including at least two committees per month on average.

Members discussed the clerk's workload generated from the meetings, on top of other parish business, as well as her second role as the Responsible Financial Officer. It was noted that an incident such as a dangerous tree, vandalism, persistent FOI requests, training dates and the windfarm development proposals, are examples of some of the business which contribute to disproportionately affecting this workload. Bank holidays also push back on the Clerk's time. The Council has no support staff.

A number of proposals were put forward to help address the issue, including the option to increase decisions under the Council's delegating powers especially payments within budget; set up more working parties to progress projects and carry out research which is common practice for smaller and some of the larger councils; reduce Full Council meetings to 11 per year by cancelling one in August; and to alternate the main meetings of OSRA & Planning & Transport Committee each month. It was noted that the OSRA meetings dealt mainly with routine inspection reports and maintenance which could be handled by delegation outside meetings, within budget. Often quotes were not ready in time to consider or exceeded the committee's spending powers and would be deferred to Full Council agendas. Planning & Transport meetings were not a monthly requirement. The Council's comments on routine applications were already delegated outside meetings to members. But the meetings were useful for time sensitive comments on major applications which cannot wait until a Full Council meeting.

Following a discussion it was proposed by the Chairman and **RESOLVED** to recommend as a starting point, the aim to reduce the two main OSRA and Planning & Transport meetings to six per year, starting from January. These could either alternate each month or be held together every other month, whichever works best in practice; and to consider increasing the spending powers of OSRA to allow payments of works already agreed by Council within budget.


**P/23/11/8 To Receive items for the next Personnel Committee Agenda and Agree date of the meeting**

None made. It was noted that the next Personnel Committee meeting is in January for staff appraisal, on a date to be confirmed.

There being no further business to transact, the meeting was closed at 20:20hours

Signed.....

Dated..... 29 JANUARY 2024 .....

  
S.J.B.