

# Clerk's report and item information for Full Council meeting 5<sup>th</sup> November 2024

## Clerk's report:

1. **Castle Point Local Plan** – The letter was sent to CP, the Clerk did not receive any direct response. The Clerk has also contact CP for a meeting with the Members of CP with the Councillors of the Town Council.
2. **Poppy Wreaths** – These are purchased.
3. **Christmas Lights Working Party** – The group met and the Clerk has circulated the agreed program as per C&C committee meeting.
4. **Memorial Bench** – The Clerk is hoping to have this installed within the next 3 weeks.
5. **IT Update** – The Clerk has her new laptop. The files have yet to go over to the cloud.

## Item 7. Committee Terms of Reference - looking at the responsibilities, Committee size, and Committee Vacancies

1. This motion is to increase the membership of the Staffing Committee from 6 to 7 members. This would bring the membership of the Staffing Committee in line with the other committees.
2. To expand the remit of the Planning, Highways and Licensing Committee.

The built environment isn't simply limited to planning and highway matters but also the management of our parks, open spaces and treescape.

It is vital that local residents have a voice and feed into environmental matters that affect our town. Recently, these have included,

\*The Castle Point Local Plan

\*Tree Removal notices (e.g. In Vernon and Canvey Roads)

\*The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (ended 25 October), and

\*The current Boundary Commission consultation (which closes on 2<sup>nd</sup> December)

It is suggested that the name of the committee changes from the Planning, Highways and Licensing Committee to the Planning and Environment Committee.

It is suggested that the purpose of this committee is changed from

### **Purpose**

To make observations where appropriate on all planning applications within the Town Council area and Government and City Council planning consultations and to make site

visits where necessary

To make observations on any Licensing applications within the Town Council area the

Committee thinks appropriate

To make observations on any relevant Highway issues referred to or being discussed by the

Highway Authority

To (\*additional part given in red)

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To make observations on any relevant Highway issues referred to or being discussed by the

Highway Authority

To make observations on any tree removal and replacement notices, on the management and care of open spaces within the council jurisdiction and on relevant consultations that pertain to residence within the Town Council's jurisdiction.

**Item 9. Working Group for the Café**

The Clerk as the Council to agree the members of the working group to look at the running of the café now that the 6 months interim period has passed.

**Item 10. Grant Application**

The Clerk has circulated the grant application from Southend Area Bus User Group. A grant for £224.00 is sort for covering their room hire costs. The Clerk asks the Council to consider the request and decide if they are going to grant it or not.

**Item 11. Financial Transaction**

The Clerk has circulated the income report, expenditure report and copies of all the invoices to be paid for the month of October 2024. The Clerk asks the Council to agree the payments for the month.

**Item 12. Financial Review**

The Clerk has circulated the bank reconciliations for September 2024 for the Council to agree. The October bank reconciliation will be circulated once complete.

The Clerk has circulated the budget comparison report showing the budget that was set and income received and expenditure paid for the year so far.

**Item 13. Agenda, agenda papers and publication**

Over the last year we have felt strongly that the best interests of residents and the council have not been served which has given rise to unnecessary tensions. This is due to the complete lack of reporting in writing on agenda. No papers, no explanations, no written recommendations.

Many decisions have been made on the verbal say so of a few councillors and have created a backdrop of mistrust and lack of evidential support for those decisions and a lack of transparency.

Whilst this is steadily improving through the efforts of the Clerk, we feel the parameters should be set by Council for consistency and certainty.

How are residents expected to ask appropriate questions when all they have is a sometimes misleading and unexplained heading to go on.

Councillors should have all the information before them with time to consider it and for transparency and completeness so should residents.

The art fair is a prime example of poor and speculative information causing poor decision making and angst.

Whilst the official record of meetings are the minutes, these can be unintelligible without the agenda and background reports. This is an important omission should they be needed in future, for instance when appearing at a hearing or inquiry or for research on future matters as precedents or guidance.

Regardless of what other councils may do this has always been the practice in Leigh and should be reinstated formally for transparency, accountability and the integrity of the council.

The following motion is therefore proposed

1. Henceforth this Council, in the preparation of agenda shall include a written report in relation to items for decision, and others, if helpful, setting out the subject matter, relevant information and research, costings and budgetary implications as necessary and the view and recommendations of the clerk together with justification and reasoning.
2. That all such papers form part of the agenda and are published with it on the website for the benefit of residents.
3. That if a report originates from a Councillor, they will seek the advice of the clerk on the information required for good decision making and to ensure there are no legal or financial impediments to what is recommended in the report.

#### **Item 14. Agreeing of Councillor Absences**

We currently have a situation where apologies for absences from Councillors who are regularly unable to attend due to ill health are agreed alongside Councillors who are occasionally unable to attend. We have to ask whether this

1. Is in the best interests of the Council and its resident; and
2. Leaves a poor impression with the public of the Council's commitment to transparency and accountability

I wish to table a motion which will ensure best practice is followed so that

1. All apologies must be voted on individually.
2. Apologies must be given directly to the Clerk, in writing, not to another Councillor, before the meeting.

3. If 2 is not possible verbal apologies must be provided directly to the Town Clerk before the meeting.

#### Background

We are all aware that there has been concern expressed at the constant absences of several members of the Council.

We have been through the explanation of how a councillor can seemingly just have someone give there apologies with no information month after month even over the 6 month period without any infringement of that period.

We have a Councillor who is clearly on long term sickness, and that is a sadness, and we wish that person well. However, due to that inability to function as a Councillor and to the resignations of former councillors in Elm's ward, until the recent elections that ward has had no representation on this Council for a long time.

Hopefully that is now rectified but it doesn't alter the fact that a Councillor has attended only a handful of meetings over the last 18 months, now sits on no committees and is visibly unwell when and if they do attend and has to be assisted to vote and takes no part in Council affairs or debate.

We now have the situation whereby a superficial nod of agreement is given to absences which gets over the issue of termination of councillorship. In practice a councillor can survive the whole 4 years in this manner.

We have to ask ourselves is this right for the council, the residents and the town of Leigh to be so underrepresented.

We have had ex councillors who just didn't turn up for months without any reasons given, who at least had the decency to resign. And we have others who are clearly unable to get to meetings and cite out work commitments or travel issues with regularity. Or indeed leave it to someone else to say it for them to get over the lack of apology. If they can't get to meetings what is the point of them being on the council.

With the influx of new councillors who have watched this happening over the months it is little wonder that they query the relevance of these councillors.

There needs to be a formal recorded vote on each absence. It will mean that if the vote is lost i.e. no agreement is given, this may have a salutary effect on some councillors to consider their position or turn up to meetings. The choice is theirs. The attendance by the administration is poor to say the least and leaves the decision making in the hands of a core few which is bad for democracy and for decision making.

#### **Item 15. Payroll Provider**

The Clerk has contacted another payroll provider who she has used in her previous Councils. The quote for J M Payroll is £65 a month. The monthly fee incorporates undertaking all the payroll paperwork, completing returns to HMRC and Essex Pensions and providing payslips for staff. It also includes all year end paperwork and Essex Pension year end return.

The present provider James Todd charges £7.25 per payslip amounting to £72.50 a month. The company provides all paperwork for the payroll but does not complete or send any returns. These are at present undertaken by the Clerk and the Finance Officer.

The Clerk asks the Council to consider changing payroll providers.

#### **Item 16. Christmas Tree's for the Community Centre**

The Clerk has been advised that last year the community centre had a Christmas tree in the foyer and also on the balcony on the outside of the front of the building. The Clerk would like the Council to agree to trees being purchased again and a few new baubles for decorating them. The Clerk will have an estimated cost for the meeting.

#### **Item 17. Annual Pay Increase**

The unions have now agreed the Local Government Pay for 2024/25 which the Clerk has circulated. The Council just needs to note the increases and agree them being implemented and the back dated pay from April 2024 for all relevant staff, including staff that left during the financial year 2024/25.

The pay increases are part of the pay and conditions for council staff which is why they are not for discussion but just for noting and agreement on record for the back pay. This cost was included in the budget as a 5% increase on wages was approved when it was set. This is normal and correct practice.

#### **Item 18 Leigh Heritage Centre pipe laying works**

The Clerk hopes to have the paperwork for this at the meeting for Councillors to discuss and agree.

#### **Item 20 Extension of Artist in Residence**

The artist in residence tenure finishes in March 2025. The Clerk has received a request from a past artist in residence for the current artists to have their tenure extended for another year due to the turmoil over the past 2 years.

The Clerk asks the Council to discuss this request and decide if they are in agreement.