

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PROCEDURES REVIEW COMMITTEE

Held on 25th February 2015 at 10.30am in the Brearley Room

Public Open Forum – none present

Present: Cllr Hughes (in the Chair), Cllr Alker, Cllr Ingram, Cllr Payne, Cllr Booth,
Cllr Deegan (by invitation), Jayne Cooper

1) To receive apologies and note absences

Apologies received from Cllr Greatrex (attending a planning inquiry at Stafford Borough Council)

2) To receive and confirm the notes of the last meeting held on 22nd October 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd October 2014 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

3) To discuss any matters arising not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda

Confirmation of rules relating to councillors expenses

The Clerk, as requested, had obtained advice on the rules regarding cllrs expenses and had circulated the information to PRG members.

SPCA had referred to a National Association of Local Council's Legal Topic Note that says *it is now permissible to pay a councillor an allowance "....for travel and subsistence within the parish as well as outside of it"*.

Advice from the Society of Local Council Clerk's was *in 2003 the rules changed (not in Wales) and cllrs can claim travel and subsistence allowance (or expenses whichever word is used) for "approved duties" carried out in and outside a parish. Reference was made to the word "allowance" and that the parish council must not get confused with the Parish Basic Allowance that District Cllrs receive and that Parish Cllrs can receive but this is not common.*

The Parish Council must be very clear about "approved duties" – cllrs cannot just decide to go somewhere and then claim for their travel expenses. It must be approved at a council meeting. All expenses claimed will be published at the end of the financial year and on a parish council website.

Therefore it was accepted that cllrs can claim for travel expenses for approved duties both inside and outside the parish.

Progress on the review of parish council policies

Committees had, at recent meetings been asked to review relevant policies ready for the PRG committee to carry out a review of all policies by the end of 2015.

The Clerk had sent members an extract from a Society of Local Council Clerk's publication listing a number of suggested policies that could be a useful reminder of policies Gnosall Parish Council should have in place.

It was agreed this committee should:

- Review the complaints procedure, the Clerk was asked to send a copy of the current policy to members
- Produce a developer liaison policy. Cllr Booth had tried to obtain a copy of SBC's policy but this had not been sent. The Clerk would follow this up.

It was noted that the Communications Committee would be developing a Social Media policy including videoing council meetings.

4 To consider a review of committee membership and re-appraisal of the function of each committee.

It was accepted that there had been a significant increase in the workload and responsibilities of the Parish Council particularly the way Council has had to come together to deal with each large planning issue over the past two years. Demands on the Parish Council and subsequent expectations from the community had grown and the parish council should adapt accordingly.

To ensure committees function effectively, it was felt councillors (both current and those considering becoming a councillor) should identify the skills and expertise they could offer by becoming a member of a particular committee.

It was appreciated that councillors are volunteers who give their time freely - with a variety of differing circumstances and opportunities to contribute. However, effective committees need people with a diversity of attributes. Some specific committees also regularly deal with a heavy workload and require members able to obligate themselves to more demanding levels of commitment and input.

It was agreed to review the current system and committee membership beginning with submitting a report, for inclusion in the April edition of GPN, giving a brief summary of the work of the committees. Committee Chairmen would be asked to write a brief summary by 9th March. As soon as possible, a reappraisal of the function of each of the committees should be carried out including the likely input/commitments from committee members. This could be started at the next PRG Committee meeting.

It was also agreed that as and when necessary it would be useful to target non-councillors to attend meetings where expert advice is needed. This had proved particularly valuable recently with the appointment of a local experienced planner to be Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group. This would be recommended to Council at its meeting on 9th March.

An email from the Chairman was referred to that related to a conversation he had had with a member of the public (and landowner within Gnosall parish) who had questioned the membership of the Parish Council's Planning Committee and whether councillors were also members of GRID. This was in relation to the Council's decision to object to an application for development on Audmore Loop. The Chairman had correctly sent the Clerk a report of this conversation to retain on record. This was discussed. The Clerk said as long as the Parish Council follows the correct procedures during council meetings and Cllrs fully understand the need to declare an interest when items are being considered to which they may have an interest, this is acceptable. Councillors being members of outside bodies/organisation is acceptable and should help the parish council work more effectively with other local groups. The Clerk also advised councillors to invite parishioners to share their views at Council meetings in the Public Open Forum or alternatively write to the Clerk.

5 To agree the time and date of the next meeting - To be confirmed