

# Cranham Parish Council

## **Clerk's Report for Parish Council Meeting to be held on 7 March 2017**

### **Clerk's activities since the last meeting**

The Parish precept request was sent to Stroud District Council but no money has yet been received.

Minutes for previous meetings written and published online and in parish magazine.

Article on precept (by Councillor Cooper) inserting in Parish magazine

22 Emails have been circulated on the Village Email.

Cash received banked and bills prepared for payment.

Accounts prepared and bank reconciliation done.

Handover notes prepared for incoming Clerk.

Final salary calculations and P45 prepared. Payroll and tax information completed.

### **Defibrillator**

The Defibrillator by the village hall must be checked by an employee of the Council for insurance purposes. It is checked visually on a weekly basis and the box opened and the contents check monthly. A report is then made via the Heartbeat website. This takes about an hour in each month.

The ambulance service will automatically notify anyone calling 999 of the code to get the defibrillator **ONLY** if they are calling from within a **very short distance** of the box – this rules out most of Cranham and the defibrillator will only be made available to those people if they are able to access it some other way. The defibrillator has not yet been used in an emergency.

One way of making the defibrillator of more use to the whole community is to use the VETS volunteers to deliver it when necessary.

### **VETS**

When the defibrillator was installed a VETS (Village Emergency Telephone System) was set up to work alongside it but this appears to be widely misunderstood and is not currently used. I am aware that very few (if any)

residents know the number to call to activate the VETS and as a VETS volunteer myself I was not given the code to use the defibrillator box. I believed that the ambulance service would give it when needed. I understand from the Heartbeat Trust that this is **not** the case.

The VETS works by having a single 'emergency number' that people within the village can call for help. The call is then cascaded to up to 10 people simultaneously who have volunteered to be helpers. Once the phone is answered by one of the volunteers the others' phones stop ringing. The volunteer taking the call can then go to the aid of the person calling. The VETS system is not specifically for using the defibrillator but the volunteer could take the defibrillator to the person calling if appropriate, or they could simply go round and help if a second adult is needed while an ambulance arrives, or to look after a young child if the parent is incapable after an accident. VETS is for use in all emergencies, not just those requiring a defibrillator.

The key to the VETS system being of any use is for the number to be made widely available and for Cranham residents to keep it on/by their phone so that they can call it if needed.

**NB the ambulance service DO NOT call the VETS system to get help for people and will only give the defibrillator code to those very close to the village hall.**

To make effective use of either of these systems more public information is needed.

- The number for the VETS system needs to be circulated to all residents and published prominently on the website, in the parish magazine and on notice boards.
- The VETS volunteers should be given some training on what they might be asked to help with, DBS checked if appropriate (as they may be in people's homes and may be left in charge of children or vulnerable adults) and given the code to use the defibrillator so they can fetch and use it if needed by people away from the village hall area.
- An article needs to be circulated in the parish magazine and on the website explaining what the VETS does and how to access it, when in need.

To be of use to the Community the Defibrillator or the VETS must be used together an information disseminated effectively to those most likely to need it.

## **Village Email as part of the Emergency Plan**

The Village email was set up in 2007 to contacting everyone quickly after the floods of that year when there were issues with water distribution. It currently covers approximately half of the households within Cranham Parish. If a similar severe weather situation were to occur many of the parishes more vulnerable households are not easily and quickly contactable, as we do not have their email addresses or telephone numbers. Email use is now much more widespread than

it was in 2007 and it would be wise to try to increase the number of households covered by the village email and to investigate other means of contacting those who might be most vulnerable (not just the elderly). The village email covers the majority of older residents (but not all) but has particularly weak coverage of many of the younger households and people new to the village.

Vulnerable people include the very elderly, those alone with young children, those with physical or mental conditions that might make them more vulnerable to anxiety or coercion.

The village email could be used alongside the VETS volunteers to communicate in a crisis.

**Councillors are asked to consider how best to update the village email list and how best to compile a list of vulnerable households with the best means of contacting them identified. Councillors should also consider whether the VETS needs to be re-launched or ended.**

## **Training**

Marcia Lynall and Charlie Overs attended a Councillor training session with Stroud District Council on strengthening and maintaining personal resilience.

## **Grass cutting contract**

Grass cutting of the playing field and the allotments is currently carried out by Countrywide. The Playing Fields Committee were looking at alternative contractors but have not provided any alternative contractors or quotations to the Clerk.

Countrywide will charge £100 +VAT for each cut starting in March 2017.

The Council agreed to budget for an additional 2 grass cuts a year on the same basis as at present. It was agreed in December that the proposals are costed on the basis of 10 cuts per year – monthly cuts in March, April, May and August, September and October with fortnightly cuts in June, and July, making 10 cuts in total.

**Council need to agree the appointment of Countrywide, or an alternative contractor, for the coming year as grass cutting starts in March.**

## **Neighbourhood Watch/Crime**

Several attempted burglaries and thefts appear to have taken place in Cranham in the last few weeks, including garden sheds but also break-ins to residential premises. One of these was notified to the Council by the John Gazzard/Neighbourhood Watch. The Council does not receive any information

directly from the police as it has in the past. Other incidents have been reported on social media.

## Planning

S.16/2629/REM – Hillside – approval of detailed plans - refused permission

S.17/0418/HHOLD – changes to roof and decking at Woodside Lodge – Council's response to be agreed at this meeting

## Finance

Cheques presented for signature at the last meeting were not signed – it is requested that cheques are signed during the meeting at the appropriate agenda item to ensure there are not unnecessary delays in making payments.

Cheques to be signed at this meeting:

- a. £59 to Glasdon for purchase of wall mounted bin for the Bus shelter on A46 (within Upton St Leonard's Parish) – section 137 payment
- b. £520 to Cranham Parochial Church Council for the Churchyard
- c. £712.80 to be paid to Caroline Field - salary
- d. £80 for Cranham Village Hall – room bookings
- e. £128.24 GAPTC Annual Subscription
- f. £17.50 PATA (UK) payroll

## Council Meetings for the forthcoming year

In terms of when the best time to hold council meetings would be - they need to comply with deadlines for financial reporting - all other activities can be added to any meetings. The Council needs to hold a minimum of 4 meetings a year by law (and according to Cranham PC standing orders). Ordinary council business can be added to the agenda at the Annual Parish Council meeting (but not at the Annual Parish Meeting).

To comply with the latest financial reporting requirements holding a meeting on the first Tuesday of the month is not always going to be appropriate. Suggested timing of meeting might be:

**1st week in April** - Annual Parish Meeting - anything decided at this meeting can then be followed up by the council in its next meeting (NB The Annual Parish Meeting is not one of the 4 Council meetings)

**3rd week in April** - Full ordinary Parish Council meeting to approve draft accounts up to end of March - the RFO (Clerk) needs time after the year end to finalise the accounts and send them out to Councillors to review at least 3 clear days in advance of the meeting so the meeting cannot be held earlier in the month.

**3rd week in May** for Annual Parish Council Meeting - no separate ordinary Parish Council meeting is necessary as normal business can be conducted at the end of the AGM - you will need to formally sign the internally audited accounts at this meeting (must be a different date from the initial review (according to Grant Thornton) and should be after the internal auditor has signed them off)

**July or September (optional)** if councillors feel the need for a meeting then but there is no regular time sensitive business for Councillors to do at this time - its an opportunity to review some of the routine documents that the Council must review each year - the Clerk has a lot of financial compliance work around this time of year but it does not require a council meeting or direct input from the Councillors.

**November/December** for agreeing the Parish Council budget for the following year- Councillors would need to read fully and research any supplementary information they require (in advance of the meeting) to be in a position to agree the budget at this meeting. The Council has a requirement in your standing orders to have agreed its budget by the end of December each year (this is not a legal requirement and you could change your standing orders if you want to do this on a different date). It might be appropriate to hold a working party containing all councillors and Clerk to meet a few weeks before the formal council meeting to thrash out what will be included in the budget and what additional information is required to reach a decision so that formal meeting time is not wasted.

**Late January** - if the amount to be requested from Stroud DC for the precept has not been formally agreed a meeting will be needed before the end of January as the request has to be received by SDC by mid February.

The initial review and final signing of the accounts are supposed to be at different meetings according to Grant Thornton and the Council was chastised last year for doing it at the same meeting as it does not provide enough time to perform a review and reflection.

NB There is no requirement to hold the meetings on the first Tuesday of the month, although it has been the Council's habit over the last few years there is nothing in standing orders about this and Councillors can choose whichever dates are most suitable.

Automatic Planning meetings are an expensive, and possibly unnecessary, addition to the Council's workload. At the moment a meeting is called every time a planning application is received but usually the response is not to support or object. The Council should consider whether it would be appropriate for a Parish Council policy to be developed regarding planning which requires the Clerk to make a 'neither approve, nor object' response to any applications received on the last day of consultation UNLESS there is an indication that a member of the parish or a parish councillor wants to have the matter discussed by the Council. Councillors could consider whether the policy should include the following:

- On receipt of notification of a new planning application the Clerk notifies all Councillors and sends out a village email and posts the new application on the News section of the Parish Council website.
- The email to councillors and village email should give information about the

application, its location, and the date by which responses must be made. It should then state that if anyone wishes to have the application discussed by the Parish Council they must notify the Clerk within 7 days of the email and then an extraordinary Parish Council meeting will be convened to discuss and formulate a response.

- If a member of the public or any of the parish councillors want to discuss the application then a meeting is convened by the Chairman, and called by the Clerk, giving the usual minimum 3 clear days notice (This complies with the law and with standing orders). It would end the automatic calling of a meeting every time there is a planning application and if the policy is clear it does nothing to remove the Council's right to object or approve when appropriate. It would however save an enormous amount of everyone's time and consequently money.

On a general note - although the Council may hold a meeting to discuss **only** a planning application it is not limited to holding a meeting and not covering other business - if a meeting is called (with all the attendant costs) then it makes sense to cover any other outstanding matters at that meeting and treating it as you would any other ordinary Council meeting. Planning meetings have to have the same standard items on the agenda as 'normal' meetings and must be separately minuted. Planning meetings are simply 'extraordinary' meetings of the full council (rather than committee meetings) and hold the same status, once called, as every other meeting. If it was appropriate to call a meeting in June for example because there was a planning application to be discussed it might be prudent to bring forward the agenda for the July meeting and cover that in June, where possible, then to cancel the July meeting. Council may cancel any meeting providing the requisite minimum of 4 meetings a year is held. It is not necessary to hold meetings if there are no motions to agree.

Caroline Field  
Parish Clerk  
1 March 2017