

Draft minutes of the Community Centre Committee (acting as Trustee)
meeting held on 26th June 2023
at 6pm at Combe Martin Community Centre.

Present: D Optix, T Seldon, E Smallridge, R Watkins and M Worth.

Also in attendance: 0 Members of the Public and Andrew Wyr (Clerk)

The Clerk reminded Committee members that they are obliged to act in the best interests of the Trust (putting aside their position as Parish Councillors) and that Charity Commission rules require that there is evidence of discussion / debate with alternatives and consequences being considered. The Committee are also expected to make decisions which are “reasonable” i.e., that most reasonable people would agree with, if they had the same information. The Clerk also said that if he felt any decision being made could be open to being challenged, that he would try to alert members.

CCC/1/23 Election of Chairman

As she was the existing Chairman of the Committee and of the Council, it was felt Cllr Seldon was best placed to chair the committee. Cllr Seldon was elected Chairman for the municipal year 2023/2024. (Proposed: Cllr Optix, Seconded: Cllr Worth. Voted for: unanimous)

CCC/2/23 Apologies

Apologies had been received and were accepted from Cllrs Cass and Corner.

CCC/3/23 Declarations of Interest

No Councillors declared any interest.

CCC/4/23 Public Participation

There were no members of the public present, so there were no questions asked.

CCC/5/23 Minutes

The minutes from the 30th of May 2022 meeting were agreed to be accurate, so Cllr Seldon signed them.

CCC/6/23 Committee Introduction

The Clerk explained that the Council did not own the Community Centre but that it is owned by a Trust set up in 1874, designed to provide education to the children of the village. A copy of the Trust rules (or “Scheme”) was presented to each Member of the Committee.

When DCC gave the property to CMPC (2012) to be used as a Village Hall, they failed to update the Trust rules, so the Community Centre is still supposed to be used for “Education”. (They also didn’t “give” the building to CMPC, they made CMPC the sole Trustee.) For the past year he has been trying to get the Trust rules updated but this hasn’t been a priority and the Charity Commission are not very helpful when trying to get guidance. Leys Charity have managed to update their rules so he will contact them for some advice.

This Committee acts as the sole Trustee. If it wasn’t for the Parish Council paying the bills of the Community Centre (via an annual grant) it would have gone bust a long time ago. The Trust has virtually no income, all of the typical overheads you would expect (electric, gas, rates, insurance), no cash and a single asset (the building).

The Community Centre is in a reasonable condition, with the exception of the windows, which need urgent significant repair/replacement. The window repairs will cost in the region of £100,000+ because the building is Listed, and we are only allowed to replace like for like.

From a purely financial point of view, he would be at fault if he didn’t float the idea that the Parish Council should cut its losses, wind up the Trust, sell the building and donate the proceeds to the Friends of the Primary School. – he believes that this would be reasonable, justifiable and in line with Trust rules.

The alternative (which the Committee is currently trying to see happen) is that the Trust rules are updated so the Trust can provide a “Village Hall”. The Trust then leases the entire building to the Parish Council, for £1 per year, on a full maintaining and repairing lease. This will make the Parish Council liable for the window repairs, protect the asset and provide a nominal income rather than a substantial financial loss each year. There are several steps and issues which would need to be overcome, but he also thinks that this option, could be seen as reasonable.

The Parish Council moved into one of the 4 main rooms at the Community Centre in December 2021 and since then has been trying to find savings or income that offset the cost of running the building. – Primarily this is using the income from renting the old Council Offices and it is hoped, the saving of not having to rent a unit for the Council workmen. Moving the Council workmen to the Community Centre would (with the old office rent) largely cover the running costs of the building.

Moving the workmen to the Community Centre does rely on getting planning permission for vehicle access (recently submitted).

CCC/7/23 Trust Finances

The finances for the previous year were reviewed and accepted. There was a wide-ranging discussion on how to attract potential hirers of the Community Centre and to boost its “desirability” and profile. The Trust is depending on the Parish Council to continue to support it financially but in the same way the local Village Hall turned itself around and is now thriving, the Trust are optimistic that the Community Centre can do the same.

CCC/8/23 Any other business

There was no other business, so the meeting closed at 7pm.