

Introducing myself and explaining the procedure for the investigation, and that my final report will have to make a finding of breach or no breach has to be completed by 16th June. The report will be referred to the Standards Committee who will deal with it under the old procedure as the allegation pre-dates the introduction of the new procedures.

Nothing that the only matter referred for investigation relates to the allegation by Councillor Griffiths that Councillor Puckering did not declare an interest at the Parish Council meeting on 11th Feb 2008 when members voted to send a cheque for £600 to Rowney Green Pre-school.

Firstly establishing that the facts of what was alleged were not in dispute. Confirming that the clerk had already told to me that the cheque for the pre-school was indeed on the list of cheques referred to at the meeting on 11th Feb. Councillor Puckering agreeing that this was the case.

Secondly, discussing his relationship with the pre-school. He confirmed that he is the chairman of Rowney Green Pre-school which is a non profit making voluntary organisation that is run by a committee of parents. He has no involvement in the day to day running of the pre-school. All operational decisions are made by the committee and staff at regular meetings they hold at the premises used by the pre-school. Once a year he attends the AGM which he chairs; he pointed out that he sees his role in doing this largely as supporting the formalities of the meeting which he is confident at dealing with due to his experience as a councillor.

Councillor Puckering confirmed that his wife Rosemary is employed by the committee to work as a supervisor at the pre-school for which she is paid a salary.

Discussing the payments of grants generally by the Parish Council; Councillor Puckering confirming that each year a figure in the region of £5000 is paid in grants to various voluntary organisations operating for the benefit of the community in the parish. These include one other pre-school called Bear Hill pre-school, various football teams and cricket clubs, and other organisations such as the Carers Society and the Historical Society. Grants have also been used to support village events.

With reference to the annual budget, Councillor Puckering is on the Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC). He prepares the budget each year. He tries to keep it in a simple format which is easy to understand. He explained that the draft budget is usually first considered by the FGPC in October for the forthcoming financial year. He presents the budget paper; it lists all the planned spending for the year including the grants. Once approved by the FGPC it is then referred back to the full Parish Council. The draft budget sometimes goes back and forward between the committee and the full Parish Council a few times before the final figures are agreed and the budget is formally approved by the full Parish Council.

Nothing with reference to the documents provided by the clerk that the original decision to make the grant to the play group dates back to 1996. The minute provided shows that Councillor Puckering declared an interest and left the meeting for the decision. The grant has been made every year since then; the amount has gone up from time to time.

On this issue of when he would declare an interest, Councillor Puckering explained that he understands that he has a prejudicial interest in the payment of the grant to the play group. He stated that if the pre-school is discussed specifically he would immediately declare a prejudicial interest and leave the meeting. This would apply whether the meeting was of the FGPC or of the full parish Council. This is the practice he has always followed since the grant was first made back in 1996.

In relation to the procedure for payment of cheques, Councillor Puckering confirming that all items of expenditure are on the budget. Once this has been approved payments are then made by cheque. The clerk produces a list of all cheques at each full meeting of the PC. The list is handed out at the meeting but it simply reflects what has already been decided i.e. it is a fait accompli. Sometimes there is discussion but only if one of the Councillors is not sure what a cheque is for. Generally the cheque list is not for discussion; it is not an agenda item. Councillor Puckering agreed that the authorisation of the cheques at the meeting was really an administrative exercise and not an actual decision.

The only time there would be an actual decision on a cheque would be if the clerk had had to write a cheque for an urgent item that was not planned e.g. an insurance claim or a repair.

Councillor Puckering explaining that the issue of the cheque to the play group had come up on the night of the meeting. It had been raised by Councillor Griffiths. She had asked a question along the lines of "Why is this cheque being paid to the pre-school?"

Councillor Puckering's recollection was that the clerk had responded and explained what the payment was for. He also pointed out that he was surprised by the question coming from Councillor Griffiths as she was on the FGPC and should have known how the budget process worked.

Councillor Puckering confirming that any new request for a grant would first go for consideration at the FGPC, and then be referred back to the full parish council for a decision. Grants are not rolled over automatically year on year; they are discussed at the budget stage. Each item is taken line by line and Councillor Puckering who usually chairs the meeting will call out each line and ask for any comments.

Councillor Puckering confirming again that with regard to the payment of cheques, it is not a decision at the meeting; the decision has already been made. Any details discussed are for information only. He would not expect to declare an interest in this part of the meeting as it is not a decision but simply the mechanism for the cheques being issued.

SS

27.05.08