

Date: July `25 To: All Councillors From: Village Hall Chairman

Report to Council: **Review of Parish employees and introduction of a Parish Assistant.**

**Introduction**
Following the discussion at the Parish Council in May regarding Darwin’s Handyman Services, we would like to propose a change to the staff who support delivery of Parish activities.

**Background**
Last year, the Council agreed to extend the remit of Joanne Lowe’s role as Parish Clerk to include management of the Village Hall. To support this, it was agreed a caretaker would be appointed to support Jo with the Village Hall and a contractor would be hired on a task-by-task basis to support the upkeep of the Village Hall and other Parish assets.

Since then, activities in the Village Hall have grown with the hall now being used most days and by a variety of regular and one-off hirers. While we are currently seeing an expected seasonal downturn in activities, this growth is expected to continue with the introduction of the community cinema events, regular coffee mornings, and a monthly calendar of other events.

A brief review of Parish employees is as follows:

* **Joanne Lowe** has adapted to the extra responsibilities well and has forged a network of volunteer contributors to the Village Hall. Events are being planned and the team are learning all the time. The booking system is being managed effectively and Jo proactively manages the audit and compliance of the Hall and other Parish assets as well as she can with the limited resources available to her.
* **Susan Lear** is proving to be a reliable caretaker, undertaking a 5 hours per week contract mainly covering cleaning duties and key holder responsibility. The only concern so far is the ability to have contingency key holder coverage when Sue is on holiday.
* **Darwin Davies** is undertaking the contractor role and whilst he is performing well in some aspects of his role, there are some concerns about the frequency he attends the village and as a result some aspects of his role are not being met, notably the inspections of the children’s play area and the litter picking duties.

**Challenges**

1. Jo takes on an incredible amount of responsibility, and while this is very much appreciated it does result in a single point of failure when she is on annual leave or if the worst were to happen. The Village Hall now has a number of systems and processes, including the cinema, emergency lighting, air conditioning, CCTV, public WIFI, solar battery storage, which require regular inspection and upkeep by the Clerk, however there is currently no contingency cover if any of these systems were to fail and the Clerk was unavailable.
2. We have recently received a number of complaints regarding the cleanliness of the Village Hall and these have been investigated by both Jo and I. It is our opinion that this is not a capability or conduct issue with Sue but an issue in the way the hall operates. For example, every other Friday we have a regular hirer who leaves at 5:30pm and another regular hirer from 7pm which therefore leaves a just a small window of time for the Hall to be inspected and cleaned. We have learned from this and agree more operational cover is required to ensure standards are maintained between hires.
3. Inspections of the Children’s play areas is happening but not as frequently as we had committed to previously.
4. Litter picking was previously supported on a volunteer basis; however, this could not be sustained and as the volunteers undertaking the litter picking did not wish to be employed by the Parish, this activity was therefore moved to Darwin, which as previously mentioned is not happening.

**Moving Forward and proposed change**

The Parish Council agreed in May that discussions needed to be held with Darwin to discuss our concerns and Jo has confirmed this happened in June. Moving forward Darwin will now just cover ad-hoc tasks as required, rather than any of the regular inspections or activities. As a result, this leaves a gap in operational coverage which falls back to Jo.

As mentioned above there is also a need for greater operational coverage to ensure standards are maintained between hires, therefore it is proposed that a new role of ‘Parish Assistant’ be created to support the Clerk and the Caretaker in weekly activities in the Parish and at the Village Hall.

The terms of this role would mirror that of the Caretaker, in that it would be based on 5 hours per week and include key holder responsibility, however it would also cover broader duties to support the Clerk in the management of the Village Hall systems and processes, litter picking, inspections of the children’s play area and any other activities as required.

**Cost and Benefits of the Scheme**

* At £12.24 an hour the weekly cost of the role is c.£61.20.
* Darwin’s current rate is £25 for the first hour and £20 for each hour thereafter equivalent to £105 for 5 hours work, therefore on a like for like basis this represents a cost saving of over 40%.
* Darwin travels to the village to perform his duties and is not always available, however we would anticipate for the Parish Assistant to be based in the village and available at short notice if required.
* As the new role is based on an employment contract rather than a contractor agreement, Jo will have greater accountability over the weekly tasks and when they are completed.
* The systems and processes in the Village Hall will have greater contingency.
* There will be better coverage and contingency of key holder duties, ensuring standards are maintained between hires.