

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on Thursday 9th September 2021 at 7pm at the Bodle Street Green Village Hall

PRESENT: Councillors Steve Williamson (Chairman), Keith Graham (Vice Chairman), Andy Long and Mike Smythe

Also present: Jackie Cottrell – Parish Clerk

00360 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – None

00361 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - None

MINUTES

To **resolve** that the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 7th April 2021 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

00362 RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 7th April 2021.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT COVERED ON THE AGENDA

The Chairman of F&GP asked members to note the draft minutes of the 6th May 2021 would be presented at the next F&GP meeting.

Cllr Graham still needed to be added to the bank mandate

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – None

GRANTS

5.1. To review the usage of village halls for Parish Council business and to approve grants for the first 6 months of 2021/22

The Chairman of F&GP referred Members to the summary table of the village hall usage and a discussion ensued. All Members were in agreement with the decision made.

00363 RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council a payment of £450 to each village hall. This amount is 50% of their approved grant.

5.2. To consider any change to the process for grants for use of village halls in 2022/23

The matter was discussed by Members at great length. Members noted the Parish Council's change of structure and budget over recent years would reflect any decision made. It was agreed the Parish Council required a more flexible approach to hall bookings in the future. The possibility of hybrid meetings was noted along with the importance of good Wifi connections whilst taking into account any necessary social distancing.

It was **AGREED** that the Chairman of F&GP and Clerk would work together liaising with the Dunn and Bodle Street Green Village Halls to consider alternative approaches for payment based on usage. If possible this should be agreed for 2022/23. It was expected that each Village Hall would receive a similar amount to their current grant payment for use of the halls. Both village halls would continue to have the opportunity to apply for a community grant each year.

5.3. To consider and approve changes to the application process for grants 2022/23

The current grant application process was discussed and no changes were made. It was noted it was not necessary to forward yearly accounts if they had already been received with a previous application.

00364 RESOLVED to instruct the Clerk to advertise for grant applications for the accounting year 2022/23. No changes would be made to the application process. The closing date for applicants would be mid-November.

FINANCE AND BUDGET 2021/22

6.1. To receive and note the monthly bank reconciliation for August 2021

Members noted the bank reconciliation prepared by the Clerk and approved by the Chairman of the F&GP Committee.

6.2. To receive the monthly budget monitor and discuss expenditure vs budget in 2021/22

Members noted the budget monitor prepared by the Clerk and approved by the Chairman of the F&GP Committee.

All budget items were in line with expectations and no significant variances had arisen. The Clerk asked Members to note she would like the Full Council to review her salary at a future Full Council meeting. The Chairman of F&GP to investigate the process and options available.

The Chairman of F&GP advised Members that the Clerk's overtime hours continued to be within the agreed parameters of last year's budget.

Travel costs would begin to be seen from the Clerk's mileage expenses.

The Clerk would continue to chase Heathfield & Waldron's First Responders for an update report on the defibrillators and to request a training course for both village halls.

The budgeted election expenses of £500 were expected to be transferred to the ear marked reserves at the end of the current financial year (virement). This would be finalised, if appropriate at the Full Council in January 2022.

The Parish Council would be incurring an unbudgeted data protection fee.

6.3. To review and recommend changes to insurance cover and consider insurance renewal quotation

This item was deferred to the September Full Council meeting as the renewal quotations had not been received.

The Clerk was instructed to endeavour to obtain other insurance quotes and to note if these companies were VAT registered.

6.4. To review the current level of reserves

Members agreed the reserves were adequate at 64% of the 2021/22 precept. It was noted again the ear marked reserves – Election expenses were expected to increase by £500. It had been necessary to build up these reserves as the last election in 2019 had cost the Parish Council £1,004.00.

6.5. To provide an update on the applications for VAT returns

The Clerk informed Members the outstanding VAT returns would be completed imminently and submitted to HMRC.

7. BUDGET STRATEGY FOR 2022/23

7.1. To discuss approach to the 2022/23 budget and make recommendations to Council

The Chairman referred to the report previously circulated to all Members. Each committee chairman would be required to advise the F&GP Committee of any budgetary requirements for the following financial year.

It was noted the Clerk's hours could potentially increase if the Environment Committee met more regularly. Covid-19 had had a detrimental effect on the potentially very active committee.

The results of the Community Survey could also affect the Clerks hours with future CIL project work.

Cllr Smythe reported on the positive feedback he had received from the community regarding finished projects and the importance of continuing to enhance the Parish.

Preliminary budget discussions indicated the F&GP Committee would recommend the budget for 2022/23 would be funded by the precept although Councillors were mindful of the rise in precept over the last two years. Historically general reserves had been steadily decreasing. The current level of general reserves was adequate and needed to be maintained.

7.2. To consider and recommend to Council whether to move to a longer-term budget planning process

Regarding the implementation of a longer-term budget framework suggested by the internal auditor, the Clerk made the following suggestions:

The possibility of a Parish Council Facebook page to improve communication lines with parishioners as well as informing them of any achievements etc.

The possibility of a Community Hub in the village halls. The Parish Council could consider working with local groups including the PCSO to further enhance services offered to the local community.

It was agreed to re-visit the item after the Environment Committee had considered the merits of a broader 2-3 year infrastructure plan at their next meeting.

RISK REGISTER

8.1. To review the Risk Register and agree any actions and changes

The Chairman of the F&GP highlighted the circulated document with some suggested amendments to the Risk Register. The Chairman of F&GP requested Members to forward any further suggested amendments to himself. He would liaise with the Clerk and the item would feature on the next Ful Council agenda for approval.

REVIEW OF INTERNAL PROCEDURES

9.1. To review the Code of Conduct and consider the need for an internal resolution policy

The Parish Council's Code of Conduct reflects the standard model available from NALC. The Clerk to re-email all Councillors the Code of Conduct highlighting information on Declarations of Interest for noting.

It was agreed more clarity was needed regarding the action taken as a result of a complaint made against a councillor. Cllr Smythe would research the item further.

9.2. To agree to introduce a policy and procedures for data protection

The Chairman of F&GP asked Members to note the Parish Council had a legal obligation to pay a data protection fee to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) and to

nominate a Data Protection Officer. The Clerk to make the payment under delegated authority from the Legal budget, at the earliest possible convenience and to confirm the Data Protection Office could be the Clerk.

It was agreed a Data Protection Policy and procedures would need to be formulated. Cllr Smythe would research other existing policies.

Cllr Long left the meeting at 8.09pm.

APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2021/22

10.1. To agree and recommend to Council an Internal Auditor for 2021/22

All members agreed to recommend to the Full Council the re-appointment of Keith Robertson as the Council's Internal Auditor for the accounting year 2021/22

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

11.1. To agree to give delegated authority to the Parish Clerk in consultation with the Chairman of F&GP to respond, as appropriate, to consultation requests including:

- **National call for resilience**
- **Bus service in East Sussex**
- **Sustainability Settlement Strategy**

The Chairman of F&GP referred to the recent increase in consultation requests and asked Members to note the short deadlines attached to them.

It was also noted that not all Councillors responded to previous requests for comments and the Clerks available time should be taken into consideration.

It was agreed that the Clerk and Chairman of F&GP would consider the relevance of each new consultation request to the Parish Council whilst taking the Clerks workload at that time into consideration. There would be a need for Councillors to help with the consultation process at relevant times.

NEW COUNCILLOR INDUCTION

12.1 To note the arrangements for induction of a new Parish Councillor

All Members thanked the Chairman of F&GP for production of the induction information pack. No changes were made.

URGENT MATTERS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR NOTING and/or INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA – NONE

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Provisionally – Thursday 25th November 2021

The meeting closed at 8.26pm