

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on Tuesday 8th December 2020 at 6.30pm remotely via zoom

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

Also present: Jackie Cottrell – Parish Clerk
One member of the public

00223 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – None

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Long declared a PERSONAL Interest in the Village Leaf grant application.
Cllr Smythe declared a PERSONAL Interest in the Village Leaf and a PERSONAL Interest in the Warbleton Housing Association grant applications.

MINUTES

To **resolve** that the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 12th October 2020 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

00224 RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 12th October 2020. The Clerk to correct two grammatical errors.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT COVERED ON THE AGENDA

The Finance Chairman requested the Clerk arrange for an unsigned cheque stub for Orchard Landscapes for the financial year 2019-2020 to be signed by a relevant signatory. He also advised the Clerk to chase up, when time allows, the PKF external auditor findings from 2017.

Lastly, he requested the Clerk to confirm the legal requirements of a Parish Council regarding agenda documentation available to the public.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – None

AUDIT REPORT

5.1. To review and consider the actions taken as a result of the Internal Auditor report

The Chairman of F&GP stated he was confident the Parish Council were addressing all the issues highlighted in the report. No additional comments were made by members of the committee.

5.2. To discuss and note the External Auditor report

Cllr Long thanked the Chairman of F&GP for all his hard work on the External Audit. He highlighted the audit comment about figures in Box 2 & 3 of Section 2 of the AGAR which the Parish Council incorrectly filled in and asked for an explanation. The Chairman of F&GP explained that a support grant of £58 had incorrectly been included in box 2 as part of the precept rather than box 3. The overall numbers were correct. The support grant was no longer available so would not pose a problem in the future returns. The relevant boxes would be amended on the 2020/21 AGAR return and the differences would be

explained in the commentary. The Notice of Conclusion of Audit was displayed on the notice boards and website. The Chairman stated that the PKF's comments should be used a learning curve.

FINANCE 2020/21

6.1. To receive and note the November 2020 bank reconciliation

The Clerk had completed the bank reconciliation for November which had been circulated to all Members. This had been independently checked by the Chairman of the F&GP Committee

6.2. To receive and note the October and November 2020 Budget Monitors

The Clerk had completed the Budget Monitors which had been circulated to all Members. This had been independently checked by the Chairman of the F&GP Committee.

6.3. To note the payment of the Clerk's December salary

Noted.

6.4. To approve any payments

6.3. & 6.4. To authorise the bills for payment via BACS and CHEQUE

Cheque No.	Payee	£	VAT	£ Total	Purpose
	Jackie Cottrell			573.56	Clerk Salary December
	Jackie Cottrell			43.00	Ink - June, July, Sep & Oct
	PKF Littlejohn		40.00	240.00	External Audit Fees
	Jackie Cottrell			21.89	25 1 st class stamps
	HMRC			387.28	Payroll Oct-Dec 2020
	Wealden District		12.50	75.00	Dog bins quarterly emptying charges

00225 It was **RESOLVED** to authorise the four payments below £250. The Clerk's salary and HMRC payment would be added to the next Full Council agenda for retrospective approval

6.5. To receive and discuss a report from the Chairman of the Finance and GP Committee on the projected expenditure vs budget for 2020/21

The Chairman highlighted this item was a projection of expenditure against this year's budget to enable a discussion on the 2021/22 budget. He discussed each item individually and invited comments from committee members. The following points were raised: the Clerk was to investigate alternative options and costs associated with the clock at Rushlake Green, Cllr Long suggested a budget for infrastructure. Cllr Long asked Members to note that Cllr Williamson and himself were posting agendas etc on the notice boards on the Clerk's behalf; if this was unable to continue the Clerk's hours would have to increase to incorporate this job which he predicted would take approximately 40 minutes per trip. The last election for Bodle Street Green cost £1000, the Chairman of F&GP advised the budget line for 2020/21 should be moved to reserves and earmarked for future election costs. Cllr Graham requested clarification regarding Section 137 payments. It was explained there was a certain amount of money per elector which was available for further grants which did not fall under the existing Parish Council powers. The Chairman of F&GP clarified there would be no resolution for this item but stated as

had been agreed previously there would be no more discretionary grants paid in this financial year.

6.6. To review and recommend to the Parish Council, payment or otherwise of grants detailed within the 2020/21 budget

The Chairman of F&GP stated advice from the Clerk regarding grant payments specified in the 2020/21 budget. He clarified that if any of budgeted grant payments were not going to be paid, the Parish Council would need a resolution to that effect. The committee discussed each of the grant applicants detailed in the 2020/21 budget: the Bodle Street Green Village Hall - usage, the Bodle Street Green Village Hall mowing, the Dunn Village Hall – usage, and the churchyard maintenance grants. It was noted St Mary the Virgin at Warbleton had not responded to correspondence from the Parish Council. The Clerk was instructed to chase for that information and no payment would be made until evidence of expenditure had been received. It was noted both village halls had received a £10,000 grant from Wealden as well as half the projected grant from the Parish Council earlier in the year. It was unclear if any future grants would be available. Hybrid meetings, if possible, would only be an option at BSG village hall due to the location of wifi in the main hall.

00226 It was **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council that both the Churchyard grants would be awarded totalling £925 once the supplementary information had been received and the grant for £300 to Bodle Street Green for mowing would be awarded. No further grant payments would be made to the Bodle Street Green Village Hall or the Dunn Village Hall for usage. No further discretionary grants would be made in this financial year.

6.7. To receive and note the projected council reserves as at 31.3.21

The Chairman of F&GP referred to the paper which had been circulated outlining the projected reserves of £14,302.44 at the end of March 2021. This was based on expenditure to date, the projected expenditure to the end of the financial year and cashflow income from the VAT return. He requested Members to note when considering the budget next year, the recommended level of reserves is normally half the value of the precept and concluded the Parish Council is in an equitable position despite a drop in reserves over recent years. Lastly, he asked Members to note the current CIL balance of £13,807.22 which had been detailed in an income /expenditure return shared with the Council. These funds were earmarked and a number of projects were being progressed.

GRANTS

7.1. To review grant applications, payable in 2021/22, submitted by local groups, societies and organisations and make recommendations to the Parish Council

The Chairman of F&GP confirmed letters had been sent to all the groups, societies and organisations who had previously applied for grants in the last 12 months. The Parish Council had received 3 applications, details of which had been circulated to all committee members prior to the meeting.

Each application was discussed amongst Members and the following decisions were made:

Grant Applications (as at 30/11/2020)

Applicant	Brief description of request	Amount of project	Amount sought	Other Comments
Warbleton Housing Association	Improvements to garden, pergola, replace shed	£3,750	Any	£3031 raised from fundraising, donations and gift aid
Village Leaf Fund	50% of operating costs for Village Leaf operation and devt	£420	£210	
St John the Evangelist Church, BSG	Churchyard maintenance	£1344	Up to £672	Application has said any amount would be welcome

Warbleton Housing Association – it was agreed to recommend an award £300.

Village Leaf Fund – all Members were supportive of the grant application especially in the current pandemic and acknowledged the development of the link between the Parish Council and the Village Leaf would be very useful. It was agreed to recommend an award of £210.

St John the Evangelist Church, Bodle Street Green – it was agreed to recommend an award £300.

00227 It was **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council approval of the above grant applications and amounts.

7.2. To review and consider the SSALC model Grant Awarding Policy

Members noted the information. A resolution was not required at that point.

BUDGET FOR 2021/22

8.1. To receive the Clerk Report

The Clerk summarised her report which had been distributed to all Members prior to the meeting. The report was noted.

8.2. To discuss and agree the budget for 2021/22 and recommend to the Parish Council

The Chairman of the F&GP went through each individual item in the budget and a discussion ensued. The following points were highlighted:

- The grants recommended under Agenda Item 7.1 would take the draft budget to £18,192.
- A pay award of 2.5% had been factored in for the Clerk, but it would not be known for some time if any award would be made in 2021/22.
- It was recognised that the Clerk would need additional hours to fulfil all the duties required. The Committee wanted to keep the weekly contractual hours at 8, and as necessary offer up to 2.5 hour per week voluntary overtime. It needed to be clear that it was for the Council to offer these extra hours and it was entirely voluntary of the part of the Clerk if she wished to undertake them. It must be noted that if the extra hours were used on a regular basis, without clear parameters that they could become an implied part of the Clerk's contract. Any overtime would continue to be offered on a case by case basis by the Chairman of the Council or the Chairman of F&GP.
- The Chairman of the Parish Council suggested the Clerk drew up a written agreement regarding usage of both village halls going forward.
- The Clerk was instructed check the insurance policy against the asset register and confirm all the existing items listed on the policy were relevant.
- It was noted there could be implications in the future regarding potential changes to the mowing contract with Orchard Landscapes following the Wild About Warbleton's recommendations.
- Stamps would go up 9p in January. The Clerk would look at the bulk buying before that date.
- It was agreed to add an infrastructure budget. There were many items on the asset register which were in a poor state of disrepair. Licence costs were also taken into account. £1,500 was the recommended sum.
- The draft budget totalled £20,002, representing an increase of £1,636 on 2019/20 (9.1%).
- The budget would be reviewed at an additional meeting in January where it would be recommended to the full Council for resolution.

8.3 To discuss and agree 2021/22 precept and recommend to Full Council

The Chairman noted that information had been received from Wealden DC earlier in the day but it was too late to properly assess. It was noted that there had been a small decrease in the tax base. The committee agreed to a meeting in early January to review the figures before they were recommended to Full Council. The committee agreed to recommend adopting a balanced budget with the precept matching the proposed budget, subject to a review of the figures.

URGENT MATTERS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR NOTING and/or INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA

The Chairman of F&GP asked Members to note there would be a need for an annual review of the Parish Council's Financial Regulations and Standing Orders at the end of Q1/21

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed

The meeting closed at 8.56pm

