

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on Thursday 2nd December 2021 at 6.30pm at the Dunn Village Hall

PRESENT: Councillors Steve Williamson (Chairman), Keith Graham (Vice Chairman), Andy Long, Mike Smythe and Caroline Thompson (non-voting Councillor)

Also present: Jackie Cottrell – Parish Clerk
1 members of the public

00423 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – None

00424 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - None

MINUTES

To resolve that the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 6th May and 9th September 2021 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

00425 RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 6th May 2021

00426 RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on the 9th September 2021

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT COVERED ON THE AGENDA

None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A member of Wild About Warbleton spoke on behalf of their grant application. She advised Members that the signage they would like to erect was to better inform the public about the dedicated wildflower verges. There were some Daisy signs that had been erected by ESCC already in place but these would no longer be maintained by ESCC in the future and the signs were not available to purchase. The WAW proposed signage had been approved by ESCC.

One Councillor expressed concern about how the group would fund further costly bio-diversity reports and general funding in the long-term.

Cllr Thompson declared a personal interest in the WAW grant application.

She clarified the group did not require expenses. The bank account was healthy and WAW future projects were based on their existing available funds. Their pop-up stall was regularly used to fund-raise.

A further bio-diversity report for The Green would be considered in 2022.

The proposed signage sites had been approved by the relevant land owners and ESCC would be paying for the licences.

FINANCE 2021/22

5.1. To approve any bills for payment

The Chairman and Clerk informed the F&GP Committee there were 3 bills for payment:

The Clerk's December salary (to be noted)

The Clerk's printing costs £9.99

Graham Long - mole removal cost £40.00

Grant payment of £400 to the Heathfield & Waldron First Responders (£250 from the PC budget and £150 from EMR). The PC had received a report regarding the defibrillator servicing but Councillor training which had also been part of the agreement would need to be arranged in 2022.

00427 **RESOLVED** to authorise the payments listed above and to note the Clerk's salary

5.2. To receive and discuss a report from the Chairman of F&GP on the projected expenditure vs budget for 2021/22

The Chairman of F&GP referred to his previously circulated report and reiterated the key items had been highlighted for Members. The projected figures for 31st March 2022 had been reached after discussions with himself and the Clerk based on figures as at 24th November 2021. The Chairman of F&GP predicted, that on known expenditure commitments, there would be a potential £1,000 underspend. The underspend predominantly was due to the following:

- The Clerk's overtime hours were slightly less than expected.
- The zoom subscription had been cancelled.
- An external audit had not been necessary but would be required for the 2021/22 financial year.
- There had been no training expenditure.
- Postage costs had been lower than anticipated.
- Travel expenditure had been lower than budgeted as zoom meetings were held until May 2021.

The following items were also discussed:

- Clerk's salary budget – the national pay award for 2021 of 1.75% was still being negotiated.
- Infrastructure budget – quotes were still being received but these quotes were significantly higher than the current £1,500 allocated.
- Insurance budget – This item had seen an overspend. The internal auditor confirmed the PC would be unable to claim back the insurance premium tax.

Members of the Committee commended the PC for its successful budgeting but Members noted the PC must be clear to its electorate what any surplus funds would be spent on. The Chairman of F&GP confirmed all Committees had been asked to clarify a budget requirement 2022/23 and asked Members to note receipt of future CIL funds were an unknown entity.

The infrastructure budget was in its first year and it was noted there would need to be cohesion in the future with the CIL committee regarding the PC's priority list of repairs and maintenance.

The Chairman of F&GP advised Members the underspend could be allocated in the following ways:

- Moved to General Reserves which would then total approximately £14,000 which although slightly higher than the recommended levels, initial quotes received for some repair works were of considerable value.
- Recommended to Full Council to make a virement and add the funds to the environment budget for 2022/23.
- Create an Earmarked Reserve to support the parishes' Queen's Jubilee Celebrations.

All the options were initially discussed ahead of item 7 on the agenda.

5.3. To receive an update on application for VAT refunds 2019/20 and 2020/21

The Clerk confirmed both VAT claims would be submitted in the next week. She confirmed for:

For 2019/20 the VAT claim totalled £721.47

For 2020/21 the VAT claim totalled £701.54

The Chairman of F&GP reiterated the VAT refunds are not accounted for in the reserves until the refunds have been received.

5.4. To receive and note the projected Council's reserves as at 31/2/22

Members noted the previously circulated report on the PC's reserves. The Chairman of F&GP clarified the internal auditor and ESALC recommended levels should normally be approximately 50% of the precept, but that the Council had previously been happy with the current level. There were no further comments.

GRANTS

6.1. To review grant applications, payable in 2022/23 submitted by local groups, societies and organisations and make recommendations to the January 2022 Parish Council meeting

The Chairman of F&GP referred Members to the report previously circulated which listed the grant applications received:

In 2021/22 grants totalling £810 were made. Any grants recommended would form part of the 2022/23 budget proposals to the January 2022 Parish Council meeting.

Applicant	Brief description of request/ Comments	Project Amount	Amount sought
Bodle Street Green PCC	Maintenance of churchyard Grant last awarded in 2021/22	£1464	£732
Wealden CAB	To contribute to the running costs of the service for Warbleton residents, which can be accessed via phone, email, text or appointments (once our offices re-open) at one of our 3 sites - Crowborough, Hailsham or Uckfield. No specific project – grant to assist with running costs. Grant awarded Jan 2016 - £150 Grant awarded Jan 2015 - £150	Not specified	£300
Wild About Warbleton	To add informative and attractive signage to carefully selected locations in Warbleton Parish, including the Five Routes Voluntary Group – No membership	£793.16	£396
Warbleton PCC	Maintenance of Churchyard Grant awarded 2020/21 £625	£1,550	£625
Big Jubilee Lunch – Rushlake Green	Support and sponsorship for the Big Lunch and sponsorship for Tree Planting	Not specified	Not specified
Jubilee – BSG		Not specified	Not specified

Note: A grant of £250 to Heathfield and Waldron First Responders is separately budgeted as part of the agreement for maintenance of the 4 defibrillators. A further £150 is added from an earmarked reserve.

The Chairman of F&GP confirmed to Members a grant application had very recently been received from the Big Jubilee Lunch – Rushlake Green for £100 but would be considered at a later date once Members had received the application details.

He added Bodle Street Green Village Hall were discussing the arrangements for the Queen's Jubilee celebrations in January 2022 and would welcome some support from the Parish Council.

Each grant proposal was discussed at length and it was agreed the F&GP Committee would recommend supporting each of the first 4 applicants. Support for the Queen's Jubilee would be considered separately.

A Councillor asked Members to note the CAB offices had not been opened since COVID and the service offered was limited. No up-to-date accounts had been received but their income was in the region of £300,000.

Another Councillor asked Members to note the information on bio-diversity on The Green provided by Wild About Warbleton had been extremely useful and helped to fulfil the obligations of the Parish Council. It was noted that the dedicated wild flower verges were not supported by the whole parish and there were some strong views against them. They would also need to open a bank account.

The Chairman of F&GP clarified if all requested grant amounts were awarded the total would be £2,053.

The grant sums awarded were discussed at length and the following was agreed to be recommended to Full Council:

Applicant	Project Amount	Amount Sought	Agreed grant awarded for recommendation to Full Council
Bodle Street Green PCC	£1,464	£732	£350
Wealden CAB	Not specified	£300	£50 – see separate note
Wild About Warbleton	£793.16	£396	£300
Warbleton PCC	£1,550	£625	£350

The Wealden CAB grant would be accompanied by a note that the Parish Council would like to see an increase in their commitment to a face-to-face service.

The Chairman of F&GP reiterated where appropriate relevant receipts would need to be received before the grant payments were made.

00428 RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council the grant awards listed above.

Cllr Thompson left the meeting at 7.30pm

00429 RESOLVED to consider item 8 payroll provider as the next item on the agenda

PAYROLL PROVIDER FROM 1st APRIL 2022

8.1. To consider and approve a new payroll provider from 1st April 2022

The Chairman of F&GP confirmed the current payroll provider was retiring on the 31.3.2021 but would be completing the year end processes. The Clerk had obtained 3 quotations from alternative payroll providers who had been recommended on the Clerks' Forum.

It was agreed to use the services of James Todd & Co which was the cheapest quote. The Clerk to confirm that the company were happy to provide their services for only 1 employee. The charge would be £20 plus VAT a month plus a one off set up fee of £60.

The Clerk to write to the current payroll provider thanking him for providing the PC with an excellent service.

00430 RESOLVED to employ James Todd & Co as Warbleton Parish Council's payroll provider from 1st April 2022.

BUDGET FOR 2022/23

7.1. To discuss and recommend to the Parish Council the budget for 2022/23

The Chairman of F&GP discussed each budget line with the Committee and the following comments were noted:

- The PC's income for 2021/22 would exceed £25,000 resulting in the requirement for an external audit. The existing Internal Auditor had already agreed to conduct an audit for 2021/22 accounts. Total budgeted cost £400.
- The Clerk's salary was based on the assumption the 1.75% national pay award would be agreed with effect from 1st April 2021, a national pay award of 2.5% with effect from 1st April 2022 and up to 2.5 hours per week overtime would be continued to be offered to the Clerk on a voluntary basis.
- Clock maintenance costs would remain the same.
- Dog bin emptying charges would see a small incremental increase which had been the case historically. The Clerk would chase for an update.
- The budgeted flower bed costs would remain the same.
- The defibrillator grant agreement was a fixed figure.
- The F&GP Committees recommendations for discretionary grants had seen an increase of £50 in the total amount of grants to be paid.

- The Village Hall grant payments would remain the same for use of the hall for Parish Council meetings, although it was noted the underlying arrangements might change to be invoice based.
- Insurance budget allowed for a marginal increase. The PC would investigate a 3-year deal in 2022 which could potentially see a slight decrease. BHIB also offered an online mapping service for free if a 3-deal agreement was agreed.
- The Legal costs budget was increased to £200 as Land Registry documents needed to be amended.
- Misc. expenses budget would remain the same.
- The mowing costs were fixed and the Environment Committee had agreed there would be no changes to the contract requirements. Members noted it was the 3rd year of the contract which was approved in February 2020. The contract would be put out to tender in 2022.
- Payroll costs had increased to £300 as per the new payroll provider's agreed quotation.
- The Postage budget had decreased as per the projected spend for 2021/22.
- The provision for election expenses would not change.
- The Stationery budget would remain the same.
- Subscription charges, which had not yet been received, allowed for a marginal increase.
- The Training budget would remain the same. There were 2 existing Councillor vacancies and training would be an important element for a new councillor
- The Travel expenses budget would remain the same. The slight projected underspend in the 2021/22 budget was due to face-to-face meetings only returning in May 2021.
- The Website budget would remain the same.
- Following input from a councillor, the infrastructure budget would increase to £2,000. The existing £1,500 allocated in 2021/22 budget was committed and the PC had received other quotes for remaining work which were higher than expected. It was noted that the Environment Committee would work closely with the CIL Committee. The Clerk to produce a priority list.
- It was agreed to budget £500 to support village activities surrounding the Queen's Jubilee Celebrations.

As a result, the budget for 2022/23 totalled £21,615.67 which was an 8% increase on the budget for 2021/22.

00431 RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council a budget for the 2022/23 financial year totalling £21,615.67.

7.2. To discuss options for funding of the 2022/23 budget from precept and reserves and make recommendations to the January 2022 Parish Council

The Chairman of F&GP informed Members the precept figure needed to be submitted to WDC on the 14th January 2022. He clarified that the budget could be funded entirely from the precept or a proportion of the budget could be funded from the Council's general reserves.

The Committee discussed both options and it was agreed to recommend to Full Council in January 2022 that the precept would be set at £20,615 for the year 2022/23 which was an 3.06% increase on the previous year. The balance of £1,000.67 would be funded from the Council's general reserves.

It was agreed information on how the precept was funded would be clearly stated on the Parish Council's website and other available platforms.

The tax base information from Wealden would be circulated to Full Council as soon as the Clerk received it.

00432 RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to set the precept at £20,615. The balance of £1,000.67 to be taken from the Council's general reserves.

DATA PROCESSING

9.1. To review, consider and recommend to Council a Data Protection Policy

The Chairman of F&GP thanked Cllr Smythe for his hard work on the document he had produced on Data Protection previously circulated to Members.

Cllr Smythe highlighted the importance of having the correct governance in place. He confirmed the Clerk did not need to be the Data Protection Officer. The Council themselves are responsible for data processing.

Cllr Smythe would continue to work on the document. The Clerk would liaise with Cllr Smythe after attending a Data Protection course in the New Year.

The Committee agreed the document was a work in progress and would be re-visited at the next F&GP Committee meeting.

The Clerk to add the PC's ICO certificate on the website.

ESALC AGM

10.1 To receive a report from the Chairman of the F&GP Committee on the ESALC AGM

The Chairman of F&GP attended the ESALC AGM on zoom on behalf of the PC. He reported approximately 50 councils attended but there was a disappointing amount of information delivered to attendees.

ESALC were pleased with their performance in their first stand-alone year although the Chairman of F&GP asked Members to note their website was not particularly informative and seemed to drive internet traffic to the NALC website. The NALC website is very useful, but the PC could not have a membership with NALC unless they had a membership with ESALC. ESALC did however, offer a range of training courses for Clerks and Councillors. To conclude he recommended the PC remain a member of ESALC.

ESALC were not expecting their subscription charges to increase next year, but this had not been formally confirmed.

There were several separate presentations from ESCC, the police and a parish council representative. Keith Robertson would be circulating his slides of his presentation of the Black Cat shortly.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

11.1 To review, consider and recommend to Council any changes to the Complaints procedure

Cllr Smythe recommended the PC should have an internal policy to deal with complaints made against individual Councillors.

Committee members raised concerns that perhaps complaints against Councillors or the Council itself should be made to the Monitoring Officer at WDC, due to the sensitivity.

The Clerk had sought further information from Wealden DC and would update Members with WDC's response to that question. It was suggested that guidance on making a formal complaint on the PC's website should direct the public to the WDC website as it is a very sensitive subject.

The Committee thanked Cllr Smythe for his work and it was agreed to defer the item to a future meeting.

RAPE OF PEVENSY

12.1 To consider and invitation to join the Rape of Pevensey Society

The Clerk had received a brief email asking the PC to join the Rape of Pevensey Society. The Chairman of F&GP briefly clarified the history of the Rape.

It was **AGREED** to not action the invitation.

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

None

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 20.29