

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held on 17th November 2014 at the Parish Centre.

PRESENT

Councillors Mrs M P Bucknell, Mrs J M Cole, D W England, Ms L A Gifford, Mrs M H Harlock, Mrs J E Tavener and G C M Willis.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors J A Parker, R A Payne, P S Potts, J C Price and Mrs A R Wyatt and Mr G Hansell (Internal Auditor).

01/14 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Upon being moved by Councillor Mrs Cole and seconded by Councillor Willis, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs M P Bucknell be elected Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

Councillor Mrs Bucknell in the Chair.

02/14 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Upon being moved by Councillor England and seconded by Councillor Mrs Cole, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor Ms L A Gifford be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

03/14 MINUTES

Upon being moved by Councillor Mrs Harlock and seconded by Councillor Mrs Tavener, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24th March 2014 were approved as a correct record. As the minutes for the municipal year 2013/14 were currently unavailable as they had been sent for binding, the Clerk explained that the minutes would have to be signed at a later date by the Chairman.

04/14 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

All Members had previously declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in the setting of the Council's budget and Council Tax precept (Minute No. 12/14) but had been granted a dispensation by the Council to speak and vote such matters.

05/14 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted that there were no matters arising from the Minutes of its meeting held on 24th March 2014.

06/14 PARISH CENTRE PERFORMANCE

The Committee considered a report by the Clerk, a copy of which had been circulated, with regard to the operation of the Parish Centre over the previous year and in the current year to date.

The Committee was informed that income for the hire of the Parish Centre had risen significantly in 2013/14 by 22% to £8,542 compared with the previous year. Total income had been £8,868 in contrast with expenditure of £10,522. The latter had included the cost of re-fitting the kitchen which had amounted to approximately £1,200 and repairs to the boiler on a number of occasions at a cost of £796. In addition, energy costs had continued to rise.

Members were reminded that the Council had taken a decision to dispense with subsidised bookings of the Parish Centre with effect from the beginning of the current year but had subsequently decided to provide grants equivalent to the previous subsidies to three organisations. The Clerk pointed out that this was the equivalent of about £1,200 in income to which needed to be added a further £500 notional income for the use of the building for Parish Council meetings.

With regard to the current year, Members were informed that income to date was higher than for the comparable period in the previous year and that while the Government's rate relief for small business had continued in 2014/15 which had saved the Council approximately £1,000, there was no guarantee that this would continue in future years.

The Clerk informed Members that organisations and individuals hiring the Parish Centre often challenged the cleaning fee in addition to the hire charge, claiming that they left the rooms in a tidy condition. As a visit by the Cleaner was necessary in all cases to ensure that the whole of the premises were clean and it was comparatively more costly to heat the premises for a booking for a single hour rather than a longer period, the Clerk suggested that the Cleaner's fee be absorbed in a higher charge for the first hour of use.

The Committee also noted that the Community Association would be carrying out a survey shortly of organisations in the village regarding the venue for their meetings and that other premises were offering competitive hire charges. As charges for the Parish Centre had been increased for the current year, it was therefore

RESOLVED

that no increase be made in the charges for the hire of the Parish Centre for 2015/16 but that the charging structure for Warboys residents be altered to incorporate the cleaning charge in the first hour of hire as follows with the charges for non-Warboys residents being double those charges:-

Main Hall	-	£15 per hour for the first hour
		£9 per hour for each subsequent hour

Meeting Room - £10 per hour for the first hour
£6 per hour for each subsequent hour.

07/14 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

By means of a report by the Clerk, a copy of which had been circulated, the Committee was reminded of the arrangements for the payment of allowances to parish councillors. Members were reminded that parish councils had to have regard to the recommendations of an independent remuneration panel of their respective district council in deciding whether to pay allowances to its councillors. Although the panel had recommended the payment of a parish basic allowance to parish council chairmen, the Clerk pointed out that Warboys, in common with the other parishes in Huntingdonshire, had not implemented the allowance.

Members were advised that the mileage rate above which tax was deductible had been set by HM Revenue and Customs at 45 pence per mile.

In addition, the Clerk pointed out that a parish council could continue to pay its chairman an allowance under the Local Government Act 1972 to help offset the costs incurred in carrying out the duties of the office. The allowance of £80 currently paid to the Chairman had been increased from £75 in 2012/13.

RESOLVED

- (a) that no change be made to the members' allowances scheme for 2015/16 with no parish basic allowance paid and the mileage rate retained at 45 pence per mile; and
- (b) that no change be made to the Chairman's current allowance of £80 in 2015/16.

08/14 TIMEBANKING

Further to Minute No. 105/14 of the Council meeting held on 8th September 2014, a report was submitted by the Clerk (copies of which had been circulated) on the possible introduction of a timebanking scheme in Warboys.

The Clerk reported that he had spoken with the Clerk at Somersham Parish Council about the cost and implications of the scheme that they operated. Expenditure was approximately £11/12,000 per annum of which the Parish Council's contribution was currently £3,000 with the balance being met from grants obtained by the Timebank Co-ordinator. The Clerk informed Members that the Somersham scheme had been helped initially by a grant obtained by the County Council and that while grants would be available towards a new scheme in Warboys, there was little point in exploring various options until such time as the Council decided whether it was interested in proceeding.

With regard to the possibility of a joint scheme with neighbouring parish councils, the Clerk reported that both Bury and Wistow Councils were interested in joining a scheme with Warboys but required further information. Old Hurst and Broughton Councils were definitely interested in a joint scheme with the costs shared on a pro

rata population basis but Woodhurst Council were considering a smaller scheme on their own.

While further details would still need to be resolved, the Clerk suggested that if a sum of £5,000 were to be included in the budget, this should be sufficient for the principle to be established of commencing a scheme in Warboys. This would then enable neighbouring parish councils to decide whether they wished to be part of a joint scheme and a start to be made in exploring grant opportunities.

The Chairman expressed her strong support for timebanking and referred to the success being achieved in Somersham. Following discussion, it was therefore

RESOLVED

that consideration of the inclusion of a sum in the budget for the introduction of a timebanking scheme in Warboys be deferred for discussion as part of the budget and council tax precept for 2015/16 later in the meeting.

09/14 PENSIONS – AUTOMATIC ENROLMENT

Further to Minute No. 65/14 of the Council meeting held on 14th July 2014, a report was submitted by the Clerk (copies of which had been circulated) on the need to introduce a pensions scheme for the Council's employees no later than 1st June 2015 in order to comply with the auto-enrolment requirements of the Pensions Act 2008.

Of the Council's existing employees, the Clerk informed the Committee that only one person would have to be automatically enrolled in a pension scheme, although he could then opt out of the scheme if he wished. Two of the employees would have a right to opt in to the pension scheme and one would have a right to join. The total minimum contribution that must be paid into an employee's pension scheme before 30th September 2017 was 2% of which the employer had to contribute 1%. The level of contribution would increase in the following year to 5% of which the employer must contribute 2% and after 1st October 2018, the maximum level would be 8% of which the employer must contribute 3%.

Attention was drawn to the outcome of investigations into alternative pension schemes. While the local government pension scheme administered by the County Council traditionally was the pension scheme that local government employees would join, the Clerk informed Members that the employer's contribution for parish councils was currently 30% and would rise to 31% in April 2015. Enquiries had been made with a number of private pension companies, of which Aviva had indicated that they could offer a scheme. However they required full details of those employees likely to join the scheme which could not be provided at this stage. The third option was the National Employment Savings Trust which had been established by the Government with auto-enrolment in mind and which had a duty to provide a pension scheme to any employer that wished to join.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Council be recommended to join the National Employment Savings Trust for the purpose of the payment of pensions to its employees with effect from 1st June 2015; and

- (b) that the Council be recommended to pay the statutory minimum employer's contribution into the pension scheme.

10/14 INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Clerk submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) on the need for the Council to adopt an Investment Strategy to comply with guidance issued by the Secretary of State under the Local Government Act 2003.

Members were informed that the guidance recommended that a strategy be adopted by the Council before the start of each financial year and reviewed as necessary thereafter. The strategy needed to be approved by the Council and an item would be included on the Committee's agenda in future for the meeting in March to enable a strategy to be recommended to the Council for approval.

The Clerk pointed out that the Council's reserves were currently held in what was termed in the guidance as specified investments, i.e. that there was less than one year to maturity and they were made either with a body with a high credit rating, the UK government or a local authority. The strategy also required a reference to what other sources of information on credit risk were used in addition to or instead of credit ratings. The principle for investment by local authorities was to give priority to the security of the investment, followed by its liquidity and only then to have regard to yield.

The Clerk reported that approximately 75% of the Council's reserves were invested in National Savings Income Bonds and the other 25% with Cambridge and Counties Bank. Credit ratings could only be obtained for lending institutions if the Parish Council subscribed to one of the three ratings agencies and the Committee was informed that, in any event, the Cambridge and Counties Bank did not borrow money from the wholesale markets and therefore did not need a credit rating. However the bank was owned jointly by the Cambridgeshire Local Government Pension Scheme and Trinity Hall, Cambridge and was authorised by the Financial Services Authority.

It was therefore

RESOLVED

- that the Council be recommended to approve the Investment Strategy appended to the report now submitted.

11/14 REVIEW OF WAGES/SALARIES

The Committee reviewed the salaries and wages of the persons employed by the Council with the aid of a report by the Clerk (copies of which had been circulated). Members were informed that notification had been received earlier that day of the local government pay award for the current year and 2015/16. An increase of 2.2% would apply with effect from 1st January 2015 for employees on spinal column points (SCP) 11 and above and 2.32% for those on SCP10. In addition a non-consolidated payment of between £100 and £150 pro rata for part time employees had been agreed which was payable on 1st December 2014.

The Committee was reminded that the Council had reviewed the salary of the Clerk at its meeting in February 2005 following the receipt of new conditions of service negotiated by NALC and SLCC. In 2012, the Clerk's hours of employment had been increased to 20 hours per week in recognition of the fact that his average number of hours worked had been 24 per week. However Members were informed that the latter subsequently had increased to an average of 35 hours per week in the current year to date. Members expressed their appreciation for the additional hours that the Clerk worked in excess of the time for which he was remunerated and felt that his contract should be extended to 22 hours per week in recognition of the additional time now being incurred. In view of the additional work anticipated as the County and District Councils sought to delegate certain service provision to parish councils, Members also felt that it would be appropriate for an assistant to be employed for between 8 and 10 hours per week when the Clerk felt that this was necessary.

(The Clerk left the room while his salary was discussed.)

It was reported that the Senior Handyman and Handyman each worked 30 hours per week on SCPs 11 and 10 respectively which currently amounted to £7.734 and £7.283 per hour. The equivalent full time salaries were £14,880 and £14,013 respectively. Members were informed that the national minimum wage set by the Government had increased to £6.50 and the living wage for employees promoted by the Living Wage Foundation to £7.85 per hour. Even allowing for the national pay increase, the Clerk pointed out that the hourly rate of pay for the Handyman would still be below the living wage.

With regard to the Cleaner, Members were informed that the rate of pay had last been increased by £1 to £25.00 per week with effect from April 2013 and that the cleaning fees paid by hirers increased to £6 for the Hall and £4 for the Meeting Room in April 2005. As the other employees would be in receipt of the national pay award, Members felt that a small increase in the weekly wage paid to the Cleaner would be appropriate.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the salaries of the Clerk, Senior Handyman and Handyman be increased in line with the national pay increase with effect from 1st January 2015 and non-consolidated payments made in accordance with the award;
- (b) that the Council be recommended to increase the hours of employment of the Clerk to 22 hours per week with effect from 1st April 2015;
- (c) that the Clerk be requested to advise the Council at the point at which he felt that it was necessary to appoint an assistant for between 8 and 10 hours per week;
- (d) that the Council be recommended to increase the salaries of the Senior Handyman from SCP11 to SCP12 and the Handyman from SCP10 to SCP11 with effect from 1st April 2015;
- (e) that the Council be recommended to increase the salary of the Cleaner from £25 to £26 per week plus £6 and £4 for each booking of the Hall and Meeting Room respectively at the Parish Centre with effect from 1st April 2015; and

- (f) that the Council be recommended to retain the honorarium paid to the Internal Auditor at £100 with effect from 1st April 2015.

12/14 BUDGET 2015/16

The Committee considered the revised budget for the current financial year and the estimate for 2015/16, having regard to the budgets recommended by the Allotments and Leisure Areas Committees. A copy of the financial statements together with a covering report by the Clerk had been circulated to all Members.

Members were informed that the Earmarked Reserves at the beginning of the current financial year had been £154,820, made up as follows:-

Allotments	£101,837
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£35,984
Replacement of van	£ 2,805
Potential fees – landfill site	£14,194

The unallocated balance at the beginning of the financial year had been £99,820.

In terms of the current year, the Clerk reminded Members that the precept had been increased to £86,140 to offset the grant withheld by the District Council that the Government had instructed them to pass on the parish councils following the change in council tax support. Further income of £36,356 was estimated which included grants towards the refurbishment of the Jubilee Clock Tower and Connections Bus project.

The Clerk reported that the invoices for the Jubilee Clock Tower refurbishment and Jubilee Park play equipment had been paid in full and a number of other items of expenditure had been approved by the Council since the budget was prepared. However decisions had been taken not to proceed with the dredging of The Weir, CCTV at Adams Lyons playground and the community hub project.

Earmarked reserves for the maintenance of open spaces/playgrounds had been used to fund a grant of £2,000 towards the purchase of a mower by the Sports Field Committee and £10,000 had been transferred for the Jubilee Park play equipment. The Clerk invited Members to consider dispensing with the earmarked reserves of £14,194 for the landfill site which represented the legal fees recouped from the hazardous waste inquiry. However the Committee felt that this should be retained for expenditure on legal or consultants costs should the need arise given the number of waste recycling plants existing or proposed in the Parish.

At the end of the year, the Clerk predicted that the Council therefore would hold the following earmarked reserves:-

Allotments	£102,855
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£24,235
Replacement of van	£ 3,305
Potential fees – landfill site	£14,194
CIL	£ 166

It was also estimated that there would be an unallocated surplus at the year end of £76,144. As the Council was investigating the replacement of the Parish Centre,

Members agreed with a suggestion by the Clerk that a sum of £50,000 be earmarked from the surplus towards the replacement building.

Members were reminded that the Council had agreed to spend £17,388 on new play equipment and safety surfacing at Orchard Close playground, to apply for grant towards the cost and to allocate £5,000 from earmarked reserves to the scheme. It was also anticipated that safety surfacing for the mound slide at Adams Lyons playground would cost £5,000.

The Clerk invited Members to consider the replacement of the van used by the Handymen which had been purchased second hand in 2004 and which was becoming increasingly expensive to maintain. As the MOT test would be due on the vehicle in the spring, Members agreed that a replacement should be bought prior to that date.

The Committee noted that the Connections Bus project had been grant funded from a variety of sources in the current year with the Council only having to contribute £1,000 towards the cost. However if the project was to continue in 2015/16, Members were informed that the cost would be £9,300. While the local sector Police Sergeant had already applied for a grant towards a continuation of the project, the Clerk advised that further enquiries for grant would need to be made if the whole of the cost was not to be met by the Parish Council. Members were of the opinion that the scheme should continue to be supported because of the success being achieved with young people in the village.

It was reported that the Connections Bus staff would be reporting to the Council in December on the outcome of a survey of the young people about the provision of a skate park. However Members were of the opinion that it would be premature to make provision in the budget for skate park facilities even if the young people were in favour, as further investigations would be necessary and a site identified which inevitably would take some time.

The Committee also considered whether to make provision in the budget for the introduction of a timebanking scheme in Warboys (Minute No. 8/14 ante refers). Members acknowledged that if a sum was included in the budget, this would enable further enquiries to be made with neighbouring parish councils about a joint scheme and for applications for grant to be submitted.

The Committee also agreed to include a sum of £10,000 in the budget towards the earmarked reserves for a replacement Parish Centre.

Finally, Members were reminded that the rules for parish council precepts had changed as a result of the provisions of the Localism Act and any increase in precept above a figure determined by the Government would require a local referendum to be held in the same way as an election. The cost would need to be borne by the authority proposing the increase which, in the case of the Parish Council, could potentially be in the order of £3,500. The Secretary of State had decided not to set a percentage increase for parish councils for the current year but had indicated that he would continue to monitor the situation on a year to year basis.

Bearing in mind the number of schemes proposed for inclusion in the budget and the earmarking of funding for a replacement Parish Centre, Members considered that a 4.5% increase in precept was acceptable which would generate council tax income of £90,000 and a Band D council tax of £69.23 based on the current tax base of 1,300.

It was therefore

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to -

- (a) allocate £50,000 to an earmarked reserve for a replacement Parish Centre in the current year and make a further allocation of £10,000 in 2015/16;
- (b) authorise the purchase of a replacement vehicle in the current financial year at an estimated cost of £6,500, with part of the cost being met from the earmarked reserve for this purpose;
- (c) include a sum of £5,000 in the budget for a timebanking scheme to be implemented in Warboys;
- (d) include a sum of £6,200 in the budget towards the Connections Bus project in 2015/16;
- (e) allocate £5,000 from the earmarked reserve for open space maintenance/playgrounds to the purchase of play equipment for Orchard Close playground; and
- (f) approve the budget and set a council tax precept of £90,000 for 2015/16

(Councillor Mrs Tavener left the meeting at this point in the proceedings.)

13/14 BUSINESS VITALITY IN WARBOYS

Further to Minute No. 156/14 of the Council meeting held on 10th November 2014, Members considered a draft format for the proposed entry form leaflet for a Christmas 'Hunt the Santa' competition involving the shops and business in the village which had been prepared by District Councillor Mrs A Curtis.

District Councillor Mrs Curtis had proposed that the leaflets be handed out at the Christmas Lights switch-on event with the possible assistance of members of the Council. However the Chairman pointed out that the Christmas Lighting Group had not been approached about the possibility of the leaflets being handed out at the switch-on and she indicated that she would raise this with the Group at a meeting to be held later in the week.

The Chairman reiterated the comments that she had expressed at the Council meeting that a number of traders had informed her that they objected to having been asked to contribute towards the cost of the competition if they wished to take part. She also restated her view that the Parish Council should have been consulted on the format of the competition before it had progressed to the present stage.

Members present at the meeting indicated that they were not prepared to distribute the leaflets and felt that this should be left to the discretion of the traders. They also were of the opinion that the question of future competitions was a matter for the traders

themselves as the Parish Council had only become involved as a catalyst to try to encourage the traders to work more closely together to promote their businesses.

There being no further business, the meeting was declared closed.

Chairman