

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held on 7th November 2018 at the Parish Centre.

PRESENT

Councillors R J Dykstra, S J Green, Mrs M H Harlock, Mrs J E Tavener, Dr S C Withams and Mrs A R Wyatt

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J M Cole, Ms L A Gifford, J A Parker, P S Potts, Mrs S J Wilcox and G C M Willis.

01/18 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Upon being moved by Councillor Mrs Harlock and seconded by Councillor Dykstra, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor Dr S C Withams be elected Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

Councillor Dr Withams in the Chair.

02/18 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Mrs Wyatt and

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs M H Harlock be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

03/18 MINUTES

Upon being moved and seconded, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19th March 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(Councillor Ms Tavener arrived at the meeting at this point in the proceedings.)

04/18 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. 9/18) but had been granted a dispensation by the Council to speak and vote on such matters.

05/18 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted the following matter arising from the Minutes of its meeting held on 19th March 2018:-

Risk Register

Arising from Minute No. 14/17, Councillor Green offered to assist in reviewing the Council's risk register and the Clerk indicated that he would supply a copy for his attention.

06/18 PARISH CENTRE

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.

Income from hire charges had fallen to £8,473 in 2017/18 compared with £8,760 in the previous year. This had been due to the loss of regular bookings and competition from other venues in the village, particularly the Sports and Social Club where hire charges were lower than those charged by the Council.

Total expenditure had been £11,180 compared with £9,492 in the previous year as a result of expenditure on the water system to avoid the potential for legionella.

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 2014 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 £1,000 in income to which needed to be added a further £500 notional income for the use of the building for Parish Council meetings and the Council's workshops.

With regard to the current year, Members were informed that the amount of income received to date was lower than the comparable period in the previous year but having regard to the subsidised and Council use of the premises, a notional break-even situation was anticipated.

Members were informed that while the Government's rate relief for small business had continued in 2018/19 which had saved the Council approximately £1,000, there was no guarantee that this would continue in future years.

Councillor Mrs Wyatt reported that she had been approached by a member of the public who had expressed an interest in hiring the tennis court for table top sales. No objection was raised by the Committee as the tennis court was used infrequently.

RESOLVED

- (a) that no increase be made in the charges for the hire of the Parish Centre for 2019/20;
- (b) that the tennis court continue to be made available for the playing of tennis without charge but that a charge of £25 be made for the hire of the court for table top sales.

07/18 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 informed 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 Huntingdonshire 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 retained 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 £100 currently paid to the Chairman had been increased from £80 in April 2017.

RESOLVED

- (a) that no change be made to the members' allowances scheme for 2019/20 with no parish basic allowance paid and the mileage rate retained at 45 pence per mile; and
- (b) that the Chairman's allowance be retained at £100 in 2019/20.

08/18 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 the pay award for local authority employees in 2018/19 had comprised a two year agreement which had provided for a pay rise of 2% for most spinal column points in April 2018 but with a 5% increase for those on the lowest scales. The final format of the second year of the agreement had yet to be announced but the Clerk advised that he had seen an early draft which suggested that a similar percentage increase was anticipated for 2019/20.

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 2015, the Clerk's hours of employment had been increased to 24 hours per week in recognition of the fact that the average number of hours that he worked was significantly higher than his contracted hours. It was reported that the hours worked in 2017/18 and in the current financial year to date had averaged 32 hours per week.

The Chairman reported that she had discussed the situation with the Clerk who was reluctant to increase his contracted hours or receive additional remuneration. However with regard to the future, the Committee undertook to investigate the practicality of providing additional assistance and the need for succession planning. The question of office accommodation was also raised as the Clerk worked from home currently and it would be preferable, if additional staffing was engaged, for employees to work together.

Bearing in mind also the additional work currently with the development taking place in the village and the treatment plants proposed at the landfill site, the Committee asked the Clerk to place an item on the agenda for the Council meeting in March to review the amount of hours worked weekly by him over the course of the year.

It was reported that the Senior Handyman and Handyman each worked 30 hours per week on SCPs 14 and 13 respectively which currently amounted to £9.19 and £9.019 per hour respectively. The equivalent full time salaries were £17,681 and £17,171 respectively. Members were informed that the national minimum wage set by the Government would increase to £8.21 in April 2019 and that the living wage for employees calculated by the Living Wage Foundation which was currently £8.75 per hour was also likely to rise in April. However the anticipated NJC salary increase was expected to ensure that the Handymen's salaries were still higher than the living wage.

With regard to the Cleaner, Members were informed that the rate of pay had last been increased by £1 to £29.00 per week with effect from April 2018 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 number of bookings had fallen in the current year, it was felt by the majority of Members that the weekly pay of £29 should not be increased.

The Clerk reported that the Timebank Co-ordinator was currently employed for 10 hours per week on spinal column point 26 which had increased to £23,866 in April 2018. Members were reminded that the honorarium for the Clockwinder and Internal Auditor currently were £250 and £100 per annum respectively.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the NJC pay award for local authority employees be applied with effect from April 2019 in accordance with the new salary scale points;
- (b) that the salary of the Cleaner be retained at £29 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 2019;
- (c) that the honorarium paid to the Internal Auditor be retained at £100 with effect from 1st April 2019;
- (d) that the honorarium paid to the Clockwinder be retained at £250 per annum in 2019/20; and
- (e) that an item be placed on the agenda for the meeting of the Council to be held in March 2019 to review the average number of hours worked by the Clerk during the course of the year.

09/18 BUDGET 2019/20

The Committee considered the revised budget for the current financial year and the estimate for 2019/20, 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 £270,358, made up as follows:-

Parish Centre	£80,000
Allotments	£103,039
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£1,858
Replacement of van	£ 1,500
Potential fees – landfill site	£14,194
Community Infrastructure Levy	£69,767

The unallocated balance at the beginning of the financial year had been £28,741.

In terms of the current year, the Clerk reminded Members that the precept had been increased to £112,000 to enable works to be undertaken to The Weir to address the issues arising from low water levels. Further income was anticipated of £153,113 which included CIL payments of £135,987. Expenditure was forecast to be £110,793 as a result of which an unallocated surplus was expected to be carried forward of £37,574 and earmarked reserves as follows:-

Parish Centre	£ 90,000
Allotments	£104,039
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£ 1,858
Replacement of van	£ 2,000
Potential fees – landfill site	£ 12,194
CIL	£205,754
Total	£415,845

Members were reminded that the County and District Councils were still expected to be experiencing financial constraints in 2019/20, with a particular concern over the level of bus subsidy for uneconomic routes with effect from April 2019.

With regard to the Connections Bus project, the charge for 2019/20 had yet to be received but allowance had been made in the budget for a similar level of increase as the previous year. Members commented on the excellence of the work undertaken by the staff on the bus with average weekly attendances during the current term of 27 per evening. In addition to the advice and care provided for youngsters with particular problems, Members acknowledged the success of the sessions in reducing criminal damage and anti-social behaviour in Warboys.

Members reviewed the operation of the Timebank scheme which had been funded until March 2019. The number of active members of the Warboys scheme had increased to 41 and attention was drawn to a range of activities and events in which Timebank members had been involved over the past year. Given the growth both in membership and in the size of the village, Members were of the opinion that the scheme should be continued and built into the Council's budget.

The Clerk explained that only a small sum of £1,858 now remained in the fund accumulated from Section 106 receipts from earlier development in the village which was to be used for play equipment and open space provision. In determining the budget for the current year, the Council had decided against creating an earmarked reserve for play equipment repairs and replacement but to rely on Community Infrastructure Levy income.

The Clerk reported that the Section 106 Agreements for both the Great Pastures and Bellway developments required the developers to offer to transfer ownership of the open spaces and play equipment to either the District or Parish Councils. In the event of the areas not being maintained at public expense, the occupiers of the new dwellings would be required to contribute towards their maintenance by a management company. Members considered whether it was equitable for the new home owners to have to pay for the maintenance of the open spaces on the estates in which they lived whereas the District and Parish Councils maintained the open spaces elsewhere in the village.

Members were reminded that £90,000 had now been earmarked for a replacement Parish Centre and the CIL receipts had been provisionally allocated for this project. However no progress had been made in the past year as neither the sports clubs nor the Under Fives Playgroup had expressed an interest in occupying a larger development due to the potential rental costs. Members recognised the number of venues available to hire at very low hire charges in Warboys which made it difficult to predict whether a new village hall with higher letting fees would be used.

With regard to The Weir, Members noted that a sum of £20,000 had been included in the budget for 2018/19 to dredge the pond and a working party had been established to progress this proposal. The budget provision had also been subject to a successful grant for 50% of the cost. The Leisure Amenities Committee had recently accepted a quotation to analyse the sediment in the pond to establish the cost of its disposal elsewhere. As a result most of the budget provision would not be expended in the current year and the Clerk suggested that this be carried forward to 2019/20 and the budget provision increased to £30,000 with a grant of £15,000 sought.

As a further election would not be required until May 2022 and there was little likelihood of a by-election if a vacancy arose, it was agreed that no provision be made in the budget for an election in 2019/20.

The Clerk reported that he had met an officer of the County Council recently to re-open discussions on the future of the Youthie building and also potentially the Library building where refurbishments were desirable. The County Council had agreed to commission another structural survey and might be amenable to more favourable terms being offered for the transfer of the premises to the Parish Council on a freehold or long leasehold basis. As consideration had yet to be given to any terms offered, the Clerk pointed out that no provision could be made in the budget for 2019/20 but that CIL money could be spent on renovations to the premises.

The Clerk reported that the Council had agreed to include a sum of £2,000 in the budget towards the Minor Highways Improvement bid for priority narrowing in Fenton Road to be submitted to the County Council for 2019/20. Community Roadwatch had agreed to a contribution of £1,500 being added to the scheme to enable warning signs of pedestrians in the carriageway to be included in the submission.

Members were reminded that the Council had agreed to explore the possibility of an application for judicial review in the event of the County Council approving an application for planning permission for combined heat and power and waste water treatment plants at the landfill site. An initial review with counsel was likely to cost in the region of £2,000 which would be drawn from the earmarked reserve from the recovery of fees from the hazardous waste inquiry at the landfill site.

The Clerk advised that the result of the salary increase referred to in Minute No. 08/18 above was likely to result in an increase in expenditure of £2,000 which would be spread across relevant budgets.

Members' attention was drawn to a request by the Christmas Lighting Group for the Council to underwrite the cost of providing a Christmas tree from 2019 onwards as part of the Christmas lighting festivities in the village. The company that had provided a tree free of charge for the previous 11 years had decided to withdraw their support but the Lighting Group had met the cost from other sponsorship and fund raising in 2018. They hoped to be able to do so again in future years but had requested the Council to make provision in the budget in the event that their fund raising was insufficient. Members were informed that the cost of the tree was £769 plus VAT.

Members agreed that the Christmas tree at The Weir was a feature that was welcomed by the village and should be continued, with the Chairman suggesting that there might be other potential suppliers nearby who could be approached to provide the tree at a lower cost.

Members were informed that provision had been made in the budget of £1,000 to cut back the trees in Adams Lyons playground on the boundary with the Paddocks with quotations to be submitted to the forthcoming meeting of the Council.

The Clerk reported that he had yet to investigate the cost of removing the BMX track, providing a 5-a-side football pitch and providing mobile skateboarding facilities at Adams Lyons playground and drainage at the allotments. No provision had therefore been made in the budget for these suggestions.

Members' attention was drawn to the number of villages that were now installing gateway signs incorporating the name of the village and 30 mph and derestriction signs. The cost of single sided and double sided signs were £1,392.44 and £1,609.25 respectively. Members were supportive of the idea of installing similar signs in Warboys with Councillor Mrs Tavener suggesting that they helped to slow traffic entering villages. Bearing in mind the number of entrances to the village, the Clerk indicated that he would report back to Members after consultation with the highways authority and investigating the use of Community Infrastructure Levy income for this purpose.

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council could only incur expenditure if the relevant legislation conferred a power or a duty to do so as the Council did not qualify for the power of general competence under the Localism Act 2011. However the Parish Council could incur expenditure which was in the interests of the area or its inhabitants under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 up to a prescribed sum which, in the current year, was £24,263.

Particular attention was drawn to the amount of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts being accumulated from development in the parish. This now amounted to £202,754 with further income to be received from the Great Pastures phase II development, the Bellway development south of Farriers Way and a forthcoming application for development west of Ramsey Road all of which had outline or reserved matters approval or were allocated for development in the Local Plan. As the precise amounts that would be received in 2019/20 was not known, the Clerk reported that no provision had been made for additional income in the budget.

The Clerk reported that an announcement had been made by the Government that they would not be introducing capping for parish council precepts in 2019/20, although they expected parishes to consider all available options when setting their precepts to mitigate the need for council tax increases.

Members were informed that the Council Tax base for Warboys for 2019/20 was unlikely to be announced by the District Council before the beginning of December. However this was likely to rise again with the new development taking place in the Parish and would result in additional income from the parish precept. Having regard to the size of the earmarked reserves and unallocated balance expected to be carried forward, the Clerk submitted a series of options for consideration in terms of the parish precept. A schedule was also submitted of the comparable parish precepts of the other parish councils in Huntingdonshire with a council tax base in excess of 1,000.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Council be recommended to set the parish precept at £116,500 in 2019/20 which, if the council tax base increased as anticipated, would require a council tax Band D level of £78.43 which was the same as the current year;
- (b) that subject to the above, the budget estimates attached to the report now submitted be endorsed for submission to the Council for approval;
- (c) that the Council be recommended to continue to fund the Timebank scheme and make provision in the budget for future years;
- (d) that the Clerk be requested to contact David Wilson Homes and Bellway Homes to ascertain their intentions with regard to the open space provision to be provided at the developments being undertaken by them in the village;
- (e) that the Clerk be requested to investigate and report back on the installation of village gateway signs at entrances to Warboys;
- (f) that the Council be recommended to approve the request from the Christmas Lighting Group to make provision for the cost of a Christmas tree in the budget in future years if the Group are unable to meet the cost from sponsorship or fund raising.

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

Chairman