

# WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held on 18th November 2013 at the Parish Centre.

## **PRESENT**

Councillors Mrs M P Bucknell, Mrs J M Cole, D W England, Mrs M H Harlock, R A Payne, P S Potts, J C Price, Mrs S A Pryke, Mrs J E Tavener and G C M Willis.

## **APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs A R Wyatt.

## **01/13 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Upon being moved by Councillor Mrs Cole and seconded by Councillor Payne, 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.**

## **02/13 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

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

## **RESOLVED**

that Councillor Mrs J E Tavener be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

## **03/13 MINUTES**

Upon being moved and seconded, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18th March 2013 were signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

## **04/13 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. 12/12) but had been granted a dispensation by the Council to speak and vote such matters.

## **05/13 MATTERS ARISING**

The Committee considered the following matters arising from the Minutes of its meeting held on 18th March 2013:-

**(a) Retirement of Employees**

Further to Minute No. 15/11(a), Members noted that suitable retirement gifts had been presented to Messrs J Western and I Taylor who had retired as the Council's Senior Handyman and Clockwinder respectively.

**(b) Tennis Court**

Further to Minute No. 15/11(b), the Clerk reported that a quotation had been accepted for the repair of the tennis court fence but the work had been delayed while a claim was submitted for additional repair work arising from a vehicle having been driven into the fence.

**(c) Asset Register**

Further to Minute No. 15/11(c), it was confirmed that an inventory check had been undertaken by the Chairman, Internal Auditor and Senior Handyman subsequent to the previous meeting.

**(d) PAYE - Real Time Information**

Further to Minute No. 15/12, the Clerk reported that the on line real time information system that HMRC required all employers to use with effect from April 2013 for the purpose of tax and National Insurance deductions was relatively easy to follow and had not presented any problems.

**(e) Risk Management**

Further to Minute No. 17/12, the Clerk reported that the electrician referred to at the previous meeting was no longer available and that an electrician from Somersham had carried out the necessary testing of all portable electrical equipment owned by the Council.

**(f) Parish Centre – Conditions of Hire**

Arising from Minute No. 19/12, the Clerk indicated that he would ensure that the conditions of hire for the Parish Centre included instructions on the emergency evacuation of the premises.

## **06/13 INSURANCES**

The Committee reviewed the present insurance cover held by the Council with Zurich Municipal Insurance by way of a group policy with Suffolk ACRE. Copies of the parish council policy schedules had been circulated to all Members.

Arising from questions by Members, the Clerk indicated that he would check to ensure that the schedules included the community orchard sign at Jubilee Park, the entrance sign at Adams Lyons playground, Parish Centre CCTV cameras, street

lighting columns and salt bins in the highway. The Clerk also indicated that he would query the reference in the schedule to personal accident insurance only being applicable to the Clerk in order to ensure that this also applied to the Council's other employees.

In response to a question by the Chairman, the Clerk indicated that he would ensure that the van used by the Council was equipped with a warning triangle and a torch in the event of an emergency.

## **RESOLVED**

that the present insurance arrangements be noted and revisions made where necessary.

## **07/13 PARISH CENTRE AND TENNIS COURT**

The Committee considered a report by the Clerk, a copy of which had been circulated, with regard to the operation of the Parish Centre and tennis court over the past year.

The Committee was informed that income for the hire of the Parish Centre had risen slightly in 2012/13 by 3% to £6,983 compared with the previous year. Total income had been £7,287 in contrast with expenditure of £7,009 as a result of which the Centre had achieved a small surplus for the first time in many years. The Clerk also pointed out that over 100 free or subsidised lettings were expected to be made during the current year and that energy consumption also included use of the Clerk's office and Handymen's workshop.

Following the closure of the Women's Institute Hall in the summer, the Clerk advised Members that bookings had increased with a regular booking now on Monday mornings and most Saturday evenings being booked. It was therefore expected that income would increase again in the current year.

Particular attention was drawn to the recent significant increase in energy charges which had followed a number of above inflation increases in relatively short succession. Together with the greater consumption from increased usage of the Parish Centre, the Clerk suggested that energy costs were likely to increase by £500 in the current year and £800 in 2014/15. It was also pointed out that there was no indication as to whether the Government's rate relief for small business would continue in 2014/15 which had saved the Council approximately £1,000 per annum in recent years.

Bearing in mind the increase in energy charges and the possibility that the rate relief for small businesses might not be continued, Members were of the opinion that charges for the hire of the Parish Centre would need to increase, especially as these had not risen since April 2009. Members were also of the opinion that the subsidised lettings should be reviewed, given the increase in energy charges.

The Clerk reported that the newsagents had held a key to the tennis court again over the summer which had meant that the court could be hired during the day. Income for the current year had fallen again significantly to £136 compared with a figure of £155 in the previous year, notwithstanding the fact that there had been a British winner at

Wimbledon. Members were reminded that the Council had already taken a decision to leave the tennis court open in future and therefore to not charge for its use.

## **RESOLVED**

- (a) that the charges for the hire of the Parish Centre be increased to £9 per hour for the Main Hall and £6 per hour for the Meeting Room in 2014/15 for bookings by Warboys residents;
- (b) that the Clerk be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Council on the subsidised lettings of the Parish Centre.

## **8/13 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 mileage rate above which tax was not 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 office. The allowance of £80 currently paid to the Chairman had been increased from £75 in the previous year.

## **RESOLVED**

- (a) that no change be made to the members' allowances scheme for 2014/15 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 2014/15.

## **9/13 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, a copy of which had been circulated. Members were informed that local government employees had received a pay award of 1% in the current year after wages had been frozen for the previous three years. Information was not yet available on the negotiations between the employers and employees representatives for 2014/15 or whether the Government would again determine whether a pay award should be made and if so, the percentage increase.

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. Members were informed that the latter had increased to an average of 29 hours per week in the current year to date.

It was reported that the two part time Handymen worked 30 hours per week on fixed point rates of pay in accordance with spinal column points 11 and 10 for the Senior Handyman and Handyman respectively which currently were £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 £6.31 and the living wage for employees promoted by the Living Wage Foundation to £7.65 per hour.

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. With the usage of the Parish Centre having risen, the fees earned by the Cleaner had risen and under the circumstances, it was felt that an increase should not be made in the weekly rate with effect from 1st April 2014.

## **RESOLVED**

- (a) that the report be received;
- (b) that the salaries of the Clerk, Senior Handyman and Handyman be noted and their salaries varied in line with the national pay scales with effect from 1st April 2014;
- (c) that the salary paid to the Cleaner be retained at £25 per week plus the cleaning charges paid by hirers with effect from 1st April 2014; and
- (d) that honorarium paid to the Internal Auditor be retained at its present level of £100 with effect from 1st April 2014.

## **10/13 BUDGET 2014/15**

The Committee considered the revised budget for the current financial year and the estimate for 2014/15, 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 £152,621, made up as follows:-

Allotments	£100,582
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£35,540
Replacement of van	£ 2,305
Potential fees – landfill site	£14,194

The unallocated balance remaining at the beginning of the financial year had been £62,482.

In terms of the current year, the Clerk reminded Members that the precept had been set at £79,911 which, in addition to a grant of £6,589 from the District Council, had been intended to amount to an income of £86,500 compared with £83,000 from the precept in 2012/13. However the amount inadvertently submitted to the District Council for precept had been £76,911 resulting in an income of £83,500 which was slightly higher than the previous year.

The schemes for the Jubilee Clock Tower refurbishment and dredging of the Weir would not be completed before the end of the year and had been carried forward to 2014/15. If expenditure proceeded as anticipated for the remainder of the year the Clerk estimated that there would be an unallocated reserve of £74,772 and a figure of £154,754 in Earmarked Reserves as at 31st March 2014.

In addition to the schemes carried forward from the current year, the Clerk advised that he had included an amount of £8,000 for CCTV at Adams Lyons Playground and the Parish Centre in the budget for 2014/15. An amount of £41,000 had been included for the Jubilee Clock Tower refurbishment which was expected to start in March 2014, towards which grants of £10,000 and £9,000 had already been obtained from Red Tile Wind Farm Trust and Grantscape respectively. As no allowance had been made for unforeseen works when the scheme was undertaken, Members considered that the provision in the budget should be increased to £46,000.

An amount of £30,000 had been included in the budget for the provision of play equipment at Jubilee Park, following the choice of a design and quotation submitted by Sutcliffe Play and the Members were reminded that the outcome of an application for grant of £15,000 from Grantscape was awaited.

An amount of £100,000 had been proposed for inclusion in the budget for the refurbishment of the former 'Youthie' building in the event of this being transferred from the County Council. An estimate for structural repairs had already been obtained of £72,000 and it was suggested that the balance was required for the restoration of services, breaking through to link with the Library and redecoration.

On the recommendation of the Police to address the problem of anti-social behaviour in the village, an amount of £40,000 had been included in the budget for a skateboard park. Although prices for skateboard facilities varied widely dependent on the type of structure chosen, the Clerk reported that he had been informed by the Clerk of Somersham Parish Council that the skateboard facilities in that village had cost £30,000 some years previously.

With regard to the choice of scheme to be submitted to the County Council under the Local Highway Improvement Scheme for 2014/15 which had been referred to the Committee by the Council, the Clerk reported that further examination of the invitation from the County Council had shown that only one scheme could be submitted. In addition, the County Council had stated that where an applicant was able to offer a greater contribution than the minimum 10%, the bid would be looked at more favourably. The Committee was reminded that the Council had identified schemes to install a footway at St Mary's Green and roundels and road markings on the carriageway at the entrances to the village which were estimated to cost £9,000-12,000 and £1,500 respectively.

The Clerk pointed out that the Council's ability to undertake all of the capital schemes would be dependent on the submission of successful applications for grant, the use of reserves, the possible deferral of schemes to a subsequent year and a significant

increase in the level of Council Tax. Members were reminded that the District Council had refused to pass on the grant intended for the Parish Council in 2014/15 as a result of the Council Tax system changes which would result in a loss of income of £6,589. The Clerk drew attention to the availability of loans from the Public Works Loans Board at low rates of interest over a maximum of 10 years which were intended to even out the cost of capital schemes over several years.

Finally, Members were also 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.

Members acknowledged that grants would need to be obtained for most of the capital schemes if they were to come to fruition and that it would be difficult to approve a budget without knowing how much grant could be achieved. In considering the level of precept for 2014/15, Members discussed the increase which they thought would be reasonable. Bearing in mind the number of schemes proposed for inclusion in the budget and the support for a community hub, Members considered that a 12% increase in precept was achievable which would generate income of £86,140 and a Band D Council Tax of £67.34 based on the current tax base of 1,279. Members requested the Clerk to submit a further report on the implications for the budget of an increase of this level.

It was therefore

## **RESOLVED**

- (a) that the painting of roundels and road markings on the carriageway at the entrances to the village at an estimated cost of £1,500 be submitted to the County Council under the Local Highway Improvement Programme and a contribution of 50% offered in the event of the application being successful;
- (b) that the provision in the budget for the Jubilee Clock Tower refurbishment be increased to £46,000 in the event of unforeseen works being identified;
- (c) that the Council be recommended to set a Council Tax precept of £86,140 for 2014/15; and
- (d) that the Clerk be requested to submit a further report on the budget to a meeting of the Council.

(Councillor Mrs Pryke left the meeting before the end of the discussion on the above item.)

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

**Chairman**