

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held on 23rd November 2015 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, J A Parker, P S Potts, Mrs J E Tavener, G C M Willis, Dr S C Withams and Mrs A R Wyatt.

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr G Hansell (Internal Auditor).

APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillors J C Price.

01/15 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Mrs Bucknell was moved by Councillor Parker and seconded by Councillor Potts as Chairman of the Committee. Councillor Dr Withams was moved by Councillor Mrs Bucknell and seconded by Councillor Mrs Harlock as Chairman but indicated that she wished to decline in view of the short period of time since she had been co-opted to the Council.

It was therefore

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.

02/15 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Councillor Dr Withams was moved by Councillor Potts and seconded by Councillor Mrs Tavener as Vice Chairman of the Committee. Councillor Ms Gifford was moved by Councillor Mrs Cole and seconded by Councillor Mrs Wyatt as Vice Chairman but indicated that she wished to decline the nomination.

It was therefore

RESOLVED

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

03/15 MINUTES

Upon being moved by Councillor Parker and seconded by Councillor Potts, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23rd March 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

04/15 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. 9/15) but had been granted a dispensation by the Council to speak and vote such matters.

Councillor Mrs Wyatt declared a non-statutory disclosable interest as a member of the Warboys Community Association in respect the application for grant by the Association for Feast Week in the consideration of the Council's budget and Council Tax precept (Minute No. 9/15). A dispensation to speak but not vote on matters relating to the Community Association had been granted to Councillor Mrs Wyatt by the Council previously.

Councillors Mrs Bucknell and Willis declared non-statutory disclosable interests as members of the Warboys Christmas Lighting Group in respect of provision made in the budget for Christmas lighting in the consideration of the Council's budget and Council Tax precept (Minute No. 9/15). Dispensations to speak but not vote on matters relating to Christmas lighting had been granted to Councillors Mrs Bucknell and Willis by the Council previously.

05/15 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted the following matters arising from the Minutes of its meeting held on 23rd March 2015:-

(a) Timebanking

Further to Minute No. 16/14(a), the Clerk informed Members that he would be advertising shortly for the appointment of a Timebank Co-ordinator.

(b) Pensions – Automatic Enrolment

Further to Minute No. 16/14(b), the Clerk reminded Members that the Council had registered with the National Employment Savings Trust as the pension provider to meet the statutory requirements for the auto-enrolment of employees. However the only employee who had been automatically enrolled had opted out of the scheme and all of the other employees were above the maximum age for auto-enrolment and had decided not to opt in to the scheme.

Under the circumstances no employer's pension contributions needed to be paid by the Council currently.

06/15 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.

The Committee was informed that income for the hire of the Parish Centre had risen by 13% to £9,660 in 2014/15 compared with the previous year, although charges had risen with effect from April 2014. Total income had been £10,156 in contrast with expenditure of £10,097.

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 £1,250 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 income to date was slightly lower than for the comparable period in the previous year but that a number of additional regular bookings had commenced in October as a result of which total income for the year was expected to be slightly higher than 2014/15. With expenditure likely to be similar to the previous year, a slight surplus was again anticipated.

Members were informed that while the Government's rate relief for small business had continued in 2015/16 which had saved the Council approximately £1,000, there was no guarantee that this would continue in future years.

With regard to the tennis court, the Clerk reported that no problems had occurred as a result of it being made available for use free of charge for a second year and that this had saved damage to the perimeter fencing by holes being cut and people climbing over to avoid paying.

RESOLVED

- (a) that no increase be made in the charges for the hire of the Parish Centre for 2016/17; and
- (b) that the tennis court continue to be made available for use without charge.

07/15 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 £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 2016/17 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 2016/17.

08/15 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 no firm indication had been received with regard to a pay award for 2016/17, although it was understood that the Government had announced that increases would be restricted to 1% per annum until 2020.

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 2014, the Clerk's hours of employment had been increased to 22 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 the currently financial year averaged 35 per week, compared with 33.5 hours in 2014/15.

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 24 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 agreed to assist where possible in undertaking tasks to alleviate the Clerk's workload.

(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 12 and 11 respectively which currently amounted to £8.068 and £7.904 per hour. The equivalent full time salaries were £15,523 and £15,207 respectively. Members were informed that the national minimum wage set by the Government had increased to £6.70 and the living wage for employees promoted by the Living Wage Foundation to £8.25 per hour. Even allowing for the anticipated national pay increase, the Clerk pointed out that the hourly rate of pay for the Handyman would still be below the living wage in 2016/17.

With regard to the Cleaner, Members were informed that the rate of pay had last been increased by £1 to £26.00 per week with effect from April 2015 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 an equivalent increase in the weekly wage paid to the Cleaner would be appropriate.

Members were also reminded that following the retirement of the former Senior Handyman in September, a person had volunteered to act as the Clockwinder and it had been agreed that an honorarium be paid of £100 per annum to be reviewed after the person had carried out the work satisfactorily for 6 months. The Clerk reported that no problems had occurred with the operation of the clock since the Clockwinder had commenced in October, although the Chairman pointed out that the time had not been altered for some 24 hours after British Summer Time had been ended in October.

The Chairman also drew attention to the fact that the interior of the Clock Tower was not lit by electric light and she suggested that for health and safety reasons it would be advisable for the lighting to be improved inside the structure.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Council be recommended to increase the hours of employment of the Clerk to 24 hours per week with effect from 1st April 2016;
- (b) that the Council be recommended to increase the salaries of the Senior Handyman from SCP12 to SCP14 and the Handyman from SCP11 to SCP13 with effect from 1st April 2016;
- (c) that the Council be recommended to increase the salary of the Cleaner from £26 to £27 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 2016;
- (d) that the Council be recommended to retain the honorarium paid to the Internal Auditor at £100 with effect from 1st April 2016;
- (e) that the Council be recommended to increase the honorarium of the Clockwinder to £220 per annum after the satisfactory completion of six months; and
- (f) that the Clerk be requested to investigate the feasibility of installing an electric light inside the Clock Tower.

09/15 BUDGET 2016/17

The Committee considered the revised budget for the current financial year and the estimate for 2016/17, having regard to the budget recommended by the Leisure Areas Committee. The Allotments Committee had considered their budget but had referred the decision on the budget and charges to the Finance and General Purposes Committee in order for representatives of the Committee and the Allotments Association to meet.

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 £191,450, made up as follows:-

Parish Centre	£50,000
Allotments	£102,855
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£24,235
Replacement of van	£ 0
Potential fees – landfill site	£14,194
Community Infrastructure Levy	£ 166

The unallocated balance at the beginning of the financial year had been £43,814 but this had included a grant of £22,374 towards the Orchard Close play equipment and Adams Lyons safety surfacing, the invoice for which had not been paid until April.

In terms of the current year, the Clerk reminded Members that the precept had been increased to £90,000 to enable the Connections Bus to continue and to introduce a Timebank scheme in Warboys. Further income was anticipated of £46,765 which included grants of £31,221 towards the outdoor fitness equipment in Adams Lyons playground and the Connections Bus. The Clerk reported that further expenditure had been authorised by the Council that had not been included in the budget, as a result of which an unallocated surplus was expected to be carried forward of £30,511 and earmarked reserves as follows:-

Parish Centre	£ 60,000
Allotments	£103,883
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£ 24,477
Replacement of van	£ 500
Potential fees – landfill site	£ 14,194
CIL	£ 616
Total	£203,670

With regard to 2016/17, the Clerk pointed out that as the Timebank scheme had yet to commence, it was anticipated that not all of the allocation in the budget for the current year would be used and the balance would be carried forward to the following year which would enable a Co-ordinator to be appointed on a one year fixed term contract.

Members were reminded that the Council had invited the Committee to consider the inclusion of a sum in the budget to dredge The Weir which was expected to cost in the region of £20,000, although the Clerk reported that it was expected that a grant could be obtained towards 50% of the cost.

The Leisure Areas had also asked the Committee to consider the inclusion of a sum of £10,000 in the budget to replace the bus shelter in the High Street near the Methodist Church as this had been vandalised and now appeared unsightly in the centre of the village.

With regard to the Connections Bus project, the Clerk reported that he had been advised of the cost of the attendance of the bus in Warboys on Friday evenings and that this would be submitted for consideration at the next meeting of the Council. However, the Clerk pointed out that while it was anticipated that all of the cost in the current year would be offset by grants from the Police and Crime Commissioner and the residue of the Warboys Youth Action Group funds, there was uncertainty as to whether grants could be obtained if the scheme was retained in 2016/17.

Members were informed that representatives of the Allotments Committee had met representatives of the Allotments Association in the week preceding the meeting. The Association's representatives had requested that the roadway at the allotments be improved by the laying of road planings at an estimated cost of £1,500 and a new storage container be installed at an estimated cost of £1,200. The Clerk explained that the Association had asked that the rents be retained at their present levels in 2016/17 and that unless the improvements were to be funded from the precept, the cost would have to be met from the reserves earmarked for allotments.

Members were reminded that £60,000 had now been earmarked for a replacement Parish Centre and the Clerk suggested that a further allocation be made of £10,000 in 2016/17.

It was reported that the Community Association had discussed the possibility of organising an event in alternate years during Feast Week and a paper was attached to the report submitted by the Clerk explaining what was being considered and asking for a grant of £600-£800 to enable this to proceed in the first year. The Association had suggested that they would be unable to arrange an event every year as they were already organising the May 'It's A Knockout' event in alternate years. Members suggested that if the application for grant was approved, the possibility of transferring the May event to Feast Week and the future of the Feast Week band concert sponsored by the Council could be discussed with the Association.

Members' attention was drawn to a request by the Chairman that the provision for the funding of the Christmas Lights in the village be doubled in view of the growing impact of health and safety legislation and its effect on the ability of the Lighting Group volunteers to erect and dismantle the decorations.

Members were informed that none of the Council's employees had decided to join the pension scheme, as a result of the employers contribution of 1% of salary would not need to be paid. The Clerk suggested that a sum of £1,000 be included in the budget for training as one of the Handymen would need to obtain the necessary certificate to be able to implement road closures. It was also understood that a qualification was now required to carry out knapsack spraying. With regard to the latter, Councillor England was asked to investigate details of the qualification required.

Members were reminded that the County and District Councils were facing cuts in their expenditure in 2016/17 and that the County Council had suggested that parish councils make provision in their budgets if they wished some of the services to be cut locally to continue. The Clerk reported that none of the cuts affecting Warboys had been specified thus far but that if the Parish Council were to agree to deliver or fund those services, this would require additional resources in both financial and staffing terms.

Finally, Members were reminded that the Secretary of State had the power to cap the percentage increase for parish council precepts. Although capping had yet to be applied by the Secretary of State, the Clerk suggested that this was a growing possibility as county and district council budgets were cut and parishes were encouraged to make up the shortfall in local services.

Bearing in mind the number of schemes proposed for inclusion in the budget and the earmarking of funding for a replacement Parish Centre, Members were of the opinion that the funding of a replacement bus shelter in the High Street could not be justified.

To enable the other schemes to proceed and retain an increase in precept to what was considered to be an acceptable level, it was

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to -

- (a) allocate a further £10,000 in 2016/17 to the earmarked reserve for a replacement Parish Centre;
- (b) carry forward the balance of the unexpended sum in the budget for the Timebanking scheme to 2016/17 and make a further provision of £5,000;
- (c) include a sum of £10,432 in the budget towards the Connections Bus project in 2016/17;
- (d) include a sum of £20,000 in the budget for the dredging of The Weir and income of £10,000 from grant towards the scheme;
- (e) increase the allocation for Christmas Lighting to £1,500;
- (f) retain the allotment rents unchanged in 2016/17 and approve improvements to the roadway at Hallgate Allotments and the installation of a storage container in the sums of £1,500 and £1,200 respectively, the cost to be met from the earmarked reserves for allotments;
- (g) approve a grant of £800 to the Community Association in 2016/17 to enable events to be organised in Feast Week in 2016;
- (h) subject to the above, approve the budget and set a council tax precept of £95,000 for 2016/17 which would represent an increase of 5.5% and a Band D Council Tax precept of £73.30.

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

Chairman