

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held on 20th November 2017 at the Parish Centre.

PRESENT

Councillors Mrs M P Bucknell, Mrs J M Cole, R J Dykstra, D W England, Ms L A Gifford, Mrs M H Harlock, G B Joseph, Mrs J E Tavener, G C M Willis, Dr S C Withams and Mrs A R Wyatt

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P S Potts and G C M Willis and Mr G Hansell (Internal Auditor).

01/17 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Mrs Bucknell was moved by Councillor Dr Withams and seconded by Councillor Correll for election as Chairman and Councillor Dr Withams was moved by Councillor Bucknell and seconded by Councillor Ms Gifford. After a vote had been taken, 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.

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

02/17 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor Ms Gifford, seconded by Councillor Mrs Cole and

RESOLVED

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

03/17 MINUTES

Upon being moved by Councillor Dykstra and seconded by Councillor Dr Withams, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20th March 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

04/17 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. 9/17) but had been granted a dispensation by the Council to speak and vote on such matters.

05/17 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted the following matters arising from the Minutes of its meeting held on 20th March 2017:-

(a) Asset Register

Further to Minute No. 13/16, the Clerk confirmed that an inventory check had been carried out with the Chairman and the Internal Auditor subsequent to the meeting.

(b) Road Closure for Carol Singing

Arising from Minute No. 14/16 and a question by the Chairman, the Clerk reported that no further contact had been received from the Rector concerning a potential carol service on the highway until October by which time it was too late to apply for a road closure. Alternative off-road venues had been suggested but the church had decided not to proceed and to review the matter again in 2018.

(c) Investment Strategy

Further to Minute No. 16/16, the Clerk reported that it had come to his attention that the Government were consulting on a review of the capital finance prudential framework which would affect local councils' investment strategies. Members were informed that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Council on the implications.

06/17 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 £8,760 in 2016/17 compared with £9,717 in the previous year. This had primarily been the result of the winding up of two local organisations that had hired the premises on a regular basis and the loss of another regular booking. Attention also was drawn to the competition from other venues in the village, particularly the Sports and Social Club where hire charges were exceptionally low.

Total expenditure had been £9,492 compared with £12,262 in the previous year.

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 equivalent to the comparable period in the previous year and with expenditure likely to be similar to the previous year, a break-even was anticipated.

Members were informed that while the Government's rate relief for small business had continued in 2017/18 which had saved the Council approximately £1,000, there was no guarantee that this would continue in future years.

RESOLVED

- (a) that no increase be made in the charges for the hire of the Parish Centre for 2018/19; and
- (b) that the tennis court continue to be made available for use without charge.

07/17 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 with effect from April 2017.

RESOLVED

- (a) that no change be made to the members' allowances scheme for 2018/19 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 2018/19.

08/17 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 2016/17 had comprised a two year agreement which had provided for a pay rise of 1% for most spinal column points in April 2017 but with a slightly higher increase for those

on the lowest scales. However although reports had appeared in the media about an end to the public sector pay restraint over the past 10 years, no indication had been made as to whether this would apply to local government employees.

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 by the Clerk in the current financial year averaged 31.5 per week in the year to date.

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 £8,722 and £8,571 per hour respectively. The equivalent full time salaries were £16,781 and £16,491 respectively. Members were informed that the national minimum wage set by the Government had increased to £7.50 and would be reviewed again in April 2018. However the living wage for employees calculated by the Living Wage Foundation had risen to £8.75 per hour in November 2017.

Under the circumstances, the Chairman suggested that the Committee consider an increase in the salaries of the Handymen in view of the unpleasant tasks that they had to perform and their flexibility and willingness to undertake additional duties. However bearing in mind the additional costs envisaged in 2018/19, Members felt that this needed to be considered as part of the discussion on the following item.

With regard to the Cleaner, Members were informed that the rate of pay had last been increased by £1 to £28.00 per week with effect from April 2017 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.

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 £23,398 in April 2017. Members were reminded that the honorarium for the Clockwinder and Internal Auditor currently were £220 and £100 per annum respectively.

RESOLVED

that consideration of the salaries of the Council's employees be deferred for consideration as part of the discussion on the ensuing minute.

09/17 BUDGET 2018/19

The Committee considered the revised budget for the current financial year and the estimate for 2018/19, 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 £230,005, made up as follows:-

Parish Centre	£70,000
Allotments	£102,019
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£17,722
Replacement of van	£ 1,000
Potential fees – landfill site	£14,194
Community Infrastructure Levy	£25,070

The unallocated balance at the beginning of the financial year had been £19,606.

In terms of the current year, the Clerk reminded Members that the precept had been increased to £102,200 to enable the Connections Bus to continue and to introduce a Timebank scheme in Warboys. Further income was anticipated of £62,544 which included CIL payments of £44,697. Expenditure was forecast to be £120,410 as a result of which an unallocated surplus was expected to be carried forward of £23,279 and earmarked reserves as follows:-

Parish Centre	£ 80,000
Allotments	£103,019
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£ 2,186
Replacement of van	£ 1,500
Potential fees – landfill site	£ 14,194
CIL	£ 69,767
Total	£270,666

Members were reminded that the County and District Councils were still expected to be experiencing financial cuts in 2018/19, although few details had emerged of the likely impact on services.

With regard to the Connections Bus project, notification had been received that the cost would increase by 1% in 2018/19 which in the case of Warboys would result in a cost of £10,625 for 39 sessions during term time. Members were informed that average attendances during the current term was 38 per evening and reminded of the impact of the sessions in Warboys in reducing criminal damage and anti-social behaviour.

Members were reminded that the Council had agreed to continue with the Timebank scheme until March 2019 and that suitable provision therefore needed to be made in the budget.

As a result of the award of a contract recently for repairs and replacement of play equipment funded from the Council's Section 106 reserve, the Clerk pointed out this was now almost exhausted with only £2,186 remaining. Section 106 contributions had been replaced by the Community Infrastructure Levy paid in respect of new development and the Clerk advised that he had received confirmation from the District Council that play equipment repairs could be classed as infrastructure expenditure for the purpose of CIL.

Members were reminded that £80,000 had now been earmarked for a replacement Parish Centre and the Clerk suggested that a further allocation be made of £10,000 in 2018/19.

The Clerk reported that the Council had agreed to include a sum of £2,000 in the budget towards the Minor Highways Improvement bid to be submitted to the County Council for 2018/19. The Council also had undertaken to consider the purchase of speedwatch equipment for use by the local speedwatch team and to install another notice board in the village in the Station Road area which would cost £1,050.

With regard to The Weir, Members noted that a sum of £20,000 had been included in the budget for 2016/17 to dredge the pond but it had subsequently been decided to take no further action while the effects of the application of Siltex and subsequently Diofix to reduce weed growth were assessed. No provision had been made in the budget for 2017/18 but having regard to the ongoing problem of low water levels in dry summers, it was felt that provision needed to be made in the budget to enable a solution to be implemented. The Clerk reported that he had obtained an estimate for budgeting purposes from a local contractor which suggested that £20,000 would be required if the pond was to be dredged, although Councillor Mrs Cole suggested that this might not be the most appropriate solution. Nevertheless Members concurred that a sum of this nature needed to be included in the budget to enable a scheme to be implemented in 2018/19.

As a further election would be required in May 2018 to coincide with the District Council's transition to all out elections from that date, the Clerk reported that this would cost £3,040 if the election was contested and £225 if uncontested when 15 or fewer candidates stood for election.

The Clerk reported that an announcement had been made by the Government that they would not be introducing capping for parish council precepts in 2018/19, 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 2018/19 was unlikely to be announced by the District Council before the beginning of December but this was likely to rise again with the new development taking place in the Parish which would result in additional income from the parish precept.

Members acknowledged that the increase in expenditure proposed in 2018/19 could not be met from a commensurate increase in the precept. It was suggested that the suggested provision of a £5,000 contribution to a play equipment earmarked reserve should be deleted and any expenditure required for this purpose be met from CIL receipts, although these had been provisionally allocated to the replacement Parish Centre scheme.

Members felt that an increase in precept of 5% was not unreasonable as this amounted to only £3.73 per annum or 7 pence per week for a band D property.

As the council tax base would not be known until the beginning of December, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that consideration of the budget for 2018/19 be deferred and the Clerk requested to submit an updated report to the next meeting of the Council;
- (b) that in the event of the NJC pay award for local authority employees with effect from April 2018 not resulting in the Handymen's salaries

advancing to the level of the Living Wage, their salaries be reviewed further;

- (c) that the Council be recommended to increase the salary of the Cleaner from £28 to £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 2018;
- (d) that the Council be recommended to retain the honorarium paid to the Internal Auditor at £100 with effect from 1st April 2018;
- (e) that the Council be recommended to increase the honorarium paid to the Clockwinder from £220 to £250 per annum in 2018/19.

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

Chairman