

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held on 25th November 2019 at the Parish Centre.

PRESENT

Councillors Mrs J M Cole, R J Dykstra, D W England, Ms L A Gifford, S J Green, Mrs M H Harlock, J A Parker, P S Potts, Mrs J E Tavener, Mrs S J Wilcox, G C M Willis, Dr S C Withams and Mrs A R Wyatt.

01/19 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Upon being moved by Councillor Mrs Harlock and seconded by Councillor Mrs Harlock, 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.

02/19 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor England, seconded by Councillor Mrs Cole and

RESOLVED

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

03/19 MINUTES

Upon being moved and seconded, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18th March 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

04/19 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. 9/19) but had been granted a dispensation by the Council to speak and vote on such matters.

05/19 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted the following matter arising from the Minutes of its meeting held on 18th March 2019:-

- (a) **Asset Register**

Arising from Minute No. 13/18, the Clerk indicated that he needed to update the asset register in accordance with the new insurance arrangements with RSA whereby the premium was based on the total value of the Council's assets as opposed to individual premises and items of equipment.

(b) Risk Management

Further to Minute No. 14/18, the Clerk reported that the Health and Safety Regulations required users of brushcutters and mowers to be competent in their use. The Regulations did not require users to hold specific training certificates and competence could be based on experience. In order to ensure that the Council was satisfied as to the competence of the Handymen, the Clerk indicated that he would prepare suitable documentation for the Handymen.

06/19 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 £7,793 in 2017/18 compared with £8,471 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 £9,740 compared with £11,180 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 a number of organisations. The Clerk pointed out that this equated to about £1,000 in lost 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 higher than the comparable period in the previous year and a notional break-even situation was anticipated.

Members were informed that while the Government's rate relief for small business had continued in 2019/20 which had saved the Council £1,817, 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 2020/21;
- (b) that the tennis court continue to be made available for the playing of tennis without charge.

07/19 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 2020/21 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 2020/21.

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

08/19 REVIEW OF WAGES/SALARIES

The Committee reviewed the salaries and wages of 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, the second year of which had restructured the pay scales and provided for a pay rise of 2% for most spinal column points in April 2019 and a higher increase for those on the lowest scales.

The Clerk reported that the trades unions had submitted a claim for 2020/21 for a pay increase of 10% plus a reduction in the working week and additional days annual holiday. The claim would be the subject of negotiation with the employers' side but was unlikely to be settled prior to the start of the new financial year.

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, although it was acknowledged by the Committee that the average weekly number of hours worked by the Clerk was significantly higher than his contracted hours.

It was reported that the Senior Handyman and Handyman each worked 30 hours per week on SCPs 5 and 4 respectively which currently amounted to £9.77 and £9.58 per hour respectively. These were higher than the national minimum wage (now the National Living Wage) set by the Government of £8.21 per hour and that the living

wage for employees calculated by the Living Wage Foundation which recently had been increased to £9.30 per hour.

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. The cleaning fees paid by hirers of the Parish Centre were now absorbed in the first hour charged and had remained unchanged at £6 for the Hall and £4 for the Meeting Room since April 2005. As an increase in pay had not been made in the current year, Members agreed that the weekly rate should increase to £30 per hour with effect from April 2020.

The Clerk reported that the Timebank Co-ordinator was currently employed for 10 hours per week on spinal column point 19 which had increased to £24,799 in April 2019. Members were reminded that the honorarium for the Clockwinder and Internal Auditor currently were set at £250 and £100 per annum respectively.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the NJC pay award for local authority employees be applied with effect from April 2020;
- (b) that the salary of the Cleaner be increased to £30 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 2020;
- (c) that the honorarium paid to the Internal Auditor be retained at £100 with effect from 1st April 2020;
- (d) that the honorarium paid to the Clockwinder be retained at £250 per annum in 2020/21.

09/19 BUDGET 2020/21

The Committee considered the revised budget for the current financial year and the estimate for 2020/21, 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. In addition, an updated copy of the General Account and Balance Sheet and Reserves had been circulated at the meeting.

Members were informed that the earmarked reserves at the beginning of the current financial year had been £415,170, made up as follows:-

Parish Centre	£90,000
Allotments	£104,040
Maintenance of open space/playgrounds	£1,858
Replacement of van	£ 2,000
Potential fees – landfill site	£14,194
Community Infrastructure Levy	£203,078

The unallocated balance at the beginning of the financial year had been £42,554.

In terms of the current year, the Clerk reminded Members that the precept had been increased to £115,292 to enable works to be undertaken to The Weir to address the issues arising from low water levels. Further income was anticipated of £94,070 which included CIL receipts of £59,258. Expenditure was forecast to increase to £168,839 as a result of the Weir project and new play equipment and replacement sleepers at Adams Lyons Playground. This was anticipated to generate an unallocated surplus to be carried forward at the end of the year of £43,316 and earmarked reserves as follows:-

Parish Centre	£100,000
Allotments	£105,039
Replacement of van	£ 2,500
Potential fees – landfill site	£ 12,694
CIL	£234,698
Total	£454,931

With regard to the Connections Bus project, notification had been received that the charge would increase by 5% in 2020/21 which would amount to £291 per session. Members' attention was drawn to a fall in the number of youngsters attending the sessions in the village which had averaged only 11 in the autumn term to date compared with 25 in the same period in 2018/19. While acknowledging the high quality of the service provided by the staff supervising the sessions and not wishing to withdraw funding, Members felt that the situation would have to be reviewed in the following year if numbers did not increase.

Members acknowledged the progress made by the Timebank scheme over the past year which was funded and managed by the Council. A number of successful events had been held and Members were informed that an update on membership figures would be presented to a future meeting.

Members were reminded that £100,000 had now been earmarked for a replacement Parish Centre and the majority of CIL receipts had been provisionally allocated for this project. A decision had been made by the Council to appoint a working group to progress the project, the first meeting of which would be held on 2nd December. Under the circumstances a sum of £20,000 had been included in the budget towards the fees to be incurred.

With regard to The Weir, a tender had been accepted in the sum of £22,390 for the dredging of the pond, 50% of which would be funded by a grant from Red Tile Wind Farm Trust Fund Ltd. Members were reminded that the work was scheduled to start on site in January 2020. Froglife had applied for grant for the dredging of the Heath Pond and refurbishment of the Sheepwash and the outcome of the application should be known in the near future.

The Clerk reported that the Council had agreed to include a sum of £5,000 in the budget towards the Minor Highways Improvement bid for priority narrowing in Ramsey Road which had been submitted to the County Council for 2020/21, the cost of which would be met from CIL receipts.

The Clerk reported that the Community Association had requested that a sum of £200 be included in the budget to enable a grant to be made to them to subsidise the cost of producing the Warboys Diary. However the Clerk suggested that this could be met from the Grants and Donations budget for which a figure of £1,000 had been budgeted.

The cost of obtaining legal advice in the current year for a possible judicial review of the County Council's decision to grant planning permission for the proposed combined heat and power and waste water treatment plants at the landfill site had been met from the earmarked reserve from the recovery of fees from the hazardous waste inquiry at the landfill site. The balance remaining of £12,694 would be retained to fund an objection to any subsequent application for environmental permits to operate the plants.

Members' attention was drawn to a request by the Christmas Lighting Group for the Council to underwrite the cost of providing a Christmas tree in 2020 if sponsorship could not be obtained elsewhere. In addition, the Council had agreed recently to meet the additional cost of installing and removing displays from street lighting columns as a result of a new policy adopted by the County Council that required the work to be undertaken by suitably qualified people. A sum of £2,000 towards the Christmas Lighting display had therefore been provisionally included in the budget for 2020/21.

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 £25,902.

Particular attention was drawn to the amount of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts being accumulated from development in the parish. It was anticipated that a further sum of £118,515 would be received in 2020/21 from the David Wilson Homes phase II and Bellway developments with further sites in the village allocated for development in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

The Clerk reported that the Government had yet to announce whether they would be introducing capping for parish council precepts in 2020/21, although this was considered unlikely.

Members were informed that the Council Tax base for Warboys for 2020/21 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 list also was submitted of the comparable 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 £120,000 for 2020/21 which, if the council tax base increased to an estimated 1500, would require a council tax Band D level of £80.00 which represented a 2% increase in the level of Council Tax;
- (b) that subject to the above, the budget estimates attached to the report now submitted and as amended by the updated tables circulated be endorsed for submission to the Council for approval;
- (c) 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 if the Group is unable to meet the cost from sponsorship or fund raising.

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

Chairman