

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held remotely on 16th November 2020.

PRESENT

Councillors R J Dykstra, D W England, Ms L A Gifford, S J Green, Mrs M H Harlock, J A Parker, P S Potts and Dr S C Withams.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs J M Cole, Mrs C Evans, Mrs J E Tavener, Mrs S J Wilcox, G C M Willis and Mrs A R Wyatt

01/20 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Upon being moved by Councillor Ms Gifford and seconded by Councillor Parker, 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.

02/20 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor Ms Gifford, seconded by Councillor Dykstra and

RESOLVED

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

03/20 MINUTES

Upon being moved by Councillor Potts and seconded by Councillor Parker, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16th March 2020 were approved as a correct record.

04/20 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. 9/20) but had been granted a dispensation by the Council to speak and vote on such matters.

05/20 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted the following matters arising from the Minutes of its meeting held on 16th March 2020:-

(a) Asset Register

Arising from Minute No. 13/19, the Chairman reported that it had not been possible to undertake the annual inventory check with the Handymen and Internal Auditor that summer due to the pandemic restrictions but that this would be scheduled when permissible.

(b) Investment Strategy

Further to Minute No. 16/19, the Chairman referred to a recent report considered by the Council on the impact of interest rate reductions but stressed that the Investment Strategy required the first priority for all investments to be security.

06/20 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 risen to £8,677 in 2018/19 compared with £7,793 in the previous year. A number of new bookings had begun, the most popular of which had been a Bounce trampoline keep fit class that had been meeting for three sessions weekly.

Total expenditure had been £9,895 compared with £9,740 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. The Centre also had been closed for the last two and a half weeks in March due to the first Covid-19 national lockdown.

With regard to the current year, the Clerk reported that the Centre had remained closed until July with the first use by external organisations not until 29th of that month. Those regular hirers that could meet below the maximum numbers permitted to ensure the Hall was Covid secure had been starting to return when the second lockdown had been imposed in November. The Centre would be closed until 2nd December but an exemption had been available for the twice weekly sessions provided by the Day Centre which had relocated as a permanent booking from the Resource Centre.

In the event of lockdown being lifted in early December and groups returning, the Clerk estimated that income would amount to £3,700 in 2020/21, compared with anticipated expenditure of £6,491. However the Council had been successful in obtaining a grant of £10,000 under the Small Business COVID-19 Grant Scheme and the Clerk reported

that he had also applied for a further grant of £1,334 under the Local Restrictions Support Grant Scheme as a result of the second lockdown.

Members were informed that while the Government's rate relief for small business had continued in 2020/21 which had saved the Council £1,817, there was no guarantee that this would continue in future years.

The Clerk referred to Minute No. 78/20 of the Council meeting held on 12th October and reminded Members that a Pilates class that had been a regular hirer of the Parish Centre for three sessions per week prior to lockdown would only return if the wi-fi reception improved. A quote had been received for the installation of mobile broadband at a cost of £40 per month.

The Clerk reported that one of the handles on the cooker in the Parish Centre kitchen had broken and could not be repaired.

Members also were reminded that it had been decided not to re-open the tennis court after lockdown because of the poor condition of the playing surface.

RESOLVED

- (a) that no increase be made in the charges for the hire of the Parish Centre for 2021/22; and
- (b) that the Clerk be authorised to arrange for the purchase of a replacement cooker and for the installation of mobile broadband at the Parish Centre.

07/20 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 2021/22 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 2021/22.

08/20 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 a pay award of 2.75% had been announced for local authority employees in August which would be backdated to 1st April 2020. No information was available with regard to the review of salaries that would come into effect on 1st April 2121.

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. In that regard, the Clerk was requested to submit a report to the Council in March on the average number of hours that he had worked in 2020/21.

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 £10.01 and £9.81 per hour respectively. These were higher than the National Living Wage set by the Government of £8.72 per hour and that the living wage for employees calculated by the Living Wage Foundation which recently had been increased to £9.50 per hour.

With regard to the Cleaner, Members were informed that the rate of pay had last been increased by £1 to £30.00 per week with effect from April 2020. 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 other employees had benefitted from a pay increase of 2.75%, Members agreed that the Cleaner's weekly rate should increase to £31 per hour with effect from April 2021.

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 £25,481 in April 2020. Members were reminded that the honorarium for the Clockwinder and Internal Auditor currently were set at £250 and £100 per annum respectively.

Due to the circumstances prevailing with lockdown and other restrictions in the current year in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Members were informed that employees had taken few holidays. As it was usual for no more than 5 days annual leave to be carried forward if untaken at the end of the year, the Chairman indicated that she would discuss the situation with the Clerk and report back to a future meeting of the Council.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the NJC pay award for local authority employees for 2020/21 be noted;
- (b) that the salary of the Cleaner be increased to £31 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 2021;
- (c) that the honorarium paid to the Internal Auditor be retained at £100 with effect from 1st April 2021;

- (d) that the honorarium paid to the Clockwinder be increased to £260 per annum in 2021/22;
- (e) that the Clerk be requested to submit a report to the meeting of the Council in March on the average number of hours that he had worked in the current year; and
- (f) that the Chairman be requested to discuss the situation with the Clerk in respect of the taking of holidays by employees in the current year and report back to a future meeting.

09/20 BUDGET 2021/22

The Committee considered the revised budget for the current financial year and the estimate for 2021/22, 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 £471,589, made up as follows:-

Parish Centre	£100,000
Capital (formerly allotments)	£105,039
Replacement of van	£ 2,500
Potential fees – landfill site	£12,694
Community Infrastructure Levy	£251,356

The unallocated balance at the beginning of the financial year had been £58,238.

In terms of the current year, the Clerk reminded Members that the precept had been increased to £122,000. Further income was anticipated of £145,154 which included CIL receipts of £120,200 and a grant of £10,000 under the Small Business COVID-19 Grant scheme. Expenditure was forecast to increase to £129,502 which it was anticipated would result in an unallocated surplus to be carried forward at the end of the year of £65,190 and earmarked reserves as follows:-

Parish Centre	£110,000
Capital (Allotments)	£105,039
Replacement of van	£ 3,000
Potential fees – landfill site	£ 12,694
CIL	£352,040
 Total	 £582,773

With regard to the Connections Bus project, sessions had been suspended with effect from the beginning of the first lockdown, although some outreach work had been commissioned by the Council over the school summer holidays. The Clerk suggested that it was unlikely that sessions would resume in January 2021. Due to falling attendance levels before March, Members had agreed to undertake a review of continued funding after the first full term of visits if attendance had not increased. In

the absence of any further information, the Clerk reported that had included sufficient funding for a full year's operation in the draft budget.

As the Section 106 Agreement reserve for play equipment/open space provision had now been exhausted, the Clerk reported that any future expenditure on new or replacement play equipment would need to be met from the precept or CIL reserve. As the Council had made substantial investments in play equipment in recent years, it was considered unlikely that any major expenditure would be required in 2021/22, although this would be dependent on the outcome of the annual safety inspection by an external company.

Members were reminded that architects had been engaged to design a replacement Parish Centre and that a pre-application enquiry had been submitted to the District Council. Having regard to the time required to undertake consultation, apply for grant funding and potentially loans, design work, the planning process and obtaining and accepting quotations, the Clerk suggested that it was unlikely that construction would start on site before April 2022. No provision had therefore been made in the draft budget other than fees of £10,000 in the current year and £20,000 in 2021/22.

In the absence of any further progress to date in the dredging of the Weir and Heath Pond, the Clerk advised that he had made no provision in the draft budget for 2021/22.

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 traffic calming in Ramsey Road in the current year. Due to a modification to the scheme approved, it was anticipated that the contribution requested would reduce to £3,000. A further bid for traffic calming in Ramsey Road had been submitted for 2021/22 towards which the Council had agreed to make a contribution of £5,000.

Although a sum remained earmarked towards any future expenditure required on fees etc. in respect of the landfill site, the Clerk reported that it was not anticipated that development of the combined heat and power and waste water treatment plants would be taking place in the near future.

Members were reminded that discussion had taken place at the two previous meetings of the Council about the possibility of purchasing land adjoining the A141 for open space purposes. As a decision had yet to be made on possible acquisition, the Clerk reported that no provision had been made in the draft budget. However, Members were informed that the District Council had invited applications for funding from their Community Infrastructure Levy receipts with a closing date of 14th December. In the event of the Council deciding to pursue acquisition of the land, the Clerk suggested that this would meet the criteria for the submission of applications. The opportunity to apply for funding had also been drawn to the attention of the Sports Field Committee.

Members were informed that the Christmas Lighting Group had obtained sufficient funding for the provision of a Christmas tree in 2020 and had not requested any additional support for 2021/22.

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 was not eligible for the power of general competence under the Localism Act 2011. However expenditure could be incurred if this was considered to be 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 £26,582.

With regard to Community Infrastructure Levy payments from the David Wilson Homes phase II and Bellway developments and other smaller sites in the village, the Clerk reported that he anticipated further receipts of £90,000 in 2021/22. Additional receipts would be dependent on the timing of applications for development for sites allocated 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 2021/22, although this was considered unlikely.

The Clerk advised that it would be necessary to alter the accounting method in the current year from a Receipts and Payments basis to Income and Expenditure as income would have exceeded £200,000 per annum in each of the last three years. A further report would be submitted in the near future on registration for VAT to enable the Council to reclaim the tax incurred on the construction of the replacement Parish Centre.

Members were informed that the Council Tax base for Warboys for 2021/22 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 which 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 £125,256 for 2021/22 which, if the council tax base increased to an estimated 1535, would require a council tax Band D level of £81.60 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 be approved for submission to the Council; and
- (c) that arrangements be made for a special meeting of the Council prior to the scheduled monthly meeting in December to consider the submission of applications to the District Council for CIL funding.

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

Chairman