

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held at the Parish Centre, Warboys on 15th November 2021.

PRESENT

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs J M Cole, Mrs C Evans, S J Green, P S Potts, Mrs C L Sproats and G C M Willis.

01/21 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

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

02/21 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor Dykstra, seconded by Councillor Parker and

RESOLVED

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

03/21 MINUTES

Upon being moved by Councillor Parker and seconded by Councillor Ms Gifford, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15th March 2021 were approved as a correct record.

04/21 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. 11/21) but had been granted a dispensation by the Council to speak and vote on such matters.

05/21 MATTERS ARISING

The Committee noted the following matters arising from the Minutes of its meeting held on 15th March 2021:-

(a) Asset Register

Arising from Minute No. 13/20, the Chairman reported that she had undertaken the annual inventory check with the Clerk, Handymen and Internal Auditor in October.

06/21 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.

Due to the impact of the pandemic, the Clerk reported that the Centre had remained closed until July in 2020/21 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 further lockdowns had been imposed and there had been few bookings in the autumn and then no further bookings between Christmas and the last week in March.

As a result, income from bookings had fallen to £2,494, the majority of which had arisen from the relocation of the Day Centre from the Resources Centre and who now met in the Parish Centre on two days each week. The budget had benefitted from a total of £20,688 which had been received from the Government in four separate payments available to the owners of premises paying business rates to offset the impact of the pandemic.

Expenditure had amounted to £8,245, due primarily to the Council's decision to pay the Cleaner her regular weekly wage throughout the lockdowns, additional cleaning measures that had been put in place and the purchase of new equipment.

With regard to the current year, the Clerk reported that not all of the previous hirers had yet returned to the Parish Centre and some organisations had folded during the pandemic. Restrictions were also still in place in terms of the numbers that could be accommodated in the Centre and the types of activities permitted. Nevertheless the Clerk estimated that income would rise to £9,000 from bookings in 2021/22 which was higher than in 2019/20, the last full year before the advent of the pandemic. Expenditure was forecast to be £9,482.

The Committee noted that it was anticipated that construction would start on site on the replacement Parish Centre in 2022/23. The existing premises would be retained in use for as long as possible before needing to be demolished to make way for car parking provision. The budget submitted assumed that the existing premises would remain open throughout 2022/23 but a report would be submitted to Members if the building had to close earlier.

RESOLVED

that the report be received and no increase be made in the charges for the hire of the Parish Centre for 2022/23.

07/21 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

By means of a report by the Clerk, copies 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 2022/23 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 2022/23.

08/21 GRASSCUTTING

Arising from difficulties experienced with the grasscutting undertaken by a contractor over the past two years, the Clerk submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which listed the areas of land where grass was cut either by the Handymen or by The CGM Group (East Anglia) Ltd in the case of Adams Lyons Playground and Jubilee Park. Expenditure on grasscutting which included strimming, had amounted to £5,344 in 2019/20 and £4,277 in 2020/21, of which £1,615 and £1,530 had been paid to CGM in the respective years.

Several Members had suggested the possibility of the Council undertaking all of the grasscutting and not contracting out any of the work. Following discussion with one of the staff with extensive experience of grasscutting, the Clerk estimated that the cost of the equipment required would be between £10,000 and £20,000, depending on whether this could be driven on the road, and that the additional revenue costs in terms of staffing, repairs etc. would be between £3,000 and £5,000, depending upon the type of equipment purchased. This assumed that it would be possible to appoint an additional member of staff for say 10 hours per week for 8 months of the year and storage facilities being available for the equipment.

Members were also reminded that the Council had declined to accept the transfer of the open spaces at the David Wilson Homes estate in 2019 which would have involved the transfer of the land to Council ownership plus a payment by the developer of in the region of £150,000 under the District Council's Developer Contributions SPD.

Councillor England suggested that it should be possible to buy second hand equipment more cheaply and that the Council should consider engaging additional staffing to undertake grasscutting both of land owned by the Council and land elsewhere within the village such as the Sports Field, Bowls Club and Primary Academy. He also suggested that the Council should consider accepting a transfer of the open spaces at the Bellway Homes development which would result in a payment under the Developer Contributions SPD. As it would not be possible to reach any conclusion before the budget was set for 2022/23, Members

RESOLVED

- (a) that quotations be invited from grass cutting companies to cut Adams Lyons playground and Jubilee Park in 2022/23; and
- (b) that a working party be established to consider the future of grasscutting by the Council in the Parish.

09/21 COUNCIL EMPLOYMENT LEVELS

A report by the Clerk on Council employment levels that had been submitted to the Council meeting held on 11th October had been referred to the Committee for consideration in the preparation of the budget (Minute No. 111/21 refers). A further copy of the report had been circulated to Members, together with a summary of the duties undertaken by the Clerk.

Members were aware that the Clerk had worked in excess of his contracted 24 hours per week for many years, although he had maintained that he did not wish to receive any additional remuneration for doing so. In the current year to date, Members were advised that the average number of hours worked by the Clerk had been 33 per week.

Under the circumstances, the Committee considered the employment of an additional member of staff to assist the Clerk and also provide continuity for when the Clerk left the Council's employment. The decision not to replace the Timebank Co-ordinator when she had left the Council's employment in August would produce a saving of £8,000 per annum which could be used to offset the cost of additional administrative/financial support. Members were informed therefore that the net additional cost of employing an assistant would be in the region of £4,000 per annum.

The Clerk also referred to the need to review the arrangements for cleaning and security at the replacement Parish Centre once this was opened. The details could be considered at a later date but the Clerk suggested that the net additional cost would be in the region of £6,500 per annum which would need to be considered when preparing the budget for future years.

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to include funding in the budget for 2022/23 to employ an additional member of staff and a further report submitted with regard to the arrangements.

10/21 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 2021/22 had yet to be agreed with an offer of 1.75% by the employers side having been rejected by the unions. Once agreement had been reached, the settlement would be backdated to 1st April 2021. The Government had announced the lifting of the pay freeze on the public sector with effect from April 2022 but the Clerk advised that it was unlikely that the pay settlement for 2022/23 would be agreed until later in the year. Members were informed that a pay rise of 1.75% would add a further £1,200 per annum to the Council's expenditure.

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. Members noted that the National Living Wage set by the Government was being increased to £9.50 per hour in April 2022 and that the Living Wage Foundation were meeting that day to consider whether their assessment of the living wage which was currently £9.50 per hour should be increased next April. While the salaries of the Handymen would increase as a result of the pay award, Members noted that their hourly rates were now expected to be only slightly higher than the living wage. Under the circumstances, it was proposed that their rates of pay should be reviewed by the Council when the living wage set by the Living Wage Foundation became known.

With regard to the Cleaner, Members were informed that her rate of pay had last been increased by £1 to £31.00 per week with effect from April 2021. 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 would be benefitting from a pay increase, Members agreed that the Cleaner's weekly rate should be increased to £33 per hour with effect from April 2022.

Members were reminded that the honorarium for the Clockwinder and Internal Auditor currently were set at £260 and £100 per annum respectively. The Internal Auditor had advised the Council to consider searching for a replacement and while the current incumbent had declined any increase in the honorarium since he had assumed the role in 2002/03, the Clerk suggested that it was unlikely that a replacement could be found without additional cost.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the situation with regard NJC pay awards for local authority employees for 2021/22 and 2022/23 be noted;
- (b) that the salaries of the Handymen be reviewed further when the living wage set by the Living Wage Foundation is announced;
- (c) that the salary of the Cleaner be increased to £33 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 2022;
- (d) that the honorarium paid to the Internal Auditor be retained at £100 with effect from 1st April 2022;
- (e) that the honorarium paid to the Clockwinder be retained at £260 per annum in 2022/23.

11/21 BUDGET 2022/23

The Committee considered the revised budget for the current financial year and the estimate for 2022/23, 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 £575,941, made up as follows:-

Parish Centre	£110,000
Capital (formerly allotments)	£105,039
Replacement of van	£ 3,000
Potential fees – landfill site	£12,694
Community Infrastructure Levy	£345,208

The unallocated balance at the beginning of the financial year had been £108,828.

In terms of the current year, the Clerk reminded Members that the precept had been increased to £128,520. Further income was anticipated of £124,152 which included CIL receipts of £59,334 and grants towards the purchase of land adjoining the A141 of £44,154. With expenditure anticipated of £207,367, this was expected to result in an unallocated surplus carried forward at the end of 2021/22 of £103,144 and earmarked reserves as follows:-

Parish Centre	£120,000
Capital (Allotments)	£105,039
Replacement of van	£ 3,500
Potential fees – landfill site	£ 12,694
CIL	£385,695
Total	£626,928

Members were reminded that funding for the Timebank scheme had been withdrawn, following the departure of the previous Co-ordinator in August. Expenditure on the Connections Bus Project visits on Friday evenings to Warboys was expected to be £8,000 in the current year as a result of the altered arrangements during the summer and early autumn terms. A report would be submitted to Members at the end of the autumn term to enable an assessment to be made regarding the level of attendances and whether this justified continued support for the visits. The Clerk reported that the Project had advised that the cost of visits would remain unchanged at £291 in 2022/23 which would generate a cost of approximately £11,000 if the Council continued to fund the visits.

As the Section 106 Agreement reserve for play equipment/open space provision had now been exhausted and all of the CIL receipts were committed to the replacement of the Parish Centre, the Clerk advised that any future expenditure on new or replacement play equipment would have to be met from the precept. 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 2022/23, although this would be dependent on the outcome of the annual safety inspection by an external company.

The Clerk pointed out that an application for planning permission for the replacement of the Parish Centre had been submitted to the District Council. It was anticipated that tenders would be invited towards the end of the current year with work commencing on site in 2022/23. The Clerk advised that he had made provision in the budget for the cost to be £1.25 million. Earmarked reserves, an offer of CIL funding from the District Council and locally raised grants were hoped to generate around £900,00 towards the cost. While applications for grant would be made, the Clerk advised that it would be advisable to obtain a loan of £350,000 repayable over 25 years to fund the balance. As provision had been made in the budget for several years of £10,000 towards the cost of the replacement, the Clerk advised that the net additional cost in terms of loan repayments was expected to be £5,000.

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 2022/23.

The Clerk reported that the Council's contribution to the Fenton Road Local Highway Improvement scheme undertaken by the County Council in 2019/20 had been paid earlier in the year amounting to £5,606. As the County Council had finished work on the Ramsey Road LHI scheme in recent months, the Clerk pointed out that a further payment towards that scheme of £5,000 was anticipated in the current year. Provision had been made in the budget for a contribution of £5,000 in 2022/23 towards the LHI submission for improvements to the pedestrian access across the A141 to the land being acquired by the Parish Council.

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 proceed as planning permission would expire in the summer of 2022 and it was understood that the company that had obtained the permission had gone into liquidation.

Members were reminded of the impact of salary increases discussed earlier in the meeting on the budget and the possibility of the Council needing to make pension contributions. The draft budget had also included an assumption that the Council would decide to employ additional staffing in terms of support for the Clerk and caretaking/cleaning at the new Parish Centre.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the fact that the Council proposed to hold a sports holiday club for two weeks in the summer school holidays in 2022 but had referred the question of charging for attendance to the Committee in the preparation of the budget. As attendance at the club had been free in August 2021, Members acknowledged that there had been no financial disincentive for children not to attend. On a number of occasions, children had not arrived for the club without prior notice to the organisers which had left places unfilled that could have been taken by others. Under the circumstances, Members felt that a small charge of £5 per day for attendance would not be unreasonable and would not deter parents from registering their children from the scheme.

The Clerk reported that Members' terms of office would expire in May 2022 and that if a contested election needed to be held, the District Council had estimated the cost to be £4,000.

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 £28,005.

With regard to Community Infrastructure Levy payments, Members were advised that all of the payments from the David Wilson Homes and Bellway developments in the village had now been received. Some smaller developments had received planning permission and the Clerk advised that he had included an estimated income of £10,000 in the draft budget for 2022/23.

The Clerk reported that the Government had yet to announce whether they would be introducing capping for parish council precepts in 2022/23, although this was considered unlikely as the average increase by parish councils for 2021/22 had been 2.8% which was lower than the cap of 2.99% set by the Government for county and district councils.

The Clerk advised that it would be necessary to register for VAT in 2022/23 to enable the VAT for the construction of the Parish Centre to be recovered and a further report would be submitted in that respect in the near future.

Members were informed that the Council Tax base for Warboys for 2022/23 was unlikely to be set by the District Council before the beginning of December. The base had risen to 1575 for 2021/22 from 1,525 in the previous year but with completion of the David Wilson Homes and Bellway developments, a significant increase was not anticipated when the base was reviewed by the District Council. With some small-scale development having been granted planning permission, a small increase to 1,580 had been used in the report for illustrative purposes.

A table showing the Band D Council Tax charged by all of the parish councils in Huntingdonshire with a tax base in excess of 1,000 had been included in the report submitted. The Clerk pointed out that Warboys was the third lowest in terms of the rate charged to council taxpayers. While local councils differed greatly in terms of the services that they provided, other town and parish councils charged significantly more, with the rate set by Somersham being more than double that of Warboys.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Council be recommended to set the parish precept at £135,374 for 2022/23 which, if the council tax base increased to an estimated 1580, would require a council tax Band D level of £85.68 which represented a 5% increase in the level of Council Tax;
- (b) that the Council be recommended to charge a sum of £5 per day for children attending the sports holiday club in 2022; and
- (c) subject to the above, the budget estimates attached to the report now submitted be approved for submission to the Council.

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

Chairman