

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held at the Parish Centre, Warboys on 21st March 2022.

PRESENT

Councillor Dr S C Withams, Chairman

Councillors R J Dykstra, D W England, S J Green, Mrs M H Harlock, J A Parker and Mrs A R Wyatt.

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr G Hansell (Outgoing Internal Auditor)

Mrs I Hansell (Current Internal Auditor)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Mrs J M Cole, Ms L A Gifford, P S Potts, Mrs C L Sproats, Mrs S J Wilcox and G C M Willis.

11/21 CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chairman thanked Mr G Hansell for his service as the Council's Internal Auditor for approximately 20 years as he had decided to step down from that position. She welcomed Mrs I Hansell who had offered to take on the role of Internal Auditor and who had been appointed at the last meeting of the Council.

12/21 MINUTES

Upon being moved by Councillor Dykstra and seconded by Councillor Parker, the Minutes of the meeting held on 15th November 2021 were signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

13/21 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No Members declared interests in respect of the items appearing on the agenda for the meeting.

14/21 MATTERS ARISING

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

(a) Grasscutting

Further to Minute No. 08/21, Members were reminded that the Council had engaged a new contractor for the cutting of Adams Lyons playground and Jubilee Park after considering a number of quotations that had been obtained. The Council also had decided not to progress the proposed establishment of a working party to investigate the future of grasscutting in the Parish and the possibility that this might be undertaken by Parish Council staff.

(b) Review of Wages/Salaries

Further to Minute No. 10/21, the Committee noted that the pay award for 2021/22 for local authority employees had been announced recently with a flat rate increase of 1.75% backdated to April 2021. It was expected to be some time before information about the likely pay increase for 2022/23 was known.

(c) Budget 2022/23

Arising from Minute No. 11/21, the Committee noted that the level of Council Tax precept for the Parish in 2022/23 would be as calculated, comprising a band D level of £85.68 and an income of £135,374.

15/21 INTERNAL CONTROL

Members' attention was drawn to the requirement in the Accounts and Audit Regulations for the Council to review the effectiveness of its systems of internal control and internal audit as set out in the Practitioners' Guide to Governance and Accountability in Local Councils in England and Wales published by NALC and SLCC.

The Clerk submitted a checklist (a copy of which had been circulated to all Members) summarising the controls that should be in place and explained the measures that were undertaken by the Council. Under the circumstances, the Committee expressed its satisfaction as to the effectiveness of the existing controls.

16/21 ASSET REGISTER

The Clerk circulated copies of the Council's current asset register sub-divided into categories for land, play equipment, miscellaneous equipment and property. Members were informed that the register was kept up to date to include new equipment, disposals and items that had been scrapped.

An inventory check involving the Chairman, Clerk, Senior Handyman and Internal Auditor had been undertaken of the Council's miscellaneous equipment in November 2021 but due to the impact of the pandemic, an inventory of the play equipment, land and property had not been possible in the past 2 years.

17/21 RISK MANAGEMENT

As more extensive assessments were being prepared for the risks encountered by the Council, the Clerk explained that it was impractical to copy and circulate the information to all Members.

RESOLVED

that the situation be noted by the Committee.

18/21 INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Clerk submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) on the need for the Council to review its Investment Strategy annually to comply with guidance issued by the Secretary of State under the Local Government Act 2003. The guidance required authorities to include information about their investment activity, including the use of performance indicators in the strategy and was now mandatory for parish councils with reserves in excess of £100,000. However the Clerk pointed out that many of the requirements were not applicable in the case of Warboys.

Having regard to the nature and extent of the Council's investments, the Committee did not consider there to be a need for any additional capacity or skills in terms of either Members or the Clerk in managing the Council's assets.

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to approve the Investment Strategy appended to the report now submitted.

19/21 PARISH CENTRE – CONDITIONS OF HIRE

The Committee reviewed and confirmed the conditions of hire of the Parish Centre (copies of which had been circulated).

Members were informed that the pandemic restrictions and guidance issued by the Government had resulted in special conditions being introduced for hirers. These had been modified several times as the case number of infections had risen and fallen and Government advice had changed. The Council had agreed to remove the capacity limit on attendance at the Parish Centre at its meeting held on 14th March and the revised special conditions were circulated which were intended to remind hirers to continue to exercise caution to avoid infection in the interests of vulnerable users.

20/21 INSURANCE POLICY

The Committee reviewed the main elements of the Clerk new group insurance policy with RSA designed specifically for local councils which had been brokered by Community Action Suffolk and which had resulted in a lower premium being paid than previously. Copies of the summary of insurance had been circulated to all Members and was approved.

21/21 SECTION 137 LIMIT

Members were advised by the Clerk that the appropriate sum set by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for the purposes of Section 137 expenditure by local authorities for 2022/23 was £8.82. As the number of people on the electoral roll for Warboys on 1st January 2022 had been 3,426, this meant that the Council's expenditure under Section 137 should not exceed £30,217.32 in 2022/23.

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

Chairman