

WARBOYS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** held at the Parish Centre, Warboys on 28th November 2022.

PRESENT

Councillors R J Dykstra, D W England, D R A Fabb, Ms L A Gifford, S J Green, J A Parker, P S Potts, Mrs C L Sproats, Mrs S J Wilcox, Dr S C Withams and Mrs A R Wyatt.

APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor G C M Willis.

IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs I Hansell, Internal Auditor.

01/22 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Upon being moved by Councillor Parker and seconded by Councillor Mrs Wyatt, 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.

02/22 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Upon being moved by Councillor Dykstra and seconded by Councillor Mrs Wyatt, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor J A Parker be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

03/22 MINUTES

Upon being moved by Councillor Green and seconded by Councillor Dykstra, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21st March 2022 were approved as a correct record.

04/22 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. 11/22) but had been granted a dispensation by the Council to speak and vote on such matters.

05/22 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 21st March 2022.

06/22 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. 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 their councillors. Although the Huntingdonshire panel had recommended the payment of a parish basic allowance to town and 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 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 not been increased since April 2017.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Council continue not to pay the parish basic allowance to the Chairman;
- (b) that the mileage rate be retained at 45 pence per mile in 2023/24; and
- (b) that the Chairman's allowance be increased to £150 in 2023/24.

07/22 GRASSCUTTING

The Clerk submitted a report, copies of which had been circulated, with regard to the Council's grass cutting arrangements.

Members were reminded that the Council had decided not to accept an offer from David Wilson Homes to transfer the open spaces for their two phases of development, together with responsibility for future maintenance. The Clerk reported that he had also recently become aware that Bellway had transferred the maintenance of the open spaces at their development to a management company as opposed to offering it to the Council.

As a result, the Council was responsible for cutting the grass on land in its ownership only. The Council also had cut various highway verges in the village which were the responsibility of the County Council, although this had primarily been undertaken by a volunteer since the pandemic lockdown. The cutting of Adams Lyons and Jubilee Park was undertaken by contractors as the Council did not possess the necessary equipment to cut large areas of grass but the Clerk reported that the contractor who had cut those areas in 2022 had given notice that he would no longer be able to provide the service in the following year.

RESOLVED

that quotations be invited from grass cutting companies to cut Adams Lyons playground and Jubilee Park in 2023/24.

08/22 EMPLOYMENT OF ADDITIONAL STAFF

A report was submitted by the Clerk, copies of which had been circulated, with regard to the employment of additional administrative staff to offset the time being worked by the Clerk in excess of his contracted hours. The Council had agreed to the inclusion of funding in the budget for the current year to enable an additional person to be appointed.

The Clerk suggested that, in order to be able to attract the required calibre of candidate, a reasonable remuneration would be required and the report therefore proposed the creation of the post of Assistant Clerk on spinal column points 11 to 14 of the local government salary scales. A suggested job description and person specification were attached to the report submitted.

RESOLVED

that the Council be recommended to establish a position of Assistant Clerk on NJC terms and conditions of service to be employed for 15 hours per week on spinal column points 11 – 14 (£24,054 - £25,409 p.a.) pro rata in accordance with the job description and person specification submitted.

09/22 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 local government pay award for 2022/23 had recently been agreed which made provision for a flat rate increase of £1,925 for all employees and an additional day's leave with effect from April 2023. A table showing the effects of the increase on the salaries of the Clerk and Handymen was included in the report, showing that the percentage increases were 5.9% for the Clerk, 9.6% for the Senior Handyman and 9.8% for the Handyman respectively. The increase was backdated to 1st April 2022. Members were informed that the hourly rates of pay of the Handymen were higher than both the national living wage set by the Government and living wage set by the Living Wage Foundation.

Members were informed that the average number of hours worked by the Clerk in the current year to date had been 32, compared to his contracted hours of 24. Although the Clerk explained that he was content to work the additional hours without any remuneration, he left the room while the Committee discussed the matter.

With regard to the Cleaner, Members were informed that her rate of pay had last been increased by £2 to £33.00 per week with effect from April 2022. 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. If the Cleaner was to receive the same percentage increase in salary as the Handymen, the Clerk advised that an additional £40 per month or thereabouts would be required which could be achieved through an increase in the Cleaner's basic weekly wage or an

increase in the cleaning element of the hire charge to £7 for the Hall and £5 for the Meeting Room.

Members were reminded that the honorarium for the Clockwinder and Internal Auditor currently were set at £260 and £100 per annum respectively. The previous Internal Auditor had declined any increase in the honorarium since he had assumed the role in 2002/03 and the current Internal Auditor advised the Committee that she was of the same opinion.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the situation with regard NJC pay award for local authority employees for 2022/23 be noted;
- (b) that the salary of the Cleaner be retained at £33 per week but the payment for cleaning the Hall and Meeting Room at the Parish Centre by hirers be increased to £7 and £5 respectively;
- (c) that the honorarium paid to the Internal Auditor be increased to £200 with effect from 1st April 2023;
- (d) that the honorarium paid to the Clockwinder be increased to £290 per annum in 2023/24; and
- (e) that an additional payment of £2,000 be paid to the Clerk in recognition of the additional hours that he had worked in the current year.

10/22 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 reminded Members that the Centre had remained closed for most of 2020/21, although payments of £20,688 had been received from the Government which had been made available to the owners of premises paying business rates to offset the impact of the pandemic.

Members were advised that bookings had slowly started to resume with effect from June 2021, although restrictions had continued to apply in terms of the numbers and the type of activity permitted to comply with Government pandemic guidance. Nevertheless, income for the year had been £9,612 which had been higher than the year before the first lockdown.

With regard to the current year, the Clerk reported that bookings had continued to increase, although some of the organisations that had hired the Centre previously had closed or not returned. Some new users had been attracted, with the result that it was anticipated that income in the current year would be in the region of £11,000. In terms of expenditure, the price of the energy used was currently subject to a fixed term contract but prices were expected to increase in 2023/24 when the contracts came to an end.

The Committee noted that it was anticipated that construction would start on site on the replacement Parish Centre in 2023/24. 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 2023/24 but a report would be submitted to Members if the building had to close earlier.

The Clerk also pointed out that the Council would need to register for VAT to enable the cost of construction of the replacement Parish Centre to be recovered. This would necessitate charging VAT for the hire of the Centre, either requiring the hire charge to be increased or a loss in income if the hire charges remained the same. In view of the relatively short time between registering for VAT and the closure of the existing Centre, Members were of the opinion that the charges should not be increased and the cost of the VAT be met internally.

RESOLVED

that, having regard to the decision with regard to the salary of the Cleaner in Minute No. 09/22 above, the charge for the hire of the Parish Centre be increased with effect from 1st January 2023 to £16 for the first hour and £9 per hour thereafter for the Hall and £11 for the first hour and £6 per hour thereafter for the Meeting Room.

11/22 BUDGET 2023/24

The Committee considered the revised budget for the current financial year and the estimate for 2023/24, 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 £619,769, made up as follows:-

Parish Centre	£120,000
Capital (formerly allotments)	£105,039
Replacement of van	£ 3,500
Potential fees – landfill site	£12,694
Community Infrastructure Levy	£378,536

The unallocated balance at the beginning of the financial year had been £138,449.

In terms of the current year, the Clerk reminded Members that the precept had been increased to £136,745. In comparison to recent years, only £838 had been received in Community Infrastructure receipts in the current year, although investment income was expected to be in the region of £7,000 after increases in interest rates. With expenditure anticipated of £139,774, this was expected to result in an unallocated surplus carried forward at the end of 2022/23 of £168,175 and earmarked reserves as follows:-

Parish Centre	£130,000
Capital (Allotments)	£105,039
Replacement of van	£ 4,000

Potential fees – landfill site	£ 12,694
CIL	£379,374
Total	£631,107

Under the circumstances, the Clerk recommended that a sum of £75,000 be transferred to the earmarked reserve for the replacement Parish Centre.

Attention was drawn to a number of issues contained in the report. Notification had been received from the Connections Bus Project that average attendances at the Friday evening sessions in Warboys for the first half of the autumn term had remained high at 37 children per week. The cost per session would increase slightly in 2023/24 from £291 to £315 which would amount to £11,340 for 36 weeks.

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.

With regard to the replacement of the Parish Centre, the Clerk advised that the draft budget allowed for the cost to be £1.25 million, net of VAT. Earmarked reserves, an offer of CIL funding from the District Council and locally raised grants were hoped to generate around £1 million towards the cost. While further applications for grant would be made, the Clerk advised that it would be necessary 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 £10,000.

The Clerk reported that the Council's contribution to the Local Highways Improvement scheme to improve the crossing of the A141 would cost £6,291. Provision had been made in the budget for a contribution of £5,000 in 2023/24 towards the LHI submission for a footpath alongside Puddock Hill in the event of the application being successful.

The sports holiday club for two weeks in the summer school holidays of the current year had been popular with children and their families and provision had been made in the draft budget for this to be repeated in 2023. However, Councillor Parker advised that the company who would be providing out-of-school care at the Primary Academy with effect from January planned to run holiday schemes themselves. Although these would be educational and classroom based, it would not be known whether it would be possible to hire the school for two weeks in the summer holidays until the start of the spring term

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 £30,217.

With regard to Community Infrastructure Levy funding, Members were advised that all of the payments from the David Wilson Homes and Bellway developments in the village had now been received. Planning permission had been granted for some individual residential units, as a result of which CIL income was likely to be in the region of £2,500 only in 2023/24. Some larger sites had been allocated for development

in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 but there was no indication as to when these would be brought forward for development.

The Clerk reported that the District Council had invited applications for funding from their central CIL receipt fund with a closing date of 9th January but that there were no schemes planned by the Parish Council currently that would qualify for assistance.

The Clerk reported that the Government had yet to announce whether they would be introducing capping for parish council precepts in 2023/24, although this was considered unlikely as the average increase by parish councils for 2022/23 had been 4.3%.

Members were informed that the Council Tax base for Warboys for 2023/24 was included in a report to be considered shortly by the District Council to approve the tax base for each town and parish council in Huntingdonshire. This was expected to rise from 1,596 to 1,608 and a table was circulated showing the precept that would be generated at the new tax base by the current tax level for a Band D property of £85.68 and increases of 2% and 5%.

A table showing the Band D Council Tax charged by all the parish councils in Huntingdonshire with a tax base in excess of 1,000 also 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.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Council be recommended to set the parish precept at £144,655 for 2023/24 which would require a council tax Band D level of £89.96 and represented a 5% increase in the level of Council Tax;
- (b) that a sum of £75,000 be transferred from the unallocated budget in the current year to the earmarked reserve for the replacement Parish Centre; 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