

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF BRENCHLEY AND MATFIELD PARISH COUNCIL
HELD ON TUESDAY 26th APRIL 2022 at 10.30am at MATFIELD PAVILION

Present: Cllr J. Buttery (Chair), Cllr A. Wells, Cllr J. Spencer, Cllr A. Stout, P. Horn (RFO), C. Brooks (Clerk)

1. Appointment of Chair

Councillor Buttery expressed his interest in standing for Council Chair and consequently he would not stand for re-election as the Chair of the Fin-Com. Amanda Wells expressed an interest in standing for Chair of the Fin-Com and the remaining councillors offered their support. The appointment of Chairs will be agreed at the Annual Meeting on 3rd May 2022.

2. Apologies for absence

No apologies were received but the resignation of Lynne Butler from the Parish Council was noted and it was decided that her vacant position on the Committee should be filled to retain the Committee at five members.

3. Declarations of interest on any item on the Agenda

No Declarations of interest were made.

4. Review of Minutes of the last meeting of this Committee

It was confirmed that the action points arising from the minutes of the Fin- Com meeting of 16th November 2021 (approved by the Full Council in December 2021) have been concluded.

New Allotment fees were introduced in April 2022 with no issues raised, the income for the site is approximately £1500. One of the largest plots was surrendered and divided leaving just one tenant with a large plot. It was agreed he could pay in two instalments.

The new Pavilion booking fees have been introduced at £15 ph for the first hour and £10 ph thereafter.

The Finance and Governance Risk Register was approved.

5. Terms of Reference

The draft Terms of Reference were discussed. It was agreed that a reference to Quorum of three be added and then the Terms of Reference be submitted to Full-Council for approval.

Action: RFO

Recommendation: That the Council approve the Terms of Reference.

6. Review Financial Regulations

Amendments to the Financial Regulations will be discussed at the Parish Council meeting in June.

The current levels of delegation of authority to the Clerk to spend were discussed. It was agreed, on the suggestion of the Internal Auditor, to ask the Council to increase limits for the Clerk's discretion to make purchases where there is provision within the relevant cost centre budget to do so. This increase to a higher level is to better enable the smooth running of the Council's business, of particular relevance to authorising repairs and general maintenance of Council assets. Increases in costs of many items and services has resulted in the current level of authority for the Clerk being insufficient.

The proposed increases are:

An upper limit of £1000 authority to spent on goods, repairs and one off projects, increased from £250. For contracts to obtain quotes from three contractors if it is over £1000 not £250 as currently required. Full tenders would be required for contracts over £25k.

An increase of the credit card limit to £1,000 in line with increased delegation limit. The limit on the Credit Card is currently £500 per month.

It was also agreed that the Parish Council should be able to have preferred tradesmen that we trust and can establish a working relationship with, thus enabling work to be undertaken in a shorter timeframe and with less administration whilst maintaining regular value-for-money review. It was agreed that the Clerk investigate reliable tradesmen to put forward as preferred suppliers.

Action: Clerk

Recommendation: That the Council adopt the Financial Regulations as amended

7. SIC (Statement of Internal Controls)

The Internal Auditor recommended that the Council introduce a SIC. Following discussions, it was agreed that the contents of the draft document are covered adequately in the Council's other processes and that the introduction of this document would serve no additional purpose. It was therefore agreed not to introduce a SIC.

8. Interim Internal audit report 23 November 2021

This report was considered and no action was required.

Following the Internal Auditor's confirmation that the Parish Council do not require an interim audit it was agreed to Recommend to Council that the Interim Audit cease with immediate effect producing an annual saving of £350.

Recommendation: That the Council approve the discontinuation of the Interim Internal Audit.

9. Budget Monitoring

9.1 Comparison of 2021/22 budget to actual spend.

The Comparison was discussed and it was noted that there was an underspend on the budget of £31,319. This comprised mainly of £8,625 underspend on the pond, £1,960 on seats and signs, £1,670 on Computer costs and £1,174 on Christmas lights following a change of approach to projects originally planned. £ 9,507 underspend on budgets due to late commencement of works or late submission of invoices. A saving of £5,490 on mowing by changing frequency and supplier. The resulting increase of reserves from these savings will be considered when assigning budgets and calculating the precept for 2023/24.

9.2 Roll over of budget provision

It was determined that there are a number of areas where the unspent budgets from 2021/22 will be spent in 2022/23 due to late submission of invoices and late undertaking of commissioned work. It was noted that these budgets will be overspent in 2022/23 as a consequence. These involve the following cost centres;

503: Matfield Green Posts and Parking (£732)
512: Streetlight maintenance (£560)
514: Trees (£1035)
606: Traffic (£7,180)

It was determined that the RFO should contact the auditor to discover if there is any way in which the accounting software can be used to reflect this known overspend without restating the budgets.

Action: RFO

10. Cost Centre Review

It was agreed that the RFO should monitor expenditure on combined budgets such as trees and allocate costs to the Allotments, Cooksfield and St Luke's to provide better management accounting. It

was noted that this will impact on the individual budgets concerned but not affect the total agreed budget.

The RFO advised that recent confusion with the cost budgeted/precepted for and grant income associated with Cinderhill has led to a lack of clarity on the budget obligation. A separate cost centre was created for Cinderhill costs not associated with the RPA grant income and £1000 and £2500 were budgeted separately. It was believed that the PC had an agreement to pay £3500 which leaves the cost centre for works at Cinderhill short. A meeting was held on the 13th April with the Kent High Weald Partnership at which KHWP agreed to draft an SLA including the cost of works envisaged for 2022/23 and the resulting requirement on the Parish Councils expenditure for this year. The RFO is to liaise with Councillor Akenhead on the outcome and to appraise the Finance Committee of the impact.

Action: RFO

11. Draft Budget and Precept 2023-24 - timeframes

Timeframes were agreed and it was determined that the Finance Committee should meet once more before work on the draft budget and Precept commences.

June/July/August: Request to Councillors for expenditure requirements to be suggested, including quotes.

Early/Mid Sept: First working draft Budget meeting (RFO/Clerk and Chair of FinCom).

October PC Meeting: First draft of budget for comment.

Mid-Oct/early Nov: FinCom second budget meeting early November (including allotment/pavilion fees etc)

Dec: Full PC approval of budget

It was noted that inflation needs to be a consideration in this year's calculations.

12. Income and Fees - information

The RFO advised that it is only the Cricketers who now hold a licence for Matfield Pavilion.

The Guides have paused usage of the Pavilion pending consideration of reforming a pack. They have requested that their use of the cupboard at the Pavilion remains. The Committee agreed to permit their partial retention of this cupboard but that they return the keys they hold to the Parish Council.

Action: The Clerk be asked to convey this decision to the Guides.

13. Contracts

13.1 Renewal of Contracts and Suppliers

The RFO advised that the renewal of the Grounds Maintenance contract is due at the end of this year and it was agreed that she should seek early quotes for renewal (this having been offered only for a one year contract to Landscape Services whereas it had previously been for three years). It was also noted that the Photocopier lease comes up for renewal in October and it was agreed that the RFO should undertake an assessment of the PC's current requirements and options.

Action: RFO

13.2 Appraisal of current Contracts held

A list of contracts was supplied and noted.

14. Direct Debits/ Standing Orders – information

A list of Direct Debits was supplied and noted.

15. Asset Register – Review

The Asset Register was reviewed by Councillor Stout and the RFO and updated in 2022 to add a laptop and benches. The impact of this update was reviewed by the Finance Committee.

16. Salary and Pension

16.1 The Committee were advised that the Pay award 2021-22 was set at 1.75%, this backdated amount was paid in full to staff in the Mar 2022 payroll. Review due April 2022.

16.2 The Committee were advised that the Councils Pension policy will be discussed by the Employment Committee and may have a financial impact on the 2023/24 budgets.

The fact that Smart Pension has introduced an admin fee of £218 a year was also noted.

17. Section 106 funds – information

17.1 Funds currently held by TWBC

At the Finance Committee Meeting in November it was agreed the Parish Council would request for the remaining £1,542 S106 money to be used for “youth and adult recreation” purposes at Porters Wood, as stipulated in the s.106 agreement. This money will expire in 2023 if not drawn down. Councillor Spencer advised that he will set up a working group to assess the needs of Petteridge residents and produce a costed proposal for discussion.

Action: Cllr Spencer.

17.2 s.106 from the Fernham Development

The Committee were advised of the text on the S.106 for expenditure usage from Fernham homes. This is £75,000 but is not yet available. Councillor Akenhead is investigating the potential requirements for this income.

18. Bank Accounts - information

18.1 John Downer Charity.

It was noted that the Parish Council has no legal status with this charity and that all involvement of the Parish Council, and it's staff, should cease and be handed over to the Trustees who should determine the future of the Charity. The RFO is to organise the removal of the Parish Council staff from the Bank Account and the full transfer over to the Trustees. This action would be circulated to the Council for information.

Action: RFO

18.2 New Bank Account

The Parish Council having previously resolved the principle of opening a bank account, it was agreed that the RFO will open a new 90 day's notice Savings account with Ecology Building Society. Councillors Buttery and Wells will be the authorised signatories and the initial balance of £85,000 will be transferred.

Action: RFO

19. Date of next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was set as 12.07.22 at 10.30am