

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held on **THURSDAY 28 MAY 2015**, at the King Edward Hall, Lindfield.

The meeting began at 8.00 p.m.

Present:

Parish Councillors: Mr. S. Henton (Chairman)
Mr. M. Allen
Mr. W. Blunden
Mr. A. Gomme
Mr. R. Plass (Vice Chairman)
Mrs. V. Upton

In attendance: Mrs C. Irwin (Clerk)
Mrs. T. Ely (Responsible Financial Officer)

This being the first meeting of the Committee following the Annual Meeting of Council, the Chairman of Council, Councillor Blunden, opened the meeting and presided for the first item.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

1.1 The Chairman of Council called for nominations for the office of Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee for the Council year 2015/16. Councillor Henton was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Blunden and **SECONDED** by Councillor Plass. There being no further nominations, Councillor Stephen Henton was duly **ELECTED** as Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee for the Council year 2015/16. Councillor Henton took the Chair for the meeting.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

2.1 The Chairman called for nominations for the office of Vice Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. Councillor Plass was **PROPOSED** by Councillor Henton and **SECONDED** by Councillor Blunden. There being no further nominations, Councillor Ron Plass was duly **ELECTED** as Vice Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee for the Council year 2015/16.

3. APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE.

3.1 All Members were present.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

4.1 Item 12: Grant request from St. Catherine's Hospice. Councillor Allen declared a personal interest in this item as his wife was a member of the fundraising team.

5. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

5.1 There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

6. MINUTES AND CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 5 MARCH 2015.

6.1 An error on the Agenda (incorrect date of the last meeting of the Committee) was **NOTED**. The Chairman called for approval of the Minutes and Confidential Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 5 March 2015. These were **AGREED** and the Chairman **SIGNED** the Minutes and Confidential Minutes as being a true record of that meeting.

7. APPOINTMENT OF SUB COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

7.1 It was **AGREED** that the Sub Committees and Working Groups of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and their membership and terms of reference should be as follows:

- Insurance and Risk Management Working Group
4 members – It was **AGREED** that Councillors Allen, Henton and Plass should continue as members of the Working Group and that the fourth member be determined after the co-option of members to fill the two vacancies after the election.

Remit: to review the insurance policies of the Council in consultation with the Clerk and RFO; to make recommendations to the F&GP Committee on changes to the insurance cover arising from such reviews; to conduct a periodic review of the Council's insurance providers and submit a written comparison of proposals to F&GP with recommendations; to oversee the Council's risk management procedures to ensure that the requirements were met, reporting to F&GP and other committees as appropriate.

- Administration Sub Committee
5 members – Councillors Allen, Blunden, Henton, Plass and Upton.

Remit: to oversee all matters relating to the Parish Council's office property, employment matters and the running and maintenance of the Parish Office within the agreed Administration Budget and in consultation with the Parish Clerk, including periodic checks of the premises and working practices for compliance with Health and Safety and Risk Management requirements.

- Directory Working Group
4 members - Councillors Allen, Henton, Plass and Upton.

Remit: to give practical help to the office staff if needed when preparing the Parish Directory and Year Book for the printers and to consider significant editorial changes in consultation with the office staff. It was suggested that this Working Group should meet at least once a year.

- Grants Panel
3 members - Councillors Allen, Gomme and Upton
Remit: to assess applications for grant funding and make recommendations to the F&GP Committee.

- Public Toilets Working Group
At the request of the Chairman, it was **AGREED** to defer consideration of this Working Group pending discussion on the project under Agenda item 18.

8. BANK MANDATE.

8.1 As there had been no changes in respect of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, it was **AGREED** that there would be no recommendation to Council to change the bank mandate.

9. DIRECT DEBITS

9.1 The list of payments by Direct Debit was **NOTED**, the only change being in respect of the BT contract for telephone and broadband which had been reviewed.

10. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

10.1 There were no Chairman's announcements.

11. ACTION LIST.

11.1 The Chairman enquired about progress on repairing the clock on the Clock Tower House and the Clerk reported that this could not be done before replacement of the loft ladder which was dependent on other factors. The Chairman also pointed out that purchase of an office fridge was outstanding.

12. GRANTS AND DONATIONS.

12.1 Grant budget. **NOTED:** that the budget for the current financial year was £2,000.

12.2 Grant request from St Catherine's Hospice. **NOTED:** this item on the Agenda should have read "to consider grant request from St Catherine's Hospice" and not "to note...". Councillor Allen declared a personal interest in this item as his wife was a member of the fundraising team. He remained present. This application had been noted at the meeting held on 5 March but deferred to the present meeting, because a grant of £200 had already been made to St Catherine's Hospice during the financial year 2014/15. Councillor Upton reported that this application had been considered by members of the Grants Panel on its receipt in February they were recommending a £200 grant in support of the Hospice whose work benefitted local residents. Councillor Blunden proposed increasing the grant this year to £250 as this was a worthy cause and this was **AGREED.**

RESOLVED: that the Council, in accordance with its powers under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, should incur the following expenditure, which, in the opinion of the Council, is in the interests of the area or its inhabitants and will benefit them in a manner commensurate with the expenditure: a grant of £250 towards the work of St Catherine's Hospice.

13. BUDGET 2015/16.

13.1 The reports for April 2015 were not yet available. It was **NOTED** that expenditure from the F&GP budget had been mainly regular payments for salaries, insurance premium, loan repayment and annual subscriptions and that £17,300 had been paid from the E&A budget to UK Power Networks for the connection charges in respect of replacement light columns in Brookway.

14. UNSPENT BALANCES AND TRANSFERS TO RESERVES

14.1 The Chairman proposed that this item should be deferred to the next meeting, pending a thorough review of the reserves. This was **AGREED.**

15. PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING REQUESTS MADE UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 AND DATA PROTECTION ACT 1998

15.1 It was **NOTED** that the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme was due for reviewing and this would be put on the action list for this Committee, together with drawing up documented procedures for handling requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

16. FINAL REPORT OF THE INTERNAL AUDITOR 2014/15

16.1 **NOTED** that the Internal Auditor had completed his final inspection for the financial year 2014/15 on 20 May. He had reported that the Council's controls and procedures were well managed and met the Council's needs. He had highlighted a few points for consideration which Members went on to discuss under the next Agenda item.

17. INTERNAL CONTROLS

17.1 In his interim report dated 25 March 2015, the Internal Auditor had drawn the Council's attention to Page 50 of Governance and Accountability for Local Councils Practitioners' Guide 2014 which had referred to new procedures that needed to be introduced. He had pointed out that the External Auditors had recently asked Councils to provide evidence that these relevant systems were in place:

- Documented procedure for the handling of correspondence, circulation, responses, filing and retention
- Documented procedure for the monitoring of Grants or Loans made or received
- Documented procedure for dealing with responses to Consultation Requests

The previous version of the Guide had included these in a list headed: "Areas where a council may need to manage self risk" which went on to state: "a council's internal controls may include the following:...". However

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

in the current edition “may” had been strengthened to “should”. In his final report dated 20 May 2015, the Internal Auditor had added a fourth control to this list which he was recommending to the Council: a code of conduct for employees.

The interim report of the Internal Auditor had been received and noted by Full Council at the Annual Meeting on 19 May 2015 and it had been agreed to refer the matter of drawing up these procedures to the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The Committee considered each of the recommended controls in turn, including the code of conduct for employees, which had come to light since the Annual Meeting.

- 17.2 Procedures for dealing with and monitoring grants or loans made or received. It was **AGREED** to reinforce the Council’s policy only to monitor grants over £250 and that this should be done by requesting, in the covering letter accompanying the cheque, that the recipient report back to the Council on how the money was spent.
- 17.3 Documented procedures to deal with responses to consultation requests. It was **AGREED** that the procedure as followed by the Council should be written down and that the Clerk should maintain a log of consultations and how they were dealt with.
- 17.4 Documented procedures for document receipt, circulation, response handling and filing. It was **AGREED** that a suitable procedure based on practice should be documented.
- 17.5 Codes of conduct for employees. The Internal Auditor had drafted a short template which he had offered to the Council for adoption. The Clerk had made enquiries with SSALC and the SLCC who had both advised that the contracts of employment and appropriate discipline and grievance procedures should cover any action that could be taken if an employee acted in an unacceptable way. It was therefore **AGREED** to recommend to Council that the existing contracts of employment and discipline and grievance procedures should continue to be relied on without the need for a code of conduct for employees.

18. PROPOSED PUBLIC CONVENIENCES ON THE COMMON.

- 18.1 The Chairman read out the advice from a Planning Officer, forwarded by David Harper (MSDC).

“The whole of the site is within the conservation area. As such the law says that in determining planning applications within the conservation area regard must be had to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area. It has been established in appeals and court cases that preserve can be taken to mean having a neutral impact. Policy B12 in the Mid Sussex Local Plan contains the same tests.

From looking at the attached drawings and a map of the site I don't think it could be argued that placing a building on the northeast side of the bowl club car park would comply with this policy test. I think it's likely to look prominent and out of place. It would seem better to try and locate a new building near to either existing buildings or to a defined boundary on the ground.”

- 18.2 The Chairman expressed his intention to withdraw from the Working Group as he had completely lost enthusiasm for the project due to the lengthy delay in progressing it forward and resistance received from MSDC and certain residents. He initiated a discussion about whether to continue with this project as an impasse seemed to have been reached in finding a suitable site that was acceptable to all parties, the resistance being from neighbouring residents to the site on the left of the bowls club car park and from MSDC to the site on the right.

Points made during discussion included:

- Public conveniences on the Common were desperately needed and supported by a large number of people who had been canvassed informally
- The area of concrete covered in astro-turf near the pavilion should be investigated for availability and acceptability as this no longer appeared to be in use since the cricket nets were installed
- Public conveniences attached to the cricket pavilion would be an ideal solution but it was understood that this was not possible because of safeguarding issues for children using the pavilion
- The site to the left of the bowls club car park should still be considered as this was close to where the original WC building had been and would interfere less with the Conservation Area. They were not

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

anticipated to create the same problems as the old WCs as they would be of a modern design and managed in a modern way.

- This site had the disadvantage of there being a road to cross from the main part of the Common.
- Portaloos were brought in for big events on the Common
- Adolescents and children would still use the bushes
- Was the expense justified for something the village has managed without for several years?
- Older people had the need for toilet provision as well as children – families with grandparents regularly visited the Common.
- Section 106 money was understood to be available for this project.
- The Parish Council should get on with this project.

It was **AGREED** that:

- Councillors Gomme and Upton should join the Working Group along with Councillors Blunden and Plass
- The Working Group should meet with MSDC again to discuss how to take the project forward
- The Clerk in consultation with the Working Group should seek pre-application advice from Planning Officers on the originally preferred site and the hardstanding near the cricket pavilion
- Subject to confirmation from MSDC about a realistic site, the matter should go to Full Council to be refreshed.
- Subject to the previous bullet point, the Council should go out to public consultation on the viable site(s)

19. PARISH OFFICE.

- 19.1 Replacement of the front door. It was **NOTED** that remedial work following the replacement of the office front door had been completed.
- 19.2. Roof. Councillor Plass confirmed that cosmetic repainting of the visible areas of the Clock Tower House roof would be done during the summer. He would be speaking to the contractors shortly about cleaning the white metal work on the tower which appeared to be sound and not in need of painting.

20. TO CONFIRM ATTENDANCE AT TRAINING AND CONFERENCE EVENTS.

- 20.1 It was **AGREED** to authorise attendance at forthcoming SSALC training and networking events, including new Councillors' training.

21. RISK MANAGEMENT.

- 21.1 It was **AGREED** that the Insurance and Risk Management Working Group should arrange to meet to review risk assessments relating to employees, accommodation, financial controls and governance.

22. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

- 22.1 No other items of business were raised.

The meeting concluded at 8.54 p.m.