

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on Thursday 19 March 2009 at the King Edward Hall, Lindfield.

Present: Rev. M. Davies (Chairman)
Mr. M. Allen
Mr. W. Blunden
Mrs. M. Nicolle (ex officio)
Mrs. V. Upton
Mr. S. Willcox (Vice Chairman)

Also present: 1 member of the public

In attendance: Mrs. C. Irwin

The meeting commenced at 8.00 p.m.

220. WELCOME AND EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS.

220. The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and announced the emergency procedure for the King Edward Hall.

221. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

221.1 Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Johnson and Gomme and the reasons accepted.

222. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEM ON THE AGENDA.

222.1 There were no such declarations.

223. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

223.1 Council Tax / Precept. Mr. N. Kerslake commented on the increase in the Parish Council's precept, due to the fact that in the previous years, the balances had been depleted to fund the shortfall in the annual budget. Mr. Kerslake stated that most auditors would not criticise a council for holding reserves of at least half the budget, so the Council should build to a sensible reserve, anticipating increases in expenditure and make provision early rather than making a huge increase in the precept.

223.2 Additional Accommodation. Mr. Kerslake stated that there should have been a financial assessment to compare the option of extending the Parish Office by making use of the flying freehold with renting additional accommodation. An assessment had been carried out when the Council was considering the purchase of the existing Parish Office, to compare the purchase with building a room onto the side of the King Edward Hall for the use of the Parish Council. Such an investment appraisal should have been carried out and put on record to inform the Council in terms of best value.

224. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2009.

224.1 The Chairman called for approval of the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 15 January 2009. These were agreed and the Chairman signed the Minutes as a true record of that meeting.

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225. ACTION LIST / PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT.

- 225.1 Emergency Plan – Cllr. Allen stated that the format that had been inherited had not really been appropriate to the needs of the Parish Council. Cllrs. Allen and Willcox agreed to report to Full Council where they had reached with the process.
- 225.2 Insurance – NOTED: The Insurance and Risk Management Sub Committee would meet before the May F&GP meeting to make recommendations on the Insurance Policy in time for the renewal date and they would also be looking at the Risk Assessment documentation.
- 225.3 Website - Development of the site was in progress and a training day had been arranged for 14 April.
- 225.4 Broadband – NOTED: the Council had changed Broadband provider and had had to take a new email address. The previous provider had continued to charge the RFO for the month of March, but this was understood to have been resolved. The Council was intending to take a “.gov.uk” email address which would come with the “.gov.uk” website domain. This could be routed through whichever Broadband provider the Council was using and there should be no need to change the published email address thereafter.
- 225.5 Parish Office survey - NOTED: the owner of the adjoining property had not replied to the letter sent about issues arising from the survey. AGREED to send a reminder.

226. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

- 226.1 High Street Shops . The Chairman reported that there was to be an article in the Lindfield Life magazine to encourage people to use the local shops and businesses. The matter had been considered by the Lindfield Preservation Society and they, like the Parish Council, were prepared to offer moral support but were not in a position to do anything else. This had been the subject of some criticism since it was felt that the Society and perhaps even the Council should be more active in the support of local retailers for the sake of the future of the village. The Chairman had been contacted by two people who were particularly concerned about the situation and had put them in touch with each other. He had indicated that, as a member of the Preservation Society Committee, he was prepared to convene a meeting of the traders, but was not able to do anything beyond that stage.

227. GRANTS AND DONATIONS.

- 227.1 1st Lindfield Sea Scout Group. An application for funding towards the cost of camping equipment had been deferred at the meeting of the F&GP Committee on 15 January because Members of the Committee had minded to make a larger grant than the usual £250 limit and, according to the Council's procedure, a report was required to be made by a nominated Member. The Chairman had met with PC Geoff Bennett, who had made the application on behalf of the 1st Lindfield Sea Scouts, and obtained further information on which he had reported in the paper he had prepared for this meeting. The proposal was to make a donation of £750, which was not to be seen as a precedent, although further donations of this order would not be ruled out, as it was known that further funds were needed for tents and for work on the Scout hut, for which there would have to be a major appeal.

A donation of £750 was proposed by Cllr. Blunden, seconded by Cllr. Nicolle and AGREED unanimously.

- 227.2 4Sight. (West Sussex Association for the Blind). This organisation was a fully registered medical and social welfare charity supporting 2,000 blind and partially sighted people in West Sussex, including 15 people living within Lindfield Parish. AGREED to make a donation of £100.

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227.3 West Sussex Mediation Service. The object of this charity was to seek the resolution of actual or potential conflict between individuals, groups or organisations through a process of mediation in order that opposing positions may be reconciled. AGREED to make a donation of £100.

227.4 The donations agreed in Minutes 227.1, 227.2 and 227.3 were made under the provisions of Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972

227.5 Letters of appreciation for grants made. A letter of appreciation from Victim Support for the £150 donated in January, was noted.

228. FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE BUDGET 2008/09.

228.1 To review payments made to date in 2008/09

NOTED that to 28 February 2009:

- the budget progress relating to the F&GP Committee's budget showed that from a budget of £83,575.00, a total of £81,370.18 had been spent. This budget would be overspent by the end of March and it was AGREED that the difference should be made up from the General Reserve.
- For the overall budget, from a budget of £132,125.00, a total of £100,988.85 had been spent.

228.2 Analysis of Administration Budget 2008/09. NOTED: a breakdown of the Administration Budget showed that from a budget of £67,075.00, a total of £73,345.55 had been spent up to 28 February 2009. Members were all aware that the overspend related to personnel costs, for exceptional reasons.

It was also NOTED that the Solicitor's fees for examining the lease for Denmans Court were estimated to be in the range of £900 to £1200 plus VAT and any expenses incurred on behalf of the Parish Council.

228.3 Closure of the Barclays Treasury Deposit. In February 2009, the RFO had alerted the Clerk and the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee to the fact that the Barclays Treasury Deposit, in which the Parish Council had £48,800 invested, was now returning 0% interest. After making enquiries and consulting with the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, the RFO had arranged for deposit to be moved into the Business Premium Account, which was still returning 1%. The RFO would be looking into any suitable alternative investment products.

229. REVIEW OF INTERNAL AUDIT.

229.1 Cllr. Willcox reported that he and Cllr. Davies had met with the RFO, Mrs. Koliën, to examine the report of the Internal Auditors against a series of accountability criteria. Cllrs. Davies and Willcox had reported by means of a paper to F&GP for this meeting which addressed the process under four headings: external audit, internal audit, internal "control" and risk assessment and management. The conclusion drawn had been that the Parish Council had a very robust system: the arrangements were entirely satisfactory for a Council of the size and turnover of Lindfield and what was required had been done. AGREED to RECOMMEND Full Council to accept the review at the meeting on 26 March and to review the effectiveness of internal audit procedures early each year.

230. LIAISON WITH LINDFIELD RURAL PARISH COUNCIL.

230.1 Issues relating to the proposed merger of the two Parish Councils. The report of the Boundary Review had been published on the Electoral Commission's website. It was noted that there appeared to be nothing in the report to affect the proposals for a merger with Lindfield Rural Parish Council.

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- 230.2 Draft letter for sending to residents of both Parishes regarding the proposed merger. It had been agreed at the last meeting of representatives of the two Parishes that a joint letter should be sent to the residents of both Parishes inviting comments on the proposed merger. A draft letter was tabled and discussed. Sensitive issues relating to Scaynes Hill were recognised. It was noted that the letter would have to be agreed by Lindfield Rural Parish Council and changes, possibly the addition of perceived disadvantages, may have to be made subject to final agreement by both Councils. Two amendments were agreed: the word "that" following "artificial boundaries" in the second paragraph to be deleted and the fifth bullet point to be made into a new paragraph. It was AGREED that the draft letter as amended should be sent to the Chairman and Clerk of Lindfield Rural Parish Council for their comments.
- 230.3 Walstead Cemetery It was NOTED that Lindfield Rural Parish Council had resolved at their meeting on 2 March to create a three tiered fee structure – one rate for Lindfield Rural Parish residents, one for Lindfield Urban Parish residents and a third for people from outside these two parishes. A breakdown of the new fees had been circulated to Members by email. Members expressed disappointment that Lindfield Parishioners had not been granted parity with residents of Lindfield Rural Parish, particularly as this would have demonstrated that the two Parish Councils were beginning to work together, which would support the proposed merger.
231. COMMUNICATIONS FORUM.
- 231.1 Notes of the meeting held on 13 January 2009. The main points raised at that meeting had been noted at the F&GP meeting on 15 February, but the notes of the meeting had not been available to receive formally. AGREED to receive the Notes of the Communications Forum held on 13 January 2009.
232. PARISH COUNCIL'S NEWSLETTER
- 232.1 It was NOTED that the Parish Council's Spring Newsletter would be published in the April edition of the new Lindfield Life magazine. Once the magazine had been delivered, the Newsletter would also be put on the Parish Council's website. The Chairman stated that the draft appeared to be a good effort and if the new Lindfield Life magazine proved to be more reliable than its predecessor it would be a good thing for the community. The editors had reported that there had been some problems with the distribution arrangements, because of the disparate nature of the rural area. The magazine would also be available through local shops and websites.
233. LINDFIELD PARISH DIRECTORY AND YEAR BOOK.
- 233.1 The printers, the Graham Cumming Group, had confirmed that the best price they could offer the Parish Council was to hold last year's price provided the Directory remained at 80 pages - £5400 plus VAT. The number of pages for the current edition had been reduced from 88 because of the downturn in advertising. Because of the work involved in repaginating, there had been no reduction in the price. The additional 8 pages, if required, would cost a further £250 plus VAT. AGREED to go ahead with the 2010 edition and review the situation again early in 2010. It was also AGREED to authorise the Clerks, in consultation with the Editorial Group, to make the decision on the final number of pages if necessary.
- 233.2 At the F&GP meeting held on 15 January 2009, it had been agreed to consider the addition of marker ribbons, subject to cost. In response to the Clerk's enquiry, the Printers had stated that ribbons were normally charged at 27p per copy but, in view of the Parish Council's very long standing association since 1993, the Managing Director had agreed to include these without charge for this coming edition only. Members considered this offer but felt that the additional £918 to continue this in future years could not be

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justified and it was therefore better not to introduce the ribbon for one year only. AGREED to decline the offer, but to thank the Managing Director of the Graham Cumming Group for his generous gesture.

234. RISK ASSESSMENT.

234.1 NOTED that this would be included on the Agenda for the meeting of the Insurance and Risk Management Sub Committee to be arranged in time to report to the next meeting of the F&GP Committee.

235. TO CONFIRM ATTENDANCE AT TRAINING AND CONFERENCE EVENTS.

235.1 It was AGREED to confirm the following forthcoming events for which there was a charge:

- Clerks' Networking Day (SALC) with additional session on the CiLCA module for the Power of Wellbeing 31 March – Clerk and Deputy Clerk - a total of £125 including VAT

Councillors Update and Chairmanship Day (SALC) – 11 – 12 September. Details were not yet on the SALC website, but similar courses in April cost £201.25 including VAT on a residential basis and £155.25 non residential. Single day attendance on the Councillors' course was £98.25 and the Chairman's Day was £86.25. No members had been able to attend the April weekend, and the Chairman encouraged members to attend in September. The Chairman and Cllr. Willcox stated that they wished to attend the September event.

235.2 NOTED:

(free events that had already taken place):

- Briefing presentation given by SERCO regarding the street cleansing arrangements – attended by the Clerk.
- A briefing presentation given by the Planning Portal and MSDC, regarding the move towards an all electronic system for planning applications – attended by the Deputy Clerk.
- A Workshop given by MSDC on "How can we tackle fuel poverty in Mid Sussex?" – attended by Cllr. Upton

(free forthcoming events)

- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (MSDC) - 26 March – Cllr. Willcox.
- MSALC/MSDC Conference - 2 April – 4 Councillors and both Clerks
- Core Strategy Sustainable Rural Communities meeting (MSDC) - 20 - Cllrs. Blunden and Gomme

236. REFURBISHMENT OF THE DENMANS LANE PUBLIC TOILETS: PROGRESS REPORT.

236.1 It was noted that the work was progressing well and that the second payment, (£33,000 plus VAT) had been made on delivery of the modules.

236.2 It was also noted that a rental payment had to be made to MSDC for the contractors to use the car park space next to the recycling area, plus a licence fee and a returnable deposit of £500 in case of damage. There had been no rental charge for the recycling area. The licence and rental had come to £340. Members raised the question of the additional sum of money that Mrs. Anne Halligey had indicated might be payable from MSDC in addition to the amount already paid when the toilets were handed over to the Parish Council and it was agreed that this should be followed up.

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237. ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATION AT DENMANS COURT.

237.1 As discussion on the terms of the lease would contain sensitive information regarding the rental arrangements, it was AGREED that this item should be deferred until the end and dealt with during the confidential session.

238. TO CONSIDER FOR ADOPTION: GRIEVANCE AND DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES BASED ON THE NALC MODEL PROCEDURES.

238.1 As employers, the Council was required by law to have in place grievance and discipline procedures. The draft grievance procedure that had been circulated had been adapted from the NALC model procedure, to reflect the administrative structure of this Council which did not have a Staffing Committee, so reference to a Grievance Panel had been substituted. The Clerk had not yet completed the draft Disciplinary Procedure. AGREED to defer consideration of the draft Disciplinary Procedure to the next meeting of the Committee, and to recommend to Full Council that the Grievance Procedure should be adopted.

239. THREE TIERS, FOUR VILLAGES GROUP: MID SUSSEX FOUR PARISHES VISION STATEMENT.

239.1 Cllr. Blunden reported on the work of the Three Tiers, Four Villages Group, which had been set up at the instigation of Peter Bradbury, WSCC Councillor for Staplefield and Ansty, following publication of a Vision Statement by Haywards Heath Town Council, showing major development in the surrounding villages and making reference to "Greater Haywards Heath". The Group had agreed to draft a mutual Vision Statement, encompassing the four Parishes of Cuckfield, Ansty and Staplefield, Lindfield and Lindfield Rural. Cllr. Blunden asked Members to consider recommending formal support for the Vision Statement to be taken forward for inclusion in the Core Strategy. Members discussed some details of the Statement. It was AGREED to recommend to the Parish Council that the Vision Statement should be adopted.

239.2 In reply to a Member's question, it was confirmed that progress was now being made towards the adoption by MSDC of the Lindfield Village Design Statement.

240. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

240.1 No items of other business were raised.

This part of the meeting ended at 9.15 p.m.

There followed a second question / comments session for members of the public.

Three Tiers Four Villages Group. Mr. Kerslake commented that as it would be included in the Local Development Framework documentation, the Vision Statement should have been considered by the Planning and Traffic Committee. He also stated that the Vision, for the same reasons as Village Design Statements, could not be adopted by MSDC for inclusion in the LDF if it departed from Policy.

Grievance and Discipline Procedure. Mr. Kerslake stated that there were legal implications regarding Grievance and Discipline Procedures and suggested that the draft should be forwarded to Trevor Leggo for confirmation that the document complied with legislation before it was adopted.

Lease for Denmans Court. Mr. Kerslake asked whether the lease once agreed would be made available for inspection by members of the public.

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241. The Chairman moved under Standing Order no. 35(a) "that in view of the [confidential] nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public and press be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw". This was AGREED.
242. STAFFING ISSUES: 2008 / 09 NATIONAL FINAL SALARY AWARD FOR LOCAL COUNCIL CLERKS (FOLLOWING ARBITRATION)
- 242.1 The Clerk withdrew (9.25 p.m.) from the meeting for the duration of this item and the Confidential Minutes were taken by the Chairman.
- AGREED: a recommendation to Full Council on rates of pay to be applied from 1 April 2008, based on the final agreement as notified in a recent bulletin from NALC.
243. ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATION AT DENMANS COURT: LEASE
- 243.1 Members discussed the Heads of Terms of the lease for Denmans Court and agreed on two matters to be referred back to the Parish Council's Solicitor.

The meeting ended at 9.40 p.m.