

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE meeting held on Thursday 24 September 2009 at the King Edward Hall, Lindfield

Present: Rev. M. Davies (Chairman)
Mr. M. Allen
Mr. W. Blunden
Mr. A. Gomme
Mr. S. Henton

Also present: 1 member of the public

In attendance: Mrs. C. Irwin (Clerk)
Mrs. S. Kolien (RFO)

The meeting commenced at 8.00 p.m.

295. WELCOME AND EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS.

295.1 The Chairman welcomed those present and announced the emergency procedure for the King Edward Hall. The Chairman particularly welcomed Councillor Henton to his first meeting as a member of the Committee, following agreement of his Committee membership at the last meeting of the Council.

296. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

296.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Upton and Willcox and the reasons accepted.

297. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

297.1 There were no declarations of interest.

298. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

298.1 Quorum. Mr. N. Kerslake referred to his recent correspondence with NALC and stated that the Finance and General Purposes Committee should review the Parish Council's Standing Orders regarding the quorum.

298.2 General Reserve. Mr. N. Kerslake commented on the recent Council decision to reallocate £20,000 to the General Reserve and stated that that this sum had to come from somewhere. The budget headings, outstanding projects and reserves all added up to match the cash the Council had in the bank. It was important for the budgeting process to recognise that money did not grow on trees. Underspent items had to be shown and unallocated sums could not be shown in the budget.

299. TO CONFIRM AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 JULY 2009.

299.1 The Chairman called for approval of the Minutes and Confidential Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 23 July 2009. These were AGREED and the Chairman SIGNED the Minutes and Confidential Minutes as a true record of that meeting.

300. ACTION LIST / PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT.

300.1 The list, which had been circulated with the agenda, was noted.

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300.2 External Back up for office computer – it had been confirmed that this could be arranged through the Broadband provider but some considerable re-organisation of the computer's files would have to be done first to separate the ones that needed to be backed up regularly, to reduce the cost. This was in progress.

301. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

301.1 The Chairman had nothing to report other than those items that were on the Agenda.

302. GRANTS AND DONATIONS:

302.1 Poppy Appeal Donation. It was recognised that this came out of the Chairman's Allowance rather than the grants and donations budget but it had been put on the agenda as it was proposed to increase the donation, which had been the same (£30) for several years. The cost of the wreath was now £20. The Chairman was proposing to increase the donation to £40. AGREED to support a donation of £40. It was noted that more Poppy Appeal collectors were needed to support this cause.

303. FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE BUDGET:

303.1 To review payments made to date in 2009/10. NOTED that to 31 August 2009:

- the budget progress relating to the Finance and General Purposes Committee showed that from a budget of £99,900.00 a total of £29,685.94 had been spent.
- a breakdown of the administration budget showed that from a budget of £77,650.00, a total of £24,928.44 had been spent.
- From the overall Council budget of £154,300.00, a total of £44,973.51 had been spent.
- For outstanding projects – from a budget of £22,441,10, £21,348.55 had been spent, most of this relating to the public toilets
- For general and designated reserves – from a sum of £75,069.66 shown in the budget, £4,920.20 had been spent.

The Bank Reconciliation, Receipts and Payments and summary of allocated and unallocated funds were also noted.

303.2 AGREED that Cllr. Henton would attend the next internal control inspection and would meet the RFO for a briefing on local council accounting procedures.

303.3 To consider the Finance and General Purposes Committee's budget requirements for the 2010/11 financial year. It was AGREED that the Administration Sub Committee should meet to discuss the detail of the Administration budget in consultation with the RFO in time to report to the November meeting of the F&GP Committee. Other budget items were considered:

- Chairman's Fund – currently £500. AGREED: no change
- Grants/donations – currently £1,500. AGREED: no change
- Annual memberships/Subscriptions - currently £1,500 but overspent by £81.55. The SLCC subscriptions in January would come to £283 based on last year's figures and an increase in the SALC subscription was likely. AGREED: to raise this budget item to £2,000
- Village Directory - currently £6,000. The printers had held last year's price for the 2010 edition (£5,400) and the income from advertising was anticipated to be very slightly more than for the 2009 edition, but still under £5,000. AGREED: no change. It was noted that Lindfield Rural Parish Council had made a

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contribution in 2008 towards the costs of producing the Directory and they were to be approached regarding payment towards the 2009 and 2010 edition.

- Newsletter / Annual Report – currently £1,250, however since the Lindfield Life magazine replaced the Lindfield Times, the cost of 4 newsletters published in the magazine had risen to £1,360. The Annual Report had been reproduced on the office photocopier in 2009 and the cost had therefore been absorbed by the Administration budget. AGREED: to increase this budget item to £1,400. Members wished to record appreciation to the Communications Forum, in particular Councillors Davies and Gomme, for negotiating this avenue for the publication of newsletters.
- Members' Allowances – currently £2,500. This was well under budget the previous year, but provision needed to cover the possibility of more Members claiming their allowance. AGREED: no change
- Rental of additional accommodation – currently £9,000 based on the cost of the rented storage space at Masters. The Council would have to decide how to show the costs relating to Denmans Court, including the rent, and these could be itemised under the Administration budget. AGREED to refer this item to the Administration Sub Committee, depending on the outcome of the negotiations for the lease.

Members were asked to suggest any new projects or other headings under the F&GP budget which could be considered before the next meeting, for example to build up a fund for a public toilet on the Common.

The Environment and Amenities Committee had identified a number of possible items for the following year's budget and an article was to be published in Parish Council's newsletter due to be published in the October edition of Lindfield Life, listing these items and inviting feedback and further suggestions from residents.

It was stated that the Council needed to be very clear when communicating to the electorate the amounts in the budget and their purpose.

Councillor Blunden commented on moves to devolve maintenance of District Council assets to local councils and on the feedback from both the County and District Councils that there would be much less money available in the following year(s) and priority would have to be given to works that fulfilled statutory obligations. The precept to Parish Councils was not capped and money could be raised through the precept for work that would not otherwise be achieved. It had already been pointed out that the Parish Council would have to pay to get pollarding of the High Street and Compton Road trees carried out every three years instead of four and maintenance of the posts and rails alongside the Pond had been raised with the County and District Councils.

304. APPROVAL OF PURCHASES FOR THE PARISH OFFICE.

- 304.1 "Local Council Administration" by Charles Arnold Baker was one of the main sources of information for Councils and the Clerk had pre-ordered the latest edition to take advantage of a discount. This cost £55.70 including carriage. This purchase was APPROVED.
- 304.2 The Parish Office Shredder was no longer fit for purpose and a fairly robust cross cut shredder was required. Prices from one supplier for machines in the appropriate range were between £89.99 to £185. AGREED to authorise the Clerk to order an appropriate machine up to the cost of £200.
- 304.3 The Office guillotine was potentially dangerous as the guard had come off and had to be carefully repositioned for each cut. Prices in the Viking catalogue ranged from £9.99 to £124.99. AGREED to authorise the Clerk to order a suitable guillotine up to £125.
- 304.4 The office Clerks' Manual, published by SLCC, which was another recommended source of information for Clerks, was out of date. AGREED to authorise the Clerk to purchase a new copy at £45.

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305. ISSUES RELATING TO ROAD CLOSURE FOR CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL NIGHT.

- 305.1 Organising the Christmas Festival Night came within the remit of the Environment and Amenities Committee. However, a problem had arisen with the road closure application which needed to be resolved quickly and which had a cost implication that had not been budgeted for.

Following submission to MSDC of the road closure application, P C Tony Day, Divisional Emergency Planning Officer for Sussex Police, who had to be consulted by MSDC, had responded that he could not approve the application until he had seen a traffic management plan and had reassurances that the road closures would be effected by a proper traffic management company and manned by the same. This had been discussed with the Clerk at Cuckfield PC and with Wendy Box of the Lindfield Bonfire Society. Mr. Steve Tomlin (RANA Risk Management), had been suggested as a person who would be able to produce such documentation for Christmas Festival Night. The quotation received from his company was for £195.00 to undertake this work (not including effecting and managing the road closure itself. If the event was to go ahead the requirements would have to be complied with.

CERT had confirmed that they would be available on the night, but clarification would have to be obtained from PC Day on what they would be permitted to do as there had been indications that they would not be allowed to put the road closure barriers in place and man the closure.

Whilst the paperwork to comply with the requirements would be time consuming in the first year, a re-assessment of the event and a fresh risk assessment would be of value. It was noted that there should be more named individuals in attendance on the night, who would be given specific areas of responsibility.

AGREED that Christmas Festival Night should proceed, even if it incurred higher costs, and to instruct Steve Tomlin of RANA Risk Management Ltd to undertake a traffic management plan without delay. The Council would be undertaking a review of the issues of organising Christmas Festival Night after the event.

306. TO CONFIRM ATTENDANCE AT TRAINING AND CONFERENCE EVENTS

306.1 AGREED:

- AiRS / SALC AGM and AiRS annual Conference– 6 November - Ardingly Showground. AGMs free, but lunch and conference to be charged for - Councillors Blunden and Davies
- SLCC Regional One Day Conference – 11 November – (East Sussex National Golf Resort, Uckfield). £125 for three delegates and £39 each thereafter. The Clerk, Deputy Clerk, RFO and Chairman had so far indicated that they wished to attend.

- 306.2 NOTED: Councillors Davies, Gomme and Henton, and the Deputy Clerk had attended various training sessions run by SALC on 11 and 12 September. The Chairman encouraged the remaining eight Members to attend Power of Wellbeing Training at the next opportunity.

307. COMMUNICATIONS FORUM

- 307.1 To receive the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2009. The Minutes were tabled and Councillor Gomme reported as follows:

- Lindfield Life. Members of the Forum had all expressed their appreciation to David and Emma Tingley for publishing Lindfield Life and had agreed that Village organisations must go on supporting them with material.
- Website. Caroline Nurse was to act as Community Editor for the Community section of the new Parish Council website.
- Publication of events. There had been discussion about how organisations publicised their events: on noticeboards and websites, through the Lindfield column in the Mid Sussex Times and through Lindfield

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Life. The Preservation Society had been experiencing internal difficulties and had lost sight of what they could do. It had been agreed that Cllrs. Nicolle and Gomme would write a suitable article for publication in Lindfield Life, drawing attention to the various means of communication.

- Map. It was recognised that a full map of the Village was needed and this would be discussed by the Parish Council's Environment and Amenities Committee when considering the budget for the following year. Cllr. Allen expressed appreciation for the paper map which had been placed in the new noticeboard in Denmans Lane.
- Directory. There had been comments about the timing of the publication of the Lindfield Directory, which some members had felt should be much earlier. Members of the Committee stated that most people would not need a diary until December.
- The next meeting had been provisionally arranged for 2 March 2010, although there had been some discussion about the timing and days of the week of meetings and Members had been asked to communicate their availability to the Chairman of the Forum.

307.2 The Chairman thanked Councillor Gomme for his report and expressed his regret at not being able to attend. It was noted that there had been a large number of apologies.

307.3 The minutes of the meeting of the Communications Forum held on 22 September were duly received.

308. ISSUES RELATING TO ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATION AT DENMANS COURT; TO INCLUDE UPDATE ON LEASE OF PREMISES.

308.1 NOTED: when the draft lease had been studied it was found to contain a number of inappropriate and in some cases unacceptable terms and conditions and this had been reported back to the Council's Solicitor. A further round of negotiations had followed, but the Clerk had been informed that a new draft should be issued soon. As agreed at the July F&GP meeting, a meeting of the Administration Sub Committee would be convened when it appeared that the terms of the lease were finally acceptable. It was noted that the period of notice for the storage accommodation at Masters was a month.

309. RISK MANAGEMENT: UPDATE

309.1 NOTED: the Environment and Amenities Committee now had comprehensive checklists for periodic inspections of the allotments site and the public toilets. As previously noted, it appeared that the process for obtaining a road closure order for the Christmas Festival Night would necessitate a fresh examination of the Risk Assessment, including professional input.

To address the Governance category, a list had been drawn up of tasks which had to be conducted annually or at other intervals and completed tasks would be recorded. The list would then be signed off in March when the Risk Management documentation was reviewed. The list would also be useful as a planning tool as it would create a basic schedule of work for the Council and the Committees so that annual tasks appeared on the agendas at the appropriate times. The list was tabled and members were asked to feed back to the Clerk if there were any omissions or other suggested alterations.

310. GRIEVANCE AND DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES

310.1 Council had adopted a Grievance Procedure in March but had deferred consideration of the Disciplinary Procedure as new guidelines had been issued by ACAS which needed to be incorporated. The Society of Local Council Clerks has now produced both Model Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures in accordance with the procedures as set out in the Employment Act 2008 and the ACAS Code of Practice 2009, which affected the Grievance Procedure as well. SLCC had granted permission for these documents to be reproduced for this Council. As the SLCC Model Procedures complied with latest guidance it was AGREED to present both Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures to Full Council with a recommendation that they should be adopted, with the minimum amendments

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required to customise them for this Council. The SLCC Grievance Procedure would then replace the previous one adopted in March 2009.

311. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 311.1 Directory. NOTED: the Directory copy had been sent to the printer at the end of the previous week: somewhat late but still within the printer's schedule. Advertising still had not recovered enough to go back to the standard 88 pages but income from advertising would be higher than for the 2009 edition by £435.

This part of the meeting concluded at 9.20 p.m.

There followed a second period for questions / comments from members of the public.

Budget. Mr. N. Kerslake commented that the general reserve needed to be addressed in the budget. If the precept for next year was in the same order as the current year it was important to review the level of the general reserve and there should be a paper showing how, over time, the general reserve moved from one figure to another.

The Council should discuss the possibility of public toilets on the Common before budgeting for this item.

The grants and donations budget related to the less well-off people in the Village. With the credit crunch and the anticipated low growth over the next few years, those running clubs and societies may need more by way of a contribution from the Parish Council.

In consulting with the public on the budget, the Parish Council should be prepared to set out what it was planning to do as there were people on low incomes but who did not qualify for Council Tax Benefit who would have to pay their share of the precept.

The meeting ended at 9.25 p.m.