

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held on **THURSDAY 5 JANUARY 2023** at King Edward Hall, Lindfield.

The meeting began at 20.00 hours.

Parish Councillors: Mr. S. Henton (Chairman) Mr. R. Pickett*
Mr. W. Blunden Mrs. V. Upton
Mrs. L. Grace
Mrs. M. Hersey*

(*) Denotes absence

In attendance: Mr. A. Funnell (Parish Clerk)
Mrs T. Ely (RFO)

The Chairman opened the meeting, welcomed those present and announced the emergency procedure for the King Edward Hall.

423. TO RECEIVE AND ACCEPT APOLOGIES AND REASONS FOR ABSENCE.

423.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs. M. Hersey and Mr. R. Pickett and their reasons were accepted.

424. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEM ON THE AGENDA.

424.1 The following declaration of interest was **NOTED**:

Item 7. ii. To Consider Grant Requests Received. Councillor Grace declared a personal interest in this item in view of her membership with the Lindfield History Project Group.

425. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

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

426. TO CONFIRM AND SIGN MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2022.

426.1 The Chairman called for approval of the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Thursday 3 November 2022. These were **AGREED** and the Chairman **SIGNED** the Minutes as being a true record of that meeting.

427. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

427.1 The Chairman wished everyone a Happy and Healthy New Year.

428. ACTION LIST.

428.1 The Chairman referred to the Action List, which had been circulated with the agenda and this was **NOTED**.

429. GRANTS AND DONATIONS.

429.1 i) To Note Available Funds.
It was **NOTED** that £1,500 had been spent from a budget of £2,500.

ii) To Consider Grant Requests Received.
Members had been presented with a summary of Grants and Donations applied for, and awarded for the current financial year, with details of the purpose for which funding had been requested. Councillor Blunden

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reported on behalf of the Grants Panel and confirmed that consideration had been given towards the following grant requests:

a. Fairer World Lindfield.

Fairer World Lindfield (FWL) had recently formed a constitution, who had submitted an application for a grant as permitted dated 14 December 2022. Other organisations had been approached to seek funding. Awarding this grant would help contribute towards the cost to create and run a website, providing information about the work of FWL to their mailing list of subscribers with past and upcoming events. It would provide useful links to local resources including blogs and dates of environmental events in the West Sussex Area and would reach out to members of the public not using social media or unable to attend in-person workshops, talks or events. The total cost of this project was £850.

RESOLVED: that in accordance with the recommendation of the Grants Panel and the Council's powers under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, the following expenditure should be incurred 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 be made towards the work of Fairer World Lindfield, subject to the following:

- i) The Council is provided with an accepted quote.
- ii) Fairer World Lindfield confirms that the website will be sustainable (i.e., that there are members who can maintain it and that the group can afford the annual maintenance/hosting charges).

b. Lindfield History Project Group.

Lindfield History Project Group were a local community group, who had submitted an application for a grant of £250.00 dated 11 December 2022. No other organisations had been approached to seek funding. Awarding this grant would help to print an electronic database relating to all properties in the High Street as a permanent record. Three sets would be printed, one each for the Parish Council village archive, West Sussex Record Office, and the Lindfield History Project Group. The total cost of this project was £582.

Councillor Grace remained present but did not participate in the discussions relating to this item.

RESOLVED: that in accordance with the recommendation of the Grants Panel and the Council's powers under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, the following expenditure should be incurred 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 be made towards the work of Lindfield History Project Group.

iii) To Note Letters of Thanks Received.

Letters of thanks had been received from:

- i) 4Sight Vision Support
- ii) Air Ambulance Charity Kent Surrey Sussex

430. BUDGET 2022/23: TO NOTE BUDGET PROGRESS REPORTS TO 30 NOVEMBER 2022.

430.1 A detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading Report and Expenditure from Earmarked Reserves Report to 30 November 2022 had been circulated by the RFO prior to the meeting. A summary had been circulated with the Agenda. Budget progress was **NOTED** as follows:

- i) Finance and General Purposes Committee. a total of £95,034 had been spent from the budget of £164,633.
- ii) Overall Council Budget. a total of £133,530 had been spent from the budget of £228,033 of which £33,223 had been spent from the Environment and Amenities Committee's budget of £55,900. £2,441 had been spent from the Allotments budget of £2,500 and income of £891 received. There had been £1,312 spent from the Planning & Traffic Committee budget of £5,000. £2,400.00 had been spent from Earmarked Reserves.

Income of £197,745 had been received in total, which had included the full precept payment of £189,000.

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iii) General Reserve Expenditure, a total of £1,520 had been spent from General Reserves.

431. FINANCIAL MONITORING: TO NOTE THE ACCOUNT RECORDS TO 30 NOVEMBER 2022.

431.1 i) Cash and Investment Reconciliation and To Note Deposits and Investment Held.

It was **NOTED** that the total bank cash and investment reconciliation to 30 November 2022 was £259,803.02.

ii) Payment Analysis.

It was **NOTED** that a total of £11,313.62 net of VAT had been paid from the Barclays Bank Current Account in November 2022.

432. VAT RECLAIM: UPDATE.

432.1 It was **NOTED** that a claim for VAT refund totalling £3,161.96 had been paid by HMRC on 17 November 2022 for the invoice period July to September 2022.

433. BUDGET 2023/24: TO RECOMMEND BUDGET AND PRECEPT REQUEST FOR FULL COUNCIL.

433.1 The Chairman referred to a detailed report that had been prepared by the Clerk dated 23 December 2022 and circulated with the Agenda. Members had been asked to consider the overall budget for 2023/24 and the level of precept required. The Chair's amended total budget proposal for 2023/24 and possible precept calculation had in addition been included in the summary. The clerk's report had provided a summary of the changes that had been recommended in support of the Chair's amended total budget proposal. A comparison of precept and tax band calculations had also been shared.

433.2 It was **NOTED** that all Committees had considered their budgets, and that these had been presented to Full Council in November. The Clerk and RFO had calculated that an anticipated cash in hand balance of £174,409.47 would be available at year end 31 March 2023, which was significantly lower compared to £206,316.00 on 31 March 2022. The proposed budget would have led to a 28% increase in the precept to £241,000. An increase of this magnitude was not considered to be realistic and a meeting of the Chairmen of the three Committees was held on 2 December 2022 with a view to reducing the overall budget to a more acceptable level. This had resulted in the removal of some of the proposed projects, including a small number of minor adjustments being made to existing budget headings.

After making these adjustments the three Chairmen agreed a revised budget proposal to be put before this Committee as follows:

- a) The revised budget recommendations of the Environment & Amenities Committee totalling £76,170.58.
- b) The revised budget recommendations of the Finance & General Purposes Committee totalling £265,419.00.
- c) The revised budget recommendations of the Planning & Traffic Committee totalling £12,500.00.
- d) General Reserves to remain at £60,000.00.
- e) After taking account of anticipated funds in hand at the year end this would require a precept of £226,345.05 (an increase of 20.12% compared with the current year's precept of £189,000). This would result in an annual increase of £13.33 or £0.26 per week for a Band D taxpayer. The Chairman felt that although this was relatively low in cash terms, this would be presented by MSDC in a manner that would come across as being too large.

The Chairman had expressed concern that it was a difficult time to be imposing an increase in precept request, however he shared the other Chairmen's views that in order to progress desirable projects for the benefit of the village an increase in the precept would be appropriate and justifiable. Members were mindful that in the past it had not always been possible to spend the whole budget due to outside constraints, which were beyond the Council's control. Consideration was given towards the option of a slightly reduced level of precept.

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After full consideration, it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council a proposal for a total budget including earmarked reserves and a general reserve of £414,089 and that a precept request of £216,000 be made to Mid Sussex District Council for the financial year 2023/24.

433.3 It was **AGREED** that an article explaining the precept request would be published prior to MSDC confirming Council Tax Bills for 2023/24 to residents.

434. **COMMUNICATIONS: TO RATIFY NEW PHONE, BROADBAND AND MOBILE CONTRACT.**

434.1 Negotiations had taken place between the Clerk and the Council's existing telephone and broadband provider, BT Plc, currently costing £197.60 per month. The broadband contract had about 4.5 years remaining and the phone system approximately 2 years. The telephone system was a hybrid (part analogue, part digital) and BT Plc were trying to change all business customers over to fully digital by 2025.

A new five-year contract had been offered for a limited period for a reduced cost of £146.95 per month, which had provided the following benefits:

- Fully digital service – replacing the existing hybrid, part analogue part digital system.
- 3 x new digital office handsets.
- 3 x digital licences for handsets.
- 3x failover sims (should the office broadband go down we can use these to answer calls on our mobiles).
- 2x Samsung mobile phones with 10GB shared data per month and unlimited calls & texts.
- BT project manager.
- The termination of existing contract charge £944 had been waived as part of the new agreement.
- £200 credit.
- Upgraded broadband speeds:
 - i) Upload 29mbps to 48mbps
 - ii) Download 152mbps to 314 mbps

It was **AGREED** to ratify the contract with BT Plc that had been agreed by the Clerk in conjunction with the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair.

435. **PROPOSED PUBLIC TOILETS ON THE COMMON: UPDATE.**

435.1 The Clerk had reported on the following:

- The application had been submitted.
- To date only one response had been received from WSCC Highways who had no objections.
- The application advertisement expiry date was 27 January 2023.
- The determination date was 6 February 2023.

The above was **NOTED**.

436. **CLERK AND RFO REPORTS.**

436.1 Clerk's Report.

The Clerk advised as follows:

- a. The faulty switch in the Clock Tower House communal area kitchen had been repaired.
- b. The new photocopier had been installed early December 2022.

The above was **NOTED**.

436.2 RFO's Report.

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The RFO advised as follows:

- a. An interim internal audit review had been carried out on 16 November 2022 with no matters arising. This was **NOTED**.
- b. Enquiries were in progress to find a replacement Internal Auditor for 2023/24. Organisations had been approached but their availability was restricted due to retirement and sickness, which had reduced the number of options available to consider. Concern had been raised that many councils were in a similar position to Lindfield Parish Council increasing the level of demand to appoint a new Internal Auditor.

It was **AGREED** that the RFO would prepare a report with a recommendation, for presentation to the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair prior to the date on which the Finance & General Purposes committee were next due to meet.

It was further **AGREED** to delegate authority for the Clerk in conjunction with the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair to appoint a new Internal Auditor.

437. POLICY & STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS.

437.1 The Clerk reported on the following:

- i) Update on the Plan 2022-27 Publication.
A Public Consultation was being held at King Edward Hall on Saturday 14 January 2023.
- ii) Financial Regulations and Standing Orders.
A review of the Financial Regulations and Standing Orders was due and the Clerk and RFO would consider the latest versions available from SALC to assist with progressing this further.

The above was **NOTED**.

438. RISK MANAGEMENT: TO CONSIDER ANY RISK ASSESSMENTS.

438.1 There were no risk assessments to consider.

439. TO CONFIRM ATTENDANCE AT TRAINING/CONFERENCE EVENTS AND RECEIVE ANY ATTENDANCE REPORTS.

439.1 The Clerk advised on the following attendance:

- a. The networking event offered by SLCC on 2 December 2022 had been cancelled and rearranged to take place on 13 January 2023.
- b. A WSALC Clerks Forum would be taking place on 16 January 2023.
- c. A Mid Sussex Clerks meeting was due to be held on 30 January 2023 at Haywards Heath Town Council.
- d. There were no attendance reports.

440. MATTERS ARISING AFTER THE PREPARATION OF THIS AGENDA, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT. SUCH MATTERS WILL BE FOR NOTING OR DEFERRAL TO A FUTURE MEETING ONLY.

440.1 There were no matters arising.

The public part of the meeting ended at 20.43 hours.

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- 441. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC [AND PRESS]: TO CONSIDER WHETHER A RESOLUTION SHOULD BE MOVED UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 3(D) AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PUBLIC BODIES ADMISSION TO MEETINGS ACT 1960 SECTION 1(2), TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC AND PRESS FROM THE FOLLOWING PART OF THE MEETING, BY REASON OF THE CONFIDENTIAL NATURE OF THE BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED OR FOR OTHER SPECIAL REASONS (STAFFING MATTERS).**
- 441.1 It was **RESOLVED** in accordance with the Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960 Section 1(2) and the Parish Council's Standing Order 3 (d) that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted it as desirable in the public interest that the public [and press] be excluded.
- 442. TO CONSIDER CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING LINDFIELD ENTERPRISE PARK LTD.**
- 442.1 The Clerk referred to a letter that had been received from the Lindfield Enterprise Park Limited Management Company dated 21 December 2022. Further development was awaited.
- 443. TO CONSIDER MATTERS RELATING TO THE CLOCK TOWER HOUSE LEASE.**
- 443.1 It was **NOTED** that the Working Group were in process of instructing a solicitor to commence negotiations.

The meeting concluded at 20.53 hours.