

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** (here in F&GP) held on **THURSDAY 7 MARCH 2024** at King Edward Hall, Lindfield.

The meeting began at 20.00 hours.

Present:

Committee Members:	Mr. W. Blunden	Mr. R. Pickett
	Mrs. A. Beecroft (Committee Chair)	Mrs. V. Upton
	Mrs. L. Grace	Mr. T. Webster

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

*Denotes absence.

The Committee Chair (herein Chair) opened the meeting, welcomed those present and announced the emergency procedure for the King Edward Hall.

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

126.1 All members were present.

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

127.1 There were no declarations of interest from members regarding any items on the agenda.

128. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

128.1 There were no members of the public present.

129. TO CONFIRM AND SIGN MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE F&GP COMMITTEE HELD ON 4 JANUARY 2024.

129.1 The Chair called for approval of the Minutes of the meeting of the F&GP Committee held on Thursday 4 January 2024. These were **AGREED** and the Chair **SIGNED** the Minutes as being a true record of that meeting.

130. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

130.1 The Chair made no announcements.

131. ACTION LIST.

131.1 The Chair referred to the Action List which had been circulated with the agenda and this was **NOTED**.

132. GRANTS AND DONATIONS.

132.1 Grants budget. It was **NOTED** that funds of £610.00 were available to spend from a budget of £2,500.

132.2 Grant requests. Cllr Blunden reported on behalf of the Grants Panel and advised that no grant requests had been received for consideration. It was drawn to the Clerk's attention by Cllr Upton that an application had been submitted in January 2024 on behalf of the Mid Sussex Older People's Council (MSOPC), which had appeared to have been inadvertently overlooked.

It was **AGREED** to delegate to the Clerk, in conjunction, with Cllrs Beecroft, Blunden, Grace, Pickett and Webster, authority to consider the MSOPC application.

132.3 Letters of thanks received. No letters of thanks had been received.

133. BUDGET 2023/24: TO NOTE THE LATEST BUDGET PROGRESS REPORTS.

133.1 Members were presented with copies of the RFO summary, a detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading Report and Expenditure from Earmarked Reserves Report to 31 January 2024. Budget progress was **NOTED** as follows:

i) F&GP Committee: A total of £125,081 had been spent from a budget of £175,849.

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ii) Overall Council Budget: A total of £174,417 had been spent from the budget of £241,324 of which £43,209 had been spent from the Environment & Amenities (E&A) Committee budget of £54,975. £2,697 had been spent from the Allotments budget of £2,500. £nil had been spent from the Planning & Traffic Committee budget of £8,000. £17,033 had been spent from Earmarked Reserves, of which £4,044.26 had been accrued from 2022/23.

iii) General Reserves Expenditure: a total of £3,430 had been spent from General Reserves.

iv) Income: Income of £229,218 had been received in total, represented mainly by the full precept payment of £216,000 and £8,080 CTH rental. Other income relating to bank and building society interest, CTH service charges, licence fee, allotment rents/deposits and Christmas Village Night stallholder fees of £785 had also been received.

v) Overspent Budget Headings. The RFO report explained the reasons why the following budget headings had been overspent:

4350 F&GP Committee Fire Safety System 190.4% of the budget

4600 E&A Committee Allotment Expense 107.9% of the budget

134. FINANCIAL MONITORING: TO NOTE THE ACCOUNT RECORDS.

134.1 Members had been presented with account records to 31 January 2024.

i) Bank - Cash and Investment Reconciliation (Deposits and Investment Held).

It was **NOTED** that the total bank cash and investment reconciliation to 31 January 2024 was £226,210.09.

ii) Payment Analysis.

It was **NOTED** that a total of £15,581.00 net of VAT had been paid from the Barclays Bank Current Account in January 2024.

135. INTERNAL CONTROL CHECK AND INTERNAL AUDITOR ARRANGEMENTS 2023/24: TO CONSIDER THE REPORT.

135.1 The Chair invited the RFO to add any further comment on the report that had been prepared by the Clerk and circulated with the agenda. It was explained that the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require smaller authorities, each financial year, to review the effectiveness of the internal control system and overall internal audit arrangements. The review would support an annual governance statement in accordance with proper practices when completing this year's AGAR. A copy of last year's reports had been shared for reference. A request had been received for a member to offer their assistance in completing the annual reviews for 2023/24.

It was **AGREED** that Cllr Pickett would conduct the reviews.

136. COMMUNICATIONS: TO CONSIDER INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS REPORT.

136.1 The Chair referred to a report that had been prepared by the Clerk and circulated with the agenda. A survey had been conducted on internal communications at the start of the year and all members had been invited to participate. Eleven responses had been received and their findings were summarised in the report. Members had been asked to evaluate the findings and to consider options moving forward.

Consideration was given towards the benefit of improving the current level of communication, additional training on the use of Microsoft 365 eg taking advantage of the use of folders to share documentation, the possibility of internal training being provided by the Clerk and Deputy Clerk and the use of training videos. A suggestion had been made towards the Parish Council providing devices to members to offer a uniform platform for all to use.

The above was **NOTED** and it was **AGREED** that the Clerk would research options to assist with training and present a summary of his findings at a future meeting.

137. TOILETS ON THE COMMON: TO CONSIDER ANY MATTERS.

137.1 The Chair invited Cllr Pickett to add any further comment on the report that had been prepared by the Clerk and circulated with the agenda. Members had been asked to approve the submission of a discharging of conditions application and the preparation of the building specification for the proposed tender. As part of the tender

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process, the Working Group would need to liaise with the architects to confirm that the specification is suitable to meet the Parish Council requirements.

The above was **NOTED** and it was **AGREED** that the Clerk would:

- a) Instruct the architects, with Working Group input, to prepare the building specification for the proposed tender.
- b) Instruct the architects, with Working Group input, to prepare and submit the discharge of conditions applications.

138. PLAN 23-27: ALLOCATION OF COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES.

138.1 The Chair referred to a report that had been prepared by the Clerk and circulated with the agenda. The Parish Council had agreed to implement Plan 23-27 and was working towards the objectives. To progress this, each committee would be invited to assign Members to specific objectives. To achieve this the Clerk was seeking confirmation of arrangements. Members were mindful that the Annual Meeting of the Council was due to take place on 16 May 2024 and as such committee membership might change.

The above was **NOTED** and it was **AGREED** that the Clerk would invite Committees to allocate objectives to members once the Annual Meeting of Council had taken place and committee membership confirmed.

139. POLICY DOCUMENTS: TO CONSIDER NEW AND UPDATED POLICIES.

139.1 The Chair referred to a report that had been prepared by the Clerk and circulated with the agenda. Members had received copies of revised, updated versions of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and a draft Reserves Policy for consideration as follows:

- a. Updated Standing Orders.
Existing Standing Orders were based on the NALC 2013 template and are now due to be reviewed. Consideration needed to be given towards the NALC 2018 template including the 2022 recommended amendments and new legislation. This included GDPR, updated transparency requirements and thresholds for public tendering of contracts in the Public Contract Regulations 2015.
- b. Updated Financial Regulations.
The main changes included updates to contracts and procurement legislation. The new template had also included amended wording affecting the submission of the draft AGAR.
- c. Proposed Reserves Policy.
It had been proposed that a new Reserves Policy be adopted reflecting a recommendation made by the JPAG guide on Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England March 2023 edition. The policy would help support the budget-setting process and ensure that the Council maintained its cash flow and contingency funds to cover unexpected inflation, unforeseen events and unusual circumstances. This would in addition assist the Council in maintaining earmarked reserves appropriate to the level of future planned expenditure projects and with the opportunity to review these at least annually as part of the budget-setting process. The Parish Council had always followed guidance in the past and members were happy to cement this by adopting a Policy.

Members **NOTED** the above and felt that additional time was needed to consider proposed changes to the revised, updated Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. The Clerk was happy to provide a comparison between the old and new documents.

The following was **AGREED**:

- i. Additional time be given to members to consider proposed changes to the draft revised Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. Members' comments would be submitted to the Clerk by close of business on Thursday 14 March 2024. To delegate authority to the Clerk to collate members' views and present details together with a recommendation to Full Council at their next meeting when due.
- ii. To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council for approval to adopt the draft Reserves Policy as presented.

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140. RISK MANAGEMENT: TO CONSIDER ANY RISK ASSESSMENTS.

140.1 It was **NOTED** that the annual risk management report will be presented to Full Council for consideration at their next meeting when due.

141. CLERK AND RFO REPORT.

141.1 Clerk's Report.

The Clerk reported on the following items:

a) Clock Tower House: Ten-Year Electrical Inspection.

The Clerk was currently obtaining quotations to assist with the ten-year electrical inspection that was now due.

b) Vehicle: Magnetic Signage.

The magnetic signage had now been received.

c) Vehicle: Charging.

The use of charging points in Denmans Lane, Lindfield had proved to be effective in supporting the vehicle without incurring any problems.

d) Clock Tower House: Six Monthly Fire Alarm Service.

This was due to be carried out on 8 March 2024.

The above was **NOTED**.

141.2 RFO's Report.

The RFO reported on the following items:

a) Claim for VAT Refund: Invoice Period October to December 2023.

An application form for a claim for a refund of VAT was submitted to HMRC on 25 January 2024. A payment of £5,280.87 had been received on 1 February 2024.

b) Internal Control Check: October to December 2023.

Cllr Beecroft had carried out an internal control check on 4 March 2024 with no matters arising.

c) New Budget Heading 2023/24: Toilets on Common Construction.

The application for the Toilets on the Common project had progressed sooner than expected in the current financial year resulting in expenditure now having to be met from the capital Earmarked Reserve. To facilitate the recording of this expenditure a new nominal account code had been introduced under the F&GP Committee:

4285 Toilets on Common Construction.

d) RBS Close-down of 2023/24 Accounts.

This would be undertaken on 13 May 2024.

e) Year-End Internal Audit 2023/24.

An appointment had been arranged to meet with Mulberry & Company on 6 June 2024 to carry out the year-end internal audit.

f) VAT Threshold 2024/25.

Following the recent Spring Budget 2024, the VAT threshold would increase from £85,000 to £90,000 with effect from 1 April 2024.

The above was **NOTED**.

142. TO CONFIRM ATTENDANCE AT TRAINING, CONFERENCE AND ASSOCIATION EVENTS, AND RECEIVE ANY ATTENDANCE REPORTS.

142.1 Members had been presented with a summary of training courses that had been attended from 24 May 2023. This had also included courses that had been booked for April 2024.

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The above was **NOTED**.

It was further **NOTED** that Cllr Grace had attended the following community events:

20 February 2024 - Introduction to using the Community Carbon Calculator.

An introduction was provided regarding practical tools, resources, and ideas to inspire and support climate action in the community.

26 February 2024 – Webinar WSCC/ESCC and Brighton & Hove Councils.

An explanation was provided regarding the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. A government initiative involving other groups including the NFU and Sussex Wildlife Trust. The intention is to join up habitats and ecosystems, supporting the well-being and health of residents, soil condition and carbon storage.

27 February 2024 - Eco Forum, MSVA Burgess Hill.

Representatives from councils and community groups met to share initiatives relating to climate and sustainability matters.

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

143.1 There were no matters arising.

The public part of the meeting ended at 20.46 hours.

144. 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).

144.1 It was **PROPOSED** by the Chair and **SECONDED** by Cllr Bunden to exclude the press and the public. It was **AGREED** to exclude the press and public.

145. STAFFING MATTERS: TO CONSIDER REPORT.

145.1 The Chair referred to a confidential report that had been prepared by the Clerk and circulated with the agenda.

a) West Sussex County Council Invoicing (WSCC).

WSCC was experiencing a computer system error, which resulted in incorrect invoicing having been received. An escalated query had been raised.

b) Appraisals.

The Administration Sub-committee was being invited by the Clerk to review the existing staff appraisal arrangements, which need to be formalised and actions documented.

c) NJC Pay Claim 2024/25.

The Trade Union Side of the National Joint Council for Local Government Services: England, Wales and Northern Ireland had submitted the NJC pay claim for 2024-25 to the National Employers. A summary of their claim was shared with members.

Gratitude was expressed to the Clerk and staff members for all their support and good working relationship that existed with Council members.

The above was **NOTED**.

145.2 Ill Health Liability Insurance.

The West Sussex County Council Pension Fund was updated on 1 April 2023 regarding employees retiring on ill health grounds before the age budgeted for and who would receive an unreduced pension. Costs reflecting this uplifted benefit would now be charged to the employer. Members' attention had been drawn to the risk and had received a recommendation to consider effecting insurance cover to mitigate this liability. Legal & General were

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currently the only insurer available on the market to offer this type of cover and had provided an estimated cost of £1.55 per £100 of total plan earnings i.e. an approximate premium of £1,006.08 per annum.

The above was **NOTED** and it was **AGREED** that the Clerk would submit an application form to Legal & General for Ill Health Liability insurance commencing 1 April 2024. The premium would be collected by Direct Debit.

The meeting concluded at 21.00 hours.

DISCLAIMER

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information, statements and decisions recorded in these minutes, their status will remain that of a draft until they are confirmed as a correct record at the subsequent meeting.