

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** (here in F&GP) held on **THURSDAY 6 MARCH 2025** 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 Chairman opened the meeting, welcomed those present and announced the emergency procedure for the King Edward Hall.

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

247.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Upton and their reason was accepted.

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

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

249. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

249.1 There were no members of the public present.

250. TO CONFIRM AND SIGN MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE F&GP COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 JANUARY 2025.

250.1 The Chair called for approval of the Minutes of the meeting of the F&GP Committee held on Thursday 9 January 2025. These were **AGREED** and the Chair **SIGNED** the Minutes as being a true record of that meeting.

251. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

251.1 The Chair made no announcements.

252. ACTION LIST.

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

253. GRANTS AND DONATIONS.

253.1 Grants budget. It was **NOTED** that funds of £870 were available to spend from a budget of £2,500.

253.2 To Consider Grant Requests. Councillor Blunden reported on behalf of the Grants Panel and advised that no grant requests had been received.

253.3 To Note Letters of Thanks Received.
It was **NOTED** that a letter of thanks had been received from St Peter and St James Hospice.

254. BUDGET 2024/25: TO NOTE THE LATEST BUDGET PROGRESS REPORTS.

254.1 Members had been presented with copies of the RFO summary and detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading Report and Expenditure from Earmarked Reserves Report to 31 December 2024 and 31 January 2025. These had been circulated with the agenda. Budget progress was **NOTED** as follows:

- i) F&GP Committee:
A total of £126,823 had been spent to 31 December 2024 and this had risen to £141,451 to 31 January 2025.
- ii) Overall Council Budget:
To 31 December 2024: A total of £180,445 had been spent from the budget of £262,215 of which £51,604 had been spent from the Environment & Amenities (E&A) Committee budget of £64,425. £923 had been

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

spent from the Allotments budget of £2,500. £nil had been spent from the Planning & Traffic Committee budget of £2,900. A total of £12,164.37 had been spent to date from Earmarked Reserves.

To 31 January 2025: A total of £197,898 had been spent from the budget of £262,215 of which £54,429 had been spent from the Environment & Amenities (E&A) Committee budget of £64,425. £923 had been spent from the Allotments budget of £2,500. £nil had been spent from the Planning & Traffic Committee budget of £2,900. A total of £12,164.37 had been spent to date from Earmarked Reserves.

iii) General Reserves Expenditure:

£1,095 had been spent from General Reserves up to 31 January 2025.

iv) Income:

The following total income had been received to date:

	To 31 December 2024	To 31 January 2025
Precept	257,000	257,000
CTH Rental	7,272	8,080
Bank and Building Society Interest	3,624	3,778
Christmas Festival Night Stallholder Fees	960	960
CTH Service Charge	542	914
Telephone Refund	(360)	288
License Fee	145	145
Photocopying Service Fee	9	9
Allotments	1,197	1,197
	<u>£270,389</u>	<u>£272,371</u>

v) Overspent Budget Headings: Details of budget headings that had been overspent by 15% or more had been included in the RFO monthly financial reports throughout the year, providing reasons for the overspend, which had included the following up to January 2025:

4160 F&GP Insurance 120.1%
4450 E&A Street Lighting Energy/Maintenance 124.4%
4561 E&A Denmans Lane Toilets Utilities 137.6%

255. FINANCIAL MONITORING: TO NOTE THE ACCOUNT RECORDS.

255.1 Members had been presented with account records to 31 January 2025 with the agenda.

i) Bank - Cash and Investment Reconciliation and To Note Deposits and Investments Held.

It was **NOTED** that the total bank cash and investment reconciliation to 31 December 2024 was £258,965.62 and to 31 January 2025 was £243,096.05.

ii) Payment Analysis.

It was **NOTED** that a total of £3,482.41 net of VAT had been spent from the Barclays Bank current account in December 2024 and £1,516.12 net of VAT in January 2025. £17,810.88 net of VAT had been spent from the Unity Trust Bank current account in December 2024 and £15,862.28 net of VAT in January 2025.

iii) To Approve/Ratify any required Payments.

It was **NOTED** that the RFO had obtained approval from the three Committee Chairs prior to the meeting to transfer £13,683.18 from Barclays Bank to Unity Trust Bank to assist with meeting the cost of an invoice received from West Sussex County Council.

256. BANKING ARRANGEMENTS: TO CONSIDER THE REPORT.

256.1 Members had been presented with a report that had been prepared by the Clerk and RFO dated 6 March 2025. This had provided an update on the Council's banking arrangements and control of accounts:

- i) Unity Trust Bank Charge Card – an application had been submitted.
- ii) Direct Debit Mandates – these had now been transferred to the Unity Trust Bank.

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

- iii) Claim for VAT Refund – a claim relating to the invoice period October to December 2024 for £4,765.74 had been submitted to HMRC and payment received.
- iv) Transfer of funds - £9,000 had been transferred from the Nationwide Building Society to the Unity Trust Bank current account 10 Feb 2025 to assist with maximising FSCS protection.
- v) RFO had now arranged online access with the Hinckley and Rugby Building Society to assist with viewing transactions and requesting statements.
- vi) Petty Cash – All funds had been withdrawn and paid into Barclays bank on 4 February 2025 to close the account.

The above was **NOTED**. Members had conveyed their gratitude to the RFO for her assistance in transferring the Direct Debit payments to the Unity Trust Bank.

- 256.2 An increasing precept payment was due to be received in April 2025 and members had been asked if they wished to consider the option of an additional savings product being set up to further maximise FSCS protection.

The report was **NOTED**, and after having given the matter further consideration, it was **AGREED** that enquiries should be made to explore additional products.

257. COMMITTEE WORK SCHEDULE: TO NOTE THE PROPOSED SCHEDULE.

- 257.1 Members had been presented with a draft Committee Work schedule, which outlined a timeline to 31 March 2026. This would be a live document, continuously being updated and revised.

The above was **NOTED**.

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

- 258.1 The Clerk and Councillor Pickett reported that discussions were ongoing regrading drainage, and that progress was being made towards a lease agreement with Mid Sussex District Council. The Council had received solicitor advice not to progress any further until such time the matter concerning drainage had been overcome. There were concerns regarding the delay that was being experienced in obtaining building control and the consequent delay in accessing S106 funding, which was due to expire in October 2025.

The above was **NOTED**.

259. PLAN 23-27: TO CONSIDER THE REPORT AND ANY MATTERS REQUIRING A DECISION.

- 259.1 There was no formal written report, but the following points were made. The Chair had enquired as to whether any updates might be available to share, as she was keen to progress this key priority forward. The office was looking to update the progress tracking. The Plan 23-27 Working Group had met the day before and discussed the proposed reports to a) the Village Roadshow and b) the Annual Meeting of Council.

There was agreement towards designing and producing the grants leaflet as soon as possible. The Clerk had confirmed that the estate management company had been asked for consent to install solar panels on Clock Tower House, and written confirmation was expected soon. It was suggested that when Plan 23-27 was reviewed this year that an objective relating to the Village Archive be considered.

The above was **NOTED**.

260. GOVERNANCE: TO NOTE THE INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT AND TO CONSIDER THE ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENES OF THE OVERALL INTERNAL AUDIT AND INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM.

- 260.1 The Chair reported that the interim internal audit had been carried out on 20 November 2024 and that a copy of the full and comprehensive report had been circulated with the agenda. No matters of concern had been raised.

The interim internal audit report had been **NOTED**, and members had expressed thanks to office staff for their diligence in helping the Council to receive a positive outcome.

- 260.2 The Chair reported that Councillor Pickett had kindly offered to carry out the annual review of the effectiveness of the overall internal audit and internal control system for 2024/25.

The above was **NOTED**.

261. SUBSCRIPTIONS: TO CONSIDER THE REPORT.

261.1 Members had received details in respect of a service offered by Breakthrough Communications, who were a leading supplier of communication, community engagement and information governance support to local councils.

Their Council Hive service provided access to on-demand training and toolkits, as well as professional support covering all aspects of council communications, community engagement and GDPR/FOI compliance. A three-month trial had been offered free of charge. The cost for the Council Hive (Professional) service was £997 net of VAT, which would provide the following support to Clerks, Council officers and members:

- 200 communications and compliance training videos.
- Training events and webinars.
- Resources - including templates and how-to guides.
- On-demand skills training.
- Email newsletters.
- Annual Communication and compliance MOTS.

A reduced cost of £820 net of VAT had been offered for the first year.

The above was **NOTED**, and it was **AGREED** to approve an annual subscription to Breakthrough Communications in respect of the Council Hive (Professional) service for a reduced cost of £820 net of VAT in the first year.

262. COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP: TO CONSIDER THE REOPRT.

262.1 The Chair referred to a report that had been prepared by the Clerk dated 6 March 2025. It had been agreed by Full Council to implement a Community Engagement Statement. The Communications and Community Engagement Working Group (CCEWG) had met on 4 March to consider how best to progress this forward. Councillor Grace and the Clerk had attended training on implementing a communications strategy, which had been provided by Breakthrough Communications, and this had proved to be very informative. It had suggested that an 8-stage action plan be drafted, in respect of which stage one had already been completed by the council. Cuckfield Parish Council were benefitting from using this service and had shared a copy of their draft Communications and Community Engagement Strategy.

It had been recommended that Breakthrough Communications provide an in-person training session to staff and members. This would support the Council's agreement to undertake a review of its communications. which in turn would help to implement a communications strategy. There would be no cost for the training if Lindfield Parish Council were to agree to subscribe to Council Hive.

The above was **NOTED**, and it was **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council to delegate authority for the Clerk, in conjunction with the CCEWG, to arrange a training session for members and staff with Breakthrough Communications.

263. DEVOLUTION: TO CONSIDER SETTING UP A DEVOLUTION WORKING GROUP.

263.1 The Chair referred to a report that had been prepared by the Clerk dated 6 March 2025, and reminded members that it had been proposed that a Mayoral Combined County Authority be created that would cover the whole of Sussex. In addition, this could lead to three unitary authorities in Sussex replacing County and District Councils.

Members had been asked to consider setting up a working group to review any correspondence, proposals and consultations that would inevitably be taking place relating to devolution. This would enable the group to report back to the F&GP committee and Full Council with updates and any recommendations (if required). Members were mindful that Lindfield Parish Council should be ready to respond to and have input towards future services that might affect residents, and to be able to explore future funding opportunities if considered appropriate. Councillors Beecroft, Blunden, Grace and Webster had expressed an interest in joining the working group.

The above was **NOTED**, and it was **AGREED** to:

- i) **RECOMMEND** to Full Council to create a devolution working group to consider any matters relating to devolution as set out in section 5 of the Clerk's report.

LINDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

- ii) Agree Terms of Reference for the devolution working group.
- iii) Extend an invitation to all members of Full Council to join the devolution working group, with a view to having a representative for each Committee, including a Council representative with West Sussex ALC Limited and the Mid Sussex Association of Local Councils.

264. CLERK AND RFO REPORT.

264.1 Clerk's Report.

The Clerk reported on the following item:

a) Clock Tower House – Fire Alarm Service.

The six-monthly fire alarm service had been carried out on 4 January 2025. It had been necessary to replace the two batteries in the controller.

The above was **NOTED**.

264.2 RFO's Report.

The RFO reported on the following item:

a) Internal Control Check of Accounts.

The Committee Chair had carried out an internal control check of accounts on 4 March 2025 in respect of the invoice period September to December 2024, with no matters arising. The RFO had thanked the Chair for assistance.

The above was **NOTED**.

265. RISK MANAGEMENT: TO CONSIDER ANY RISK ASSESSMENTS.

265.1 There were no risk assessments to review.

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

266.1 Members had been presented with a Summary of Training and Meeting Attendance since January 2025, which had included a report from Councillor Grace.

The above was **NOTED**.

267. 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.

267.1 There were no matters arising.

The meeting concluded at 21.01 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.