

**Minutes of the first meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee
held on Wednesday 1st September 2021 at 7.30pm in the Ashburnham Sports Pavilion**

Members present: Cllrs Andrew Hoad (Chairman), Chris Sinden and Paul Spicer

Members absent: Cllr Richard White

In attendance: Brian Holdstock, Clerk to the Council,

1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence have been received from Cllr Richard White.

2) Disclosures of interest

No interests were declared

3) Financial procedures

a) The auditor is retiring and a new auditor needs to be appointed for next year. A number of options were suggested by the retiring auditor and it was resolved that the clerk should first approach Pat Buckle. She is a former trainer for ESALC on Clerk's Certificate courses.

b) Salary payments - strengthening the audit trail (as recommended by the internal auditor). It was resolved to amend financial regulations to require that the monthly pay slip be attached to the email requesting bank payment authorisations. Furthermore, a P60 should be added to the 'invoices to authorise' folder at the year end.

c) Payments up to £100 to view at parish council meetings. It was resolved to amend Financial Regulations and in lieu of requiring a printed hard copy of invoices up to £100 to be tabled, to circulate with the agenda e-copies of the invoices. (There is no change to the requirement to print and sign copies of invoices over £100.)

d) Schedule of payments to authorise at parish council meetings. It was resolved to amend Financial Regulations and to require the table of approved payments to form part of the minutes instead of being an attachment to the minutes.

4) Financial Planning

a) Risk assessment - possible call on parish council finances

i) **Village hall**

The committee discussed possible major maintenance expenditure recognising that the parish council, whilst not being legally liable for the cost of upkeep of the village hall, has the powers to meet costs which are beyond the village hall committee. It was agreed that the parish council needs to know what major items are likely to occur, the timing of them and the cost. The committee, therefore, resolved -

(1) to revisit the survey carried out by Housemartins Surveyors in 2011 on the instructions of the village hall committee,

(2) to investigate the cost of employing a surveyor to update the survey, and

(3) to use the survey results as the basis of a time line with future costs.

(4) Only if the results of the above show that the hall has substantial useful life remaining without risk of major maintenance costs, to then consider scoping out the cost of some selective upgrades ie kitchen, toilets, car park and ante room.

ii) **New village hall**

The committee were unable to form any view of future financial calls on the parish

council in the absence of a clear, accurate and up-to-date project cost. The committee resolved that it will :-

- (1) Wait for the New Village Hall Steering Group to produce an evidence-based project cost within the time frame set by the parish council, i.e. by the end of 2021.
- (2) Use updated project cost to assess the best / worst case for the total cost of ownership going forwards (ie financial, operating and maintenance costs). Both optimistic and pessimistic cases for the source of borrowing will be modelled.
- (3) This best case / worst case assessment/financial modelling will then be used as the basis upon which to take an informed view be taken about the viability of the project.

It was noted that currently the view is that some of the necessary funds could potentially consist of the following:-

- £100k from ATT
- £200k loan from Public Works Loan Board
- £200k from funders and grant awarding bodies.

This latter figure is based on the view of the professional fundraiser in Burwash who suggested that £200k is about the limit for which he would be prepared to engage.

iii) **Other initiatives**, e.g. environment, green agenda.

The committee view was that there is insufficient information at present to enable any provision to be made.

- b) Financial projections of level of reserves three years FY22/23 to FY24/25 and plan for precept next three years.

Until more specific future needs for the level of reserves are developed, members resolved to maintain the precept at its current level, but to adjust it for inflation based on the CPI figure for September each year. This adds some certainty to the income side of the budget for the following year which is planned in some detail in November.

The committee resolved that the precept level would be based solely on the sum requested to be raised and that it not be further adjusted to take account of annual changes in the tax base.

5) Date of Next Meeting

The next F&GP Committee meeting is set for Wednesday 27th October 2021 subject to the New Village Hall Steering Committee having had a further meeting by then.

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Signed (Chair)

Date