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|   | PULBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL*Working together for a better future* |

 PULBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL

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MINUTES OF A FINANCE & POLICY MEETING OF PULBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL

**HELD** **ON THURSDAY 26th October 2023 AT THE SPORTS & SOCIAL CLUB**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs: Hunt (Chair), Clarke, Court, Ellis-Brown, Lee, Hunt & Mote

**IN ATTENDANCE**: Mr H Quenault (Clerk)

***The meeting opened at 7.34pm.***

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence and reasons were received from:

Cllr Wallace (Personal Commitment)

1. **Declarations of Interest and Changes to Register of Interests**

 There were no changes to Councillor’s register of interests.

There were no changes to the declarations of interests.

1. **Minutes**

 The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the Minutes of the Meeting Thursday 28th September 2023 as a true and accurate record of the proceedings, and that the Committee Chairman sign them.

1. **Public Speaking**

 There were no public speakers present, therefore the Chair moved onto the next item on the agenda.

1. **Parish Council Finances**

The clerk delivered a financial update to the committee, highlighting the significant interest rates being earned on the accounts at present. He informed the committee that during this time of the year, it's typical for a council to have accumulated approximately 95 to 100% of its projected income. However, Pulborough Parish Council currently boasts a surplus of 103%, underscoring the substantial impact of the favourable interest rates on the budget. Additionally, the clerk mentioned incoming revenues, particularly from allotment rents and the Christmas lights donation. He noted that some expenses were still pending, and while the current expenditure stood at 35%, it was expected to rise to align with the budgeted levels for this time of the year. Council members expressed concerns regarding the sports tenancy agreements, as the recent adjustments in the billing structure for this area had led to a decrease in income. The clerk also informed the committee that the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funds had been allocated to the "other income" category.

Members **NOTED** bank reconciliations for Cashbook 1 & Cashbook 3, a summary of income & expenditure and the statement of earmarked reserves as at 30th September 2023.

1. **External Audit Report**

The Clerk explained that the audit was qualified and the reasons behind this.

Members **NOTED** the external audit report from Moore.

1. **Internal Audit Report**

The Clerk explained that since his arrival many areas prior to the audit being taken have improved dramatically. The Clerk updated the committee on progress that had been made since the internal audit report.

However, there were still areas for enhancement, and the Clerk pointed to four key points mentioned in the review, specifically on Page 11:

The Clerk noted that the issue of fraud and dishonesty insurance cover had already been addressed and was scheduled for discussion on the evening's agenda. Payment related to this matter was to be settled with the insurance company after the meeting.

The asset register had been adjusted, with a correction of £1 instead of none in the respective columns.

The Clerk also highlighted the issue of the £85,000 entitlement (The FSCS protects 100% of the first £85,000 you have saved, per UK-regulated financial institution) to the Parish Council and the importance of being cautious, as funds exceeding this amount in the NatWest accounts would not have protection.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Council would open a new bank account for any balance exceeding £85,000. It's important to note that this was not a recommendation from the Clerk.

Furthermore, the Clerk pointed out that the bank accounts and cash books needed to be physically signed, despite having already been reviewed by the Chair of Finance and the Chair of the Parish. Consequently, the Clerk had already coordinated with the Chair of the Parish & Finance to arrange a date for signing the documents for previous cashbooks in this financial year.

Members **NOTED** the internal audit report.

1. **Fraud & Dishonesty Cover Increase**

Members **NOTED** an increase in the fraud and dishonesty cover from £150,000 to £500,000 to fully protect the Council’s assets from fraud, as per the internal auditor recommendation.

1. **Window Replacement – S&SC Parish Room**

There was some discussion about the security of the building being at risk by not replacing the windows. The quote did not include installation. It was mentioned that this was a competitive quote. It was mentioned that the Council could get them installed by members of the Parish Council.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to put in replacement windows to the Sports and Social Club Parish Room to increase security around the building.

1. **Bowls Club Lease**

It was mentioned that the water usage may go down if they inherit the cost. The lease has been discussed with the Bowls Club. There were queries over the yearly cost of the water for the Bowls Club.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the updated lease for the Bowls Club.

1. **Grant – Recommendations**

After receiving the recommendations and after much discussion the following charities/non-profits were proposed.

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| Parochial Church Council, St. Mary’s Church | £200.00 |
| Victim Support (Sussex Area) | £100.00 |
| Storrington & Arun Valley SWT (Sussex Wildlife Trust) Regional Group | £100.00 |
| Air Ambulance Kent, Surrey & Sussex  | £200.00 |
| Pulborough & District Community Care Association | £1180.00 |
| 4Sight Vision Support | £220.00 |

The Clerk made the committee aware that the 4091-budget line which contains the grants amounts has a current spend of £208. The Clerk said he would investigate this spend and would move it if appropriate.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the recommendations above (with the £208 spend being investigated by the Clerk) after discussion and guidance from Cllr Court & Cllr Lee to Full Council next month.

1. **S106/CIL Monies**

The Pulborough Rugby Club, which is located in Storrington, was found to be allocated to £4,734 from the Pulborough 106 funds. The District Council called upon the District Councillors to approve the funds, considering that some club members came from Pulborough. However, the Councillors declined to provide the funds. Despite their objections, it appears that the District Council went ahead and allocated the £4,734 without proper authorisation. Principally, this allocation concerns a sports club and the way it has been handled has raised concerns and has been met with challenges. The allocated funds were intended for the expansion of a building in Storrington. The District Council were to be contacted in this regard.

In the context of the 106 funding, it was observed that a significant number of allocations lack clear information regarding their purpose and destination. Specifically, it remains unclear if these funds were allocated to the sports and social club, and the absence of a clear narrative has also been a subject of inquiry.

Members **NOTED** the HDC quarterly report of Unspent / Potential S106 or CIL monies.

1. **Allotment Rent Review 2024-25**

The allotment fees were a subject of extensive discussion during the meeting. Council members raised several concerns, particularly regarding the sizing of the plots, which had caused some issues due to uneven plot sizes and a lack of clarity in previous decisions. This led to a substantial debate among the councillors. There was a suggestion raised about whether the council's intent was for commercial gain or if the allotments were meant to be a community asset. This prompted questions about whether a price increase would be justified given the current circumstances and the role of these allotments as a community resource.

Motion 1: A motion was proposed to accept the clerk's recommendation, which suggested including water costs within the allotment fees. This entailed setting prices at £30 for small plots, £37.50 for medium plots, and £45 for large plots. After a discussion, this motion failed to pass.

Motion 2: Following the failure of the first motion, another proposal was put forward to increase the plot fees by a flat rate of £20 for small plots, £30 for medium plots, and £40 for large plots. This motion also failed to gain approval.

The discussion extended to the topic of water and its administration, with a mention of the time and cost involved. There was a motion made in jest which was discredited by the Chair.

Motion 3: Finally, a new motion was introduced, suggesting a 15% rent increase for the plots, with the figures then rounded to the nearest 50p for rental fees. It was specified that water costs would remain a separate billing item, calculated by the Deputy Clerk.

It was **RESOLVED** that there would be a 15% rent increase for the plots, with the figures then rounded to the nearest 50p for rental fees. It was specified that water costs would remain a separate billing item.

1. **Budget Review – 1st Draft**

The Clerk produce a 2nd draft due to significant information coming to light. This was interpreted by committee.

The Clerk provided a detailed explanation of the budget, going through it line by line. Several important points emerged during the discussion. One of these was the notable increase in Muga income, followed by a rise in revenue from room and rent hires, an expanded budget for wardens and increased salaries, all of which were presented to justify the proposed budget figures.

Committee members offered good feedback on the budget. This led to a discussion on youth work expenditures and the need for a clear plan, with a decision to evaluate the associated costs.

Another topic of concern was the absence of any allocation for communications or advertising within the current budget. It was suggested that a new budget line be created with a £1,000 allocation, funded by a reduction in the grant fund to £2,000.

There were also concerns raised about room hire expenses, prompting a suggestion for negotiations between the village hall and Pulborough Parish Council to better understand the reasons for the increases.

The discussion included consideration of direct creation or salary adjustments, with some members questioning the need for incremental increases and proposing a fixed sum as an alternative.

The inclusion of funds from the sports club in the budget was addressed, with concerns raised about the potential challenges in maintaining these funds, given recent criticism from the Cricket and Football Clubs regarding their facility usage.

The Muga income, while potentially higher upon revaluation, was approached with caution pending a more accurate assessment.

The Clerk explained the budgeting process to committee members, especially those who were new to it, and discussed the next stages in the budget development.

1. **Payments**

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| Travis Perkins | £24.94 |
| Travis Perkins | £129.01 |
| Festive Illuminations | £4305.00 |
| Gallagher Insurance | £609.27 |
| WSCC Financial Services | £320.54 |
| Mileage – Harry Quenault | £31.14 |
| MW Electrical Sussex Ltd | 103.20 |

***The meeting closed at 9.29pm.***

 ……………………………………..Chair

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