

COOKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the FINANCE COMMITTEE**Held in the Community Room on Tuesday, 25th October 2022, commencing at 7.30pm**

PRESENT: Cllr P. Roe (Chairman)
Cllrs M. Brar, I Herd, M. Howard, B. Perry and J Perry

No members of the press or public were present.

1. APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs L. Austin and C. Doyle.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

Cllrs have signed a Grant of Dispensation regarding matters related to the setting of the Precept.
Cllr M Howard Item 11 Pecuniary

3. TO ELECT A CHAIRMAN OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE:

On the proposal of Cllr M. Howard, seconded by Cllr M. Brar, Cllrs unanimously approved Cllr P. Roe's continued appointment as Chairman.

4. TO HAVE PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS REGARDING THE BUDGETS FOR 2022-23:

Cllr P. Roe outlined the budget setting process, starting with gathering information from the Committees, followed by Finance Cmte meetings in October and November with an aim to bring a proposed budget to the December Full Council for approval.

a. To review the half year figures, April 2022 to September 2022, and consider the current budget forecast for 2023/24:

Cllr P. Roe noted that following a provisional review of the half year figures things looked on track, but was aware of a number of recent items, such as planning consultant work, that might end in an overspend of around £5,000 by the end of the year. This will be monitored.

Due to the increase in inflation Cllrs felt it was more realistic to re calculate the budget forecast for 2023/24 at 10% increase. The figures will be amended.

The Precept will be discussed in more detail once the draft budget has been developed.

At this point Cllrs decided to discuss matters related to item 8, Cemetery Lodge, due to the potential implications on the budget discussion.

8. CEMETERY LODGE:**i. To discuss the recent Inspection report (October 2022):**

The Clerk has felt that some of the maintenance issues, in particularly the bathroom tiling (approved in August 2021) and the work to the wisteria and hedges, requested in spring 2022, has taken longer than necessary to resolve. Cllr Howard will follow this up with Prospect Letting services.

ii. To consider and approve the continuation of the Cemetery Lodge rental agreement:

In response to items i and ii:

The condition of the property is poor, however a recent email from the Letting Agent has suggested that the new manager of the Bel and the Dragon would be keen to work with the Parish Council to update the property and make sure there were suitable occupants. Cllrs were keen to follow this up as it would benefit both parties. Whilst not confirmed at this stage, this also implied that they were keen to renew the tenancy for another year.

The Clerk to follow up on this discussion with the Letting Agent and report back.

iii. **To consider and approve any rent increase:**

If the refurbishment of the property, at a suggested 50/50 split with the Tenant, was to go ahead, Cllrs were in agreement to keep the rental cost static for the next year at £1,512 per month.

iv. **To review the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) for Cemetery Lodge:**

In 2015, new laws set Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES), stating that private rented property in England and Wales must have an EPC rating of E or above. These came into force on 1 April 2018 for new tenancies, and on 1 April 2020 for existing tenancies. In autumn 2020, the government began a consultation on tightening the MEES rules. The changes consider raising the Minimum EPC rating from E to C. The plan is to enforce this from 1 April 2025 for new tenancies, and from 1 April 2028 for existing tenancies.

Cemetery lodge currently has an EPC rating of E. Bearing in mind that if the current tenants stay in place until 2028 work on making the property more energy efficient could be delayed, however, Cllrs were of the opinion that work should start much sooner and therefore proposed that a project to look into the measures that can be taken to bring the property up to EPC rating C should be started. It was also agreed that a strategic reserve will be created to build up funds. An item will be added to the next agenda to review what needs to be done and who will lead the project.

The meeting returned to item 4b - To consider a draft budget

b. **To consider a draft budget:**

Additional budget requested by Committees:

Planning Committee:

£5,000 for the ongoing work on the Neighbourhood Plan, as it will continue into 23/24.

£7,500 for Planning Consultants with reference to Planning Authority consultations and responses to BLP sites AL37 and AL38.

£5,000 to be added to a reserve for future legal costs associated with challenges with reference to inconsistent planning decisions.

General Purposes:

£7,000 for Alfred Major projects

£2,000 for Chapel heating and lighting upgrade.

£2,500 - Small grants and community donations budget approved in September Full Council.

Youth Engagement – increase to £500.

c. **To consider the unbudgeted spend for 22/23 and the impact on the general fund:**

A general review of the possible overspend took place.

d. **To review three year forecast:**

The three year forecast was not reviewed in detail. Cllrs decided by 4 votes to 2 to leave the forecast for the next three years with a 4% increase.

5. **TO REVIEW STRATEGIC RESERVE FUND AND CONSIDER AREAS FOR FURTHER FUNDS:**

Cllrs reviewed the information supplied by the Clerk. Moves to the strategic reserves will be confirmed at the Finance Cmte meeting in March 2023.

6. **TO CONSIDER THE LEVEL OF THE PARISH PRECEPT:**

Provisional conversations suggest a precept increase of 10% may be necessary, however further work on the budget demands need to be considered. Cllrs were mindful of the rising cost of inflation and the impact this might have on supplier's charges.

7. TO REVIEW THE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) REPORT – YTD 22/23:

At the start of the financial year the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) allocation for CPC stood at £3,309. £2571 has been used against the play area equipment and therefore £738 remains in the CIL fund. There has been no CIL payments this year (April and October). Cllrs queried this and asked for a review of the relevant planning applications.

9. TO REVIEW AND APPROVE THE RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY AND FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT DOCUMENT:

On the proposal of Cllr B. Perry, Cllrs unanimously approved the Risk Management Policy and Financial Risk Assessment subject to the following changes:

Page 5, Section 2Ba – date of adoption of Standing Orders to May 2022.

Page 10, Section 3Bm – date of adoption of Cllrs Code of Conduct to May 2022.

10. TO REVIEW THE INTERNAL FINANCIAL CONTROL CHECKLISTS AND AGREE THE CLLR WHO WILL CARRY OUT THE QUARTERLY CHECKS for 2022/23:

The Statement of Internal Control and the Internal Control checklist were reviewed, and it was felt no changes were required. Cllr L. Austin will be asked if she would be able to run the checks, if she is not available Cllr P. Roe will volunteer to carry out the internal checks this year.

The Clerk reminded Cllrs that it is their responsibility to carry out these checks to ensure proper practices are being followed and to safeguard the Councils finance.

11. TO REVIEW THE GRAZING LICENCE AT ALLEYS LANE AND CONFIRM THE FEE TO CHARGE FROM OCTOBER 2023:

Cllrs reviewed the information supplied by the Clerk. On the proposal of Cllr I. Herd, seconded by Cllr P. Roe, Cllrs unanimously agreed to increase the grazing licence fee from £310 to £325 from October 2023.

12. TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE ON THE RENEWAL OF THE LEASE WITH COOKHAM RISE PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR THE PART USE OF LAND ON THE ALFRED MAJOR RECREATION GROUND, WHICH ENDED APRIL 2022:

The Clerk had started the process of talking to the school regarding the renewal of the lease at the beginning of 2022, however this has stalled following the increased work load since the Assistant Clerk left. The Clerk asked for assistance with the negotiations as the lease ended in April and needed to be finalised. Once the terms of the new lease have been agreed the contract needs to be reviewed and approved by the Solicitor and the lease logged with Land Registry. Cllr Howard volunteered to progress the matter. The Clerk will update him.

13. TO CONSIDER THE TENDER PROCESS FOR THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS:

The contracts for the Council grounds maintenance should be reviewed approximately every 5 years. A review has not taken place in that time and the matter noted on a previous Internal Auditors reports. As this matter has been deferred on a number of occasions, Cllr P. Roe will endeavour to begin the process prior to the end of the Financial Year.

14. REVIEW THE FINANCE ACTION LIST:

The action list was reviewed. Cllr P. Roe will look into the rebuild value of Cemetery Lodge.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.