

COOKHAM PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of a Meeting of the FINANCE COMMITTEE

Held in the Community Room on Tuesday, 31st October 2023, commencing at 7.30pm

PRESENT: Cllr R. Kellaway (Chairman)
 Cllrs M. Brar (arrived 8.45pm), T. Caen, J. Edwards, J. Moore, H. Pleming and A-L Regan

No members of the press or public were present.

1. APOLOGIES:

Apologies for were received from Cllr M. Howard.
 Cllr M. Brar arrived at 8.45pm as she had been attending an RBWM meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

None.

3. TO HAVE PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION REGARDING THE BUDGET FOR 2024-25:

Cllr Kellaway 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. The Precept request must be with RBWM by mid January, therefore the Budget must be set by then.

Cllrs were reminded that the precept levy and the percentage increase appears on residents council tax demand. Cllrs would be expected to defend the reason for a large percentage increase.

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

Following a provisional review of the half year figures Cllr Kellaway noted that the budget looked on track. This will continue to be monitored.

b. To consider a draft budget for 2024/25:

Additional budget requested by Committees:

Planning Committee:

£7,500 for Planning Consultant work and legal challenges, forecast was £5000.

GP project requests totalling £10,500:

Replacement signage (AMRG)	£1,000 (AMRG projects)
Replacement noticeboards x 3	£2,000 (Administration – Advertising)
Cemetery Memorial checks	£1,500 (Cemetery Memorial checks)
Hillcrest Ave Entrance repairs	£5,000 (AMRG projects)
Additional Trees	£1,000 (AMRG projects)

Staffing: Additional staff member following recommendation from the staffing review - £16,000.

This would bring a total expenditure to £229,000, with income of £188,000 based on this years precept of £140,781, the precept would have to rise by approx. £40,000 (26%) to balance the figures.

23/24 - Budget expenditure for 23/24 is £206,478 with income £189,521, with the difference of £16,957 coming from General Fund as agreed by Council last December.

c. To review the three year forecast:

The three year forecast was not reviewed in detail. Cllrs decided to leave the forecast for the next three years with a 4% increase. Clerk to add figures for 2027/28 with 4% increase.

4. TO REVIEW STRATEGIC RESERVE FUND AND CONSIDER AREAS FOR FURTHER FUNDS (TO CONFIRM AT THE MARCH 2024 MTG):

Cllrs reviewed the information supplied by the Clerk who clarified the difference between strategic/ earmarked reserves and the General Fund. Moves to the strategic reserves will be confirmed at the Finance Cmte meeting in March 2024 after a review of the provisional end of year figures.

5. TO CONSIDER THE LEVEL OF THE PARISH PRECEPT:

Provisional conversations based on the first draft of the budget, suggest a precept increase of 26%, however some Cllrs were mindful of the rising cost of living and the impact this might have on residents. Cllrs would need to justify this increase to residents.

An increase of 7%, in line with inflation, was considered more acceptable. Further work on the budget demands need to be undertaken. Cllrs will need to take council resources into account when looking at projects that can be realistically achieved.

6. TO REVIEW THE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) REPORT – YTD 23/24:

At the start of the financial year the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) allocation for CPC stood at £738. There have been no CIL payments this year (April and October). Clerk is in discussion with CIL Team at RBWM for access to CIL Liability notices.

7. CEMETERY LODGE:

Following on from the concerns raised last year there is general concern that the Letting Agent is not fulfilling their responsibilities. This will be discussed at a future meeting.

i. To review the most recent Inspection report (March 2023):

The report was acknowledged. Cllrs commented that the property did not look cared for. Since the last inspection report the Tenant has decorated so Cllrs expect to see improvements in the next report which is due soon.

ii. To consider and approve the continuation of the Cemetery Lodge rental agreement and to consider and approve any rent increase:

Cllrs unanimously agreed to the continuation of the current tenant and agreed a rent change for the next year from £1,512 to £1,800 per month, with the capacity to negotiate to £1,750 if required. The Clerk to inform the Letting Agent who will liaise with the Tenant. The Management fee of 12%, will rise from £181.44 to £216 (ex VAT) per month.

The Clerk to remind the Agent of the contractual obligations of the Tenancy Agreement and the need for the Tenant to keep the house and garden in a good state of repair. Cllrs requested that the Tenant promptly improve the visual appearance of the property, especially from the road.

iii. To approve a quotation for carpets and flooring:

In line with an additional clause on the Tenancy Agreement, December 2022, Cllrs unanimously approved a replacement flooring quotation from Bucks Carpets of £2,285 (inc VAT), to replace the carpet in the 4 bedrooms, stairs and landing and lay vinyl flooring in the hallway. Clerk to inform the Letting Agent.

iv. To discuss the roof work and confirm next steps:

The Agent has informed the council that work is required to the roof. This appears to be connected with the wisteria that was allowed to breach the roof line despite numerous requests over a period of 15 months from the Clerk for it to be cut back.

The Clerk and Cllr Moore have a site visit booked for 3rd November. The state of the roof will be assessed at that visit and the matter will be discussed further at the November meeting. Cllrs are aware that the repairs need to be made promptly.

Cllr J. Moore left the meeting at 8.30pm and returned at 8.35pm.

v. **To provide an update on the bathroom tiling and decide next steps:**

Following a review of the history of the issue, Cllrs agreed that there was no merit in pursuing further works to the bathroom tiling. The work completed, although not to the specification agreed, has been done to an acceptable standard. The approved quote was for full tiling at £850, the council has been invoiced for £300 which has been paid.

vi. **To provide an update on the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) for Cemetery Lodge:**

There is a legal obligation for rental properties to have a minimum EPC rating of E, which Cemetery Lodge currently has. There has been a government consultation, that may require properties to be brought up to EPC rating C, however this has not yet reached a conclusion. However, the council recognise that it is beneficial for both council and tenants if the building were as energy efficient as possible.

There is a planned site visit on 3rd November to assess the property for matters related to its energy performance. This will be discussed in more detail at the November Finance Meeting, where decisions can be made to progress any works.

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

On the proposal of Cllr R Kellaway, 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 2023.

Page 10, Section 3Bm – date of adoption of Cllrs Code of Conduct to May 2023.

Cllr M. Brar joined the meeting at 8.45pm.

9. **TO REVIEW THE GRAZING LICENCE AT ALLEYNS LANE AND CONFIRM THE FEE TO CHARGE FROM OCTOBER 2024:**

Cllrs reviewed the information supplied by the Clerk. Cllrs unanimously agreed to increase the grazing licence fee from £325 to £340 from October 2024.

10. **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 updated Cllrs on the slow progress on the matter following the reduced staffing and/or new staff training requirements over the last 18 months. The Clerk will look for ways to progress the matter.

11. **TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE ON THE CREATION OF A TENDER DOCUMENT FOR THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT AND CONSIDER A WORKING GROUP TO REFINE THE DETAILS:**

Cllr A-L Regan has produced a first draft which she and the Clerk will continue to work on.

12. **TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHANGES TO THE COUNCILS NATIONWIDE BUSINESS SAVINGS ACCOUNT:**

This was acknowledged.

13. **REVIEW THE FINANCE ACTION LIST:**

The action list was reviewed.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm.