

COOKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the FINANCE COMMITTEE Held in the Council Offices on Tuesday, 21st May 2024, commencing at 7.35pm

PRESENT: Cllr R. Kellaway (Chairman)
Cllrs B Perry and H Fleming
J.Holder (Locum Minute Taker)

No members of the press or public were present.

1. APOLOGIES & QUORUM:

1. Apologies for absence were noted for Cllrs M. Brar, T. Caen, M. Howard, J Moore, and A-L Regan.
2. Members were not sure whether the Full Council at its April meeting had reduced the quorum for the Finance Committee from 5 to 4, as requested by the Finance Committee at its previous meeting but in any event, this meeting was not quorate. Whilst accordingly no decisions could be made, the primary purpose of this meeting was to review certain financial documents, including the draft Annual Governance and Accountability Return ("AGAR") and make recommendations to the Full Council at its next meeting, with the Full Council when it meets taking any decisions to approve such documentation.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

There were none.

3. TO ELECT A CHAIRMAN FOR THE FINANCE COMMITTEE:

On the proposal of Cllr B Perry and seconded by Cllr Fleming, Cllr R. Kellaway was unanimously approved as Chairman of the Finance Committee for this meeting and subject to ratification hereafter, when quorate, as Chairman of the Finance Committee for the year..

4. TO CONSIDER THE INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2023-24:

Cllr Kellaway reported that although the Clerk was currently ill, she had prior to that been able to complete with the Internal Auditor, the various financial papers for consideration at this meeting. In this regard, Members were pleased to note that in his Report/Assessment of Compliance, the Internal Auditor had remarked that in terms of materiality, there was nothing to report. The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) Annual Internal Auditor Report 2023/24 was reviewed and unanimously approved for recommendation to Full Council.

5. TO CONSIDER THE ASSERTIONS IN AGAR SECTION 1 - ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24 AND APPROVE IT'S RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL BY FULL COUNCIL:

Cllrs reviewed the documentation provided by the Clerk to enable them properly to consider the assertions 1 to 8 of the Annual Governance Statement. Question 9 relates to trust funds which this council does not hold.

The Annual Governance Statement, Section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) as prepared by the Clerk, was unanimously approved for recommendation to Full Council.

6. TO REVIEW THE ACCOUNTING STATEMENTS FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2023-24 AND APPROVE ITS RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL BY FULL COUNCIL:

The large reduction for 'total other receipts' and 'all other payments' in this year compared to the previous year was due to the implementation of the play area improvement project, as set out in the Explanation of Variances report, which is also provided as part of the AGAR documentation to the External Auditor. Also, as noted in the Explanation of Variances, the increase in staff costs this year compared to the previous year was due to there being a staff member short for much of the previous year. The Committee reviewed the Accounting Statement, Section 2 of the AGAR, as prepared by the Clerk. This was unanimously approved for recommendation by Full Council.

7. TO REVIEW THE BANK RECONCILIATION AS AT 31ST MARCH 2024 AND APPROVE ITS RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL BY FULL COUNCIL:

The Bank Reconciliation report was reviewed as part of the AGAR and was unanimously recommended for approval by Full Council.

8. TO REVIEW THE INFORMATION CONNECTED WITH THE 'CONFIRMATION OF THE DATES OF THE PERIOD FOR THE EXERCISE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS':

The dates for the period for the exercise of public rights were acknowledged as running between Monday 10th June to Friday 19th July 2024.

9. TO REVIEW THE INFORMATIONAL ACCOUNTS FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2023-24 AND APPROVE THE RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL BY FULL COUNCIL:

The Locum Minute taker introduced the Income and Expenditure Accounts for Cllrs to review. The set of Accounts were unanimously recommended for approval at Full Council.

10. TO REVIEW THE REGISTER OF ASSETS:

The Register of Assets was reviewed.

11. TO REVIEW THE STRATEGIC RESERVE FUND AT 31ST MARCH 2024:

Cllrs reviewed the movements in the Strategic Reserves for 2023-24 and the end position as of March 31st 2024. Cllrs noted that the Alfred Major Projects -Improvement projects was at zero at the start and the end of the year; consideration was given to removing it but it was noted that there might be a future project falling in this particular reserve and so it was left in place. As at March 31st 2024, the Strategic Reserve stands at £65,870 and the General Fund stands at £95,081.

12. TO APPROVE CONTINUING PAYMENTS IN 2024-25 OF ONGOING DIRECT DEBITS, STANDING ORDERS AND REMUNERATION PAYABLE TO ALL EMPLOYEES:

Cllrs unanimously approved the list of ongoing direct debits, standing order payments and remuneration payments to all employees, for the year 2024/25.

13. TO APPROVE PAYMENTS OF MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS OVER 2024-25:

Cllrs reviewed and unanimously approved the list of membership subscriptions for the year 2024/25

14. TO REVIEW AND APPROVE THE INTERNAL FINANCIAL CONTROL CHECKLISTS AND TO AGREE THE CLLR WHO WILL CARRY OUT THE QUARTERLY CHECKS FOR 2024-25:

No changes were required to the Statement of Internal Control and the Internal Control checklist . Cllr R. Kellaway volunteered to carry out the internal control checks this year.

15. TO REVIEW THE PERFORMANCE AND LONG TERM RELATIONSHIP OF THE CURRENT LETTING AGENT:

It was noted that the General Purposes Committee was now reviewing this.

16. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE TENDER PROCESS:

It was noted that Cllr A-L Regan had written to advise that there was nothing currently to report.

17. REVIEW THE FINANCE ACTION LIST:

The action list was reviewed.

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Cllr Kellaway noted that the Clerk was currently on sick leave and was not due to return until the middle of next week which was after the end of month date when staff payroll is usually paid. There were also creditors to pay. Cllr Perry requested that Mr Holder should check with Mrs Holder if she might be able to assist with this. Mr Holder would do so but noted that the Government PAYE system would be password protected by the Clerk and if that information could not be accessed in the office, then it would be necessary to contact the Clerk while absent. Also any bank payments to be made , for staff or suppliers, would need to be authorised by those councillors who were "electronic signatories". Cllr Perry noted that going forward, there would need to be arrangements to cover for such situations.

The meeting closed at 8. 22pm.