

**COOKHAM PARISH COUNCIL**  
**Minutes of a Meeting of the FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**Held in the Community Room on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023, commencing at 7.30pm**

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**PRESENT:** Cllr R. Kellaway (Chairman)  
 Cllrs T. Caen, J. Edwards, M. Howard J. Moore and H. Pleming

No members of the press or public were present.

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**1. APOLOGIES:**

Apologies for were received from Cllrs M. Brar and A-L Regan

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

None.

**3. TO CONSIDER AND APPROVE A DRAFT BUDGET FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024/25 FOR RECOMMENDATION TO FULL COUNCIL:**

Following the Finance Cmte meeting in October a further review of the provisional budget was made with an aim to reduce expenditure and therefore the impact on the precept.

There are two significant areas which has pushed the need to raise the precept above an inflationary level, plus a higher than average inflation rate:

1. This year's budget was agreed with a difference of £16,957 to come from the General Fund, ie expenditure is higher than income. This was done to reduce the General Fund as it was considered too high, and because of a couple of high-cost projects (Play area fencing, Cemetery Lodge decorating).
2. The council has resolved to employ a third person at 15 hrs a week at an annual cost of approx. £14,000 (inc PAYE and Pension cost). This cost needs to be accounted for in the budget for 24/25 as it is a significant new spend. In future years this will have been absorbed in normal running costs.

To match income and expenditure for 24/25 we need to address these differences. Although we used the General Fund this year, we cannot do that each year. Our General Fund is now at an acceptable level, because we made steps to reduce it and our running costs expenditure has risen. The General Fund should hold between 3-12 months running costs, the larger the council, the closer to 3 months fund should be held.

Budget reductions taken:

- Planning Cmte, for Planning consultant or legal work: Request of £7,500. Revised figure £4,000 with a strategic reserve of approx. £8,000.
- General Purposes project requests £10,500: Replacement signage, Hillcrest Ave entrance repairs, Additional trees, replacement noticeboards, Cemetery memorial checks. Revised figure £4,000 with a strategic reserve of approx. £4,500.
- Staffing: Initial budget was £16,000, but following the resolution this has been reduced to £14,000 as it will be a 15hr role.
- Other: Election Fees from £2,500 to £1,500, Graffiti from £1,373 to £750, Chapel Maintenance from £1,173 to £750, Chapel Projects from £2,080 to £1,500 (available SR £7,700)

Based on the figures presented on the Accubus version 23/25 05, the provisional budgeted expenditure of £217,998 against income of £212,601 with £5,397 from strategic reserves/general fund for the financial year 2024/25 was unanimously approved for recommendation to Full Council.

**4. TO PROPOSE THE PRECEPT REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2024/25 FOR RECOMMENDATION TO FULL COUNCIL:**

Applying a rate of inflation increase to the precept was not going to generate enough income to cover the projected expenditure particularly with the need to use minimal amounts from the general fund.

After careful consideration and on the proposal of Cllr R Kellaway, seconded by Cllr M Howard, based on the budget recommendation by the Finance Cmte, the recommendation to Full Council is that Precept should be £159,786. This is 13.5% increase on 2023/24 precept. This was unanimously approved.

**5. CEMETERY LODGE:****i. To confirm the acceptance of the rental renewal:**

The Clerk confirmed that the Tenant had accepted a revised rent amount of £1800 per month for the coming year to December 2024. The Management fee, at 12% would rise to £216.00 plus vat. The paperwork is in progress.

**ii. To receive an update on the site visit of 3<sup>rd</sup> November:**

The Clerk had supplied a detailed report of the visit with the agenda paperwork. At the inspection it was found that there was a number of issues that needed to be dealt with. The decorating that had been agreed as part of the December 2022 agreement, that had not been done, despite the Tenant reporting that it had been completed. The Agent will follow this up and get quotes for other outstanding work.

It has become clear that the occupants are not reporting issues and that the Tenant is not doing regular checks of the property on their behalf meaning problems are not being raised. The Agent has addressed this with the Tenants representative, they have a site visit arranged to look at this in detail to: go over the tenants responsibilities, reporting of maintenance issues and form a plan of action and ongoing inspections by the Tenant. The Agent will report back. The Clerk will request an annual visit to the property.

The Clerk reported that a number of the issues found have been fixed and quotes are awaited on others. The Clerk will recoup the funds from the Tenant where applicable.

As previously discussed, an agenda item has been added to the March Finance Cmte meeting to review the performance of the current Letting Agent.

**iii. To approve the quote for repair to the roof:**

On the advice of Cllr Moore, a quote for £610.00 from Blue Maintenance Services was approved to undertake the work to make the repairs to the roof caused by the wisteria growth.

**iv. To review and approve possible updates to improve the energy performance of the property:**

There are a few options available to the council to improve the energy performance rating, some smaller quick fixes like adding more loft insulation and a thicker hot water jacket, and some major work like lining the roof and adding wall insulation, both of which are more expensive options that will require the need to set aside funds over a number of years.

Cllr J. Moore advised that lining the roof would be the most effective step to improve the EPC rating. The Clerk is awaiting quotes which will be reviewed in due course. As this is likely to be in excess of £15,000 this will be a medium to long term project. Cllr Moore noted that in his opinion, the walls are likely to have no cavity, so wall insulation panelling is the only option available for this improvement, again quotes are being sourced.

As the work on the roof lining is not likely to be done for at least a year or two, Cllrs approved a quote for £756.00 (inc VAT) from The PMP (Archpress) to supply and fit rock wool in the loft and a new hot water cylinder jacket which should help to bring utility bills down. The loft will need to be emptied prior to the work as there is clutter left by previous residents. The Clerk is in the process of obtaining quotes.

**6. TO REVIEW THE ASSETS REGISTER:**

The assets register was reviewed.

**7. TO APPROVE THE POSITION OF MR B. DANCER AS INTERNAL AUDITOR FOR COOKHAM PARISH COUNCIL:**

The appointment of Mr B. Dancer as Internal Auditor, for a three year period (23/24, 24/25, 25/26) at a rate of £35.00 per hour, was approved unanimously.

**8. TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE OUTCOME OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT, PAY CLAIM 2023/24, WHICH IS TO BE BACKDATED TO 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2023:**

The outcome of the 2023/24 pay claim was acknowledged. The salary increase (£1,925 per annum on the relevant NJC pay points) will be backdated to the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

**The meeting closed at 8.30pm.**