

COOKHAM PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of a Meeting of the FINANCE COMMITTEE
Held in the Community Room High Road Cookham Rise on Tuesday, 22nd
October 2024, commencing at 7.40pm

PRESENT: Cllr. R. Kellaway (Chairman)
 Cllrs. B. Perry, M. Howard, T. Caen, C. Aisladie and H. Pleming
 J. Holder (Locum Clerk)

In Attendance: Cllr. J. Edwards

No members of the press or public were present.

1. Apologies for Absence

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

2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting of 21st May 2024

These were approved.

4. Matters arising not covered elsewhere on this agenda

There were none.

5. To consider the final External Auditor's report for the Financial Year 2023-24 and any actions required

The Locum Clerk noted that the External Auditor's single comment was a process point relating to the Council approval stage and of no material significance.

6. To have preliminary discussions regarding the Budget for 2025-26 in light of half year figures, and the three year forecast

6.1 The Chairman said that the draft budget for 2025/26 had been circulated following a review by himself and both Locum Clerks, with various budget lines highlighted. Comments made included provision being made for recently announced national pay increase for staff, delayed inflationary increase on pay, software for graves administration and for invoicing; to check no recent CIL (for Southwood Gardens). Insofar as the Borough might delegate grass-cutting to investigate if there was any software for mapping cutting verges. There was also noted papers recently submitted by Cllr. Pleming, on behalf of General Purposes Committee and from Cllr. Edwards from Planning Committee which potentially could increase spend by up to £20k.

6.2 Cllr. Edwards suggested having a Housing Needs Survey for Planning. Cllr. Howard noted that the Borough was currently looking into this and that Cllr. Edwards should contact the Borough. **Action: Cllr Edwards**

6.3 The initial draft circulated, which for illustration purposes showed a Precept at the same sum as for the current year, showed a slight deficit of spend over income, being £2k less than that provided for this year. Insofar as changes noted, including the GPC & Planning proposals, were to be incorporated, then the deficit would be much higher and would need to be met either from general reserves and/or an increase in the precept.

It was noted that the tax base for 2024 -25 was 2955.40, which gave a Band D rate of £54.07. The tax base for 2025-26 was not expected to be known until after the next Finance meeting in November.

6.4 Following discussion, it was **agreed** to provide a revised draft, incorporating changes, to be provided for the next Finance meeting that :-

- a) The precept be shown with a 1%, 3% and 5% increase on this year's sum;

b) Rather than allocate individual sums for the separate projects outlined by Cllr Fleming, it might be better to grant a specific sum for projects (actual spend to be determined by GPC) but such specific sum being fixed in light of the review next month.

Action: Cllr. Kellaway / Locum Clerk

7. To review the Strategic Reserve fund and consider areas for further funds

Members were asked to review, both the continued need for any existing funds shown and for any new ones and to advise in the next 2 weeks, to allow for inclusion in time for the revised issue of this document for the next Finance meeting.

Action: ALL / Locum Clerk

8. To consider the level of the Parish Precept

As discussed at item 6 above.

9. To review and recommend to Council updated Finance Regulations

It was noted that the revised draft Finance Regulations, further to the updated BALC template had been reviewed by Cllrs. Kellaway, Perry and Howard. Proposed by Cllr. Perry, seconded by Cllr Howard, the revised Finance Regulations were unanimously **approved** for recommendation to the Council at its next meeting.

Action: Locum Clerk

10. To recommend to Council that the internal auditor be appointed to conduct an interim audit

In light of approved revisions made by the Locum Clerk to simplify financial record keeping and to provide the new clerk with the comfort of reviewed accounts for the half year, it was **agreed** that the internal auditor be appointed to conduct an interim audit. As the new clerk might shortly be appointed and it was best that this be completed before such appointment commenced, it was **agreed** this decision be ratified at the next Council meeting.

Action: Locum Clerk

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

The Locum Clerk had previously circulated a draft tender for comment. It was **agreed** that:-
11.1 the Locum Clerk to send 12 months' of previous invoices to Cllr. Howard who would collate services;

Action: Locum Clerk/ Cllr. Howard

11.2 The Locum Clerk to send draft schedule of works to current supplier to confirm current specification;

Action: Locum Clerk

11.3 Cllr Fleming to review draft schedule of works to confirm requirements

Action: Cllr. Fleming

11.4 Cllrs. Perry and Howard to meet with Locum Clerk to confirm commercial arrangements before issue.

Action: Cllrs. Howard & Perry/ Locum Clerk

12. To consider a review of the Risk Management Policy and Financial Risk Assessment document

Whilst the schedule for financial risks was in table form, the main part of the document was not. It was **agreed** that the Locum Clerk should review all risks and generally put document into table form.

Action: Locum Clerk

The next meeting will be on Tuesday 3rd December 2024 at 6.30pm in the Community Room, High Road Cookham Rise.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm

Signed as a true record of the meeting

.....Chairman

Dated.....