

Minutes of a meeting of the **FINANCE and ADMINISTRATION**
Committee held at **GROOMBRIDGE OLD STATION** on **Monday 28th**
March 2022 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: Councillors Diana Kelly, Paul Watkins (Chair), Linsey Winter

In attendance: Deborah Siddle – Parish Clerk

Members of the public are encouraged to attend the meetings and there is a 10-minute opportunity at the start of the meeting for them to address the Council. There were 4 members of the public present for agenda item 5 Grants.

The representative for Withyham & Blackham PCC clarified that they were applying for £500 for the cutting of the churchyard at Blackham Church. She confirmed that the church is used for services where there is a fifth Sunday in the month, and for funerals and weddings. Income from collections is therefore limited and the village giving scheme barely covers the insurance premium.

A representative for Groombridge Preschool explained that the current Ipads need replacement as they are no longer working well. Ipads are well used by the children to support their learning, and was identified as a priority by Ofsted, and by staff for recording and reporting on the children's process. The quote for 3 Ipads had been obtained through Apple Education and was therefore a better than standard rate.

The representative for St Michael's School Withyham explained that the 'earth pod' had been purchased after Covid to provide space for targeted wellbeing support for small groups of children identified for additional help. The pod has solar panels, LED lights and plug sockets but needs connection to the electricity supply, which is what the grant would cover.

1. ENQUIRE WHETHER ANYONE PRESENT INTENDS TO FILM, PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR RECORD THE MEETING - none.

2. APOLOGIES – Cllr Nick Anderson – illness
Cllr Marcus Tarling – illness

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – None

4. MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 10th January 2022

002226 RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 10th January 2022, which were duly signed by the Chairman

4.2 Matters outstanding from these minutes

Completed actions from previous minutes

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 1821	Clerk	Community Resilience to be considered after WDC webinar on emergency planning

F and A/28.3.2022 – 002454

002180	Clerk	Budget and Precept recommended to Council
Pg. 2413	Clerk	EMRs recommended to Council
Pg. 2413	Cllr Watkins	CDM Regulations relevant to Streetlights superseded by this agenda item 8
Pg. 2413	Clerk	Wealden District Council deferred to ESCC for advice regarding streetlighting in villages/rural areas
Pg. 2413	Clerk	Wealden Clerks and ESALC asked about ES Highways' revised streetlighting process
Pg. 2413	Clerk	Quote for the Lighting Design on Withyham Road provided under agenda item 8
Pg. 2414	Clerk	Monitoring forms sought from applicants that had been in receipt of monies in 2021/22
002182	Clerk	Pensions Discretions Policy recommended to Council
002183	Clerk	Risk Assessment & Management Policy recommended to Council
002184	Clerk	Petty Cash Policy recommended to Council
002185	Clerk	Carbon Policy recommended to Council
002186	Clerk	Payments Procedure recommended to Council
002187	Clerk	Borrowing & Investment Strategy recommended to Council

Outstanding items not on this agenda

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2002	Clerk	Pursue free opportunities for advertising the meeting rooms
Pg. 2002	F&A	Review meeting room hire when hirings resume
Pg. 1283	F&A	Review position and size of post office noticeboard when WPC take ownership
Pg. 2257	Clerk	Newly repaired Cooks Corner noticeboard to be relocated to Blackham Village Hall
Pg. 2413	Clerk	Ask other Wealden Clerks which streetlighting contractor they use

Actions from this meeting

Page No	Who	Action
002227	April Council	Make grants to Withyham & Blackham PCC, Groombridge Preschool and St Michael's School Withyham totalling £2,066.23
Pg. 2455	Clerk	Obtain quotes for grass cutting from 2023 to 2025 based on the agreed specification
002228	Clerk	Accept the quote for £3,700+VAT from Royal Wells Decorating for external works at Groombridge Station

F and A/28.3.2022 – 002455

002229	Clerk	Re-instruct the streetlight repairs at Withyham Road, and up to 6 more LED upgrades
002230	Clerk	Recommend the Health & Safety Policy for review in 3 years
002231	Clerk	Recommend the Policy for Grass, Verges, Hedges, Trees
002232	Clerk	Recommend the List of Fees & Charges
002233	Clerk	Recommend the Risk Management Policy
002234	Clerk	Recommend the Pay Policy
002235	Clerk	Recommend the Business Continuity Plan
002236	Clerk	Recommend amended Financial Regulations - Clerk's delegated limit for expenditure on revenue items
Pg. 2458	Clerk	Obtain quotes for Reading Room access path
Pg. 2459	Clerk	Obtain quotes for Old Station kitchen roof/ceiling

5. GRANTS – to consider applications (expenditure from 2022/23 budget)

The application for Withyham & Blackham PCC was considered. It was AGREED to fund £500 towards the upkeep of the churchyard at Blackham Church.

The application for Groombridge Preschool was considered and it was AGREED to fund £866.23 for three new Ipads to support the children's learning and the recording of their progress by staff.

The application for St Michael's School Withyham was considered and it was AGREED to fund £700 for the electrical connection of the earth pod.

The Committee commented on the standard of the applications and their geographical spread across the parish.

002227 RESOLVED to fund grants to Withyham & Blackham PCC, Groombridge Preschool and St Michael's School Withyham totalling £2,066.23 from a remaining 2022/23 Grants budget of £10,000.

The members of the public left the meeting.

6. GRASS CONTRACT FOR PARISH COUNCIL LAND – to confirm specification for next 3-year contract and inclusion of the Tanyard within that

The Committee reviewed the current specification for grass cutting at WPC owned and leased land, and AGREED to go out for quotes using the same specification as this had been honed over the years. It was noted that

amendments may be required when the new playground is in place if that impacts on the area.

In considering the specification the Committee also reviewed the current arrangement whereby the Council cuts the grass at the Tanyard for Groombridge Sports Ground Association. It noted that the Tanyard is a major sporting facility for the village and school, and the cuts should continue as part of the specification.

The Clerk confirmed that quotes for grass cutting from 2023 to 2025 would be obtained based on the specification.

7. PARISH OFFICE – external paintwork quotes

The Clerk had obtained quotes to repaint the external paintwork at Groombridge Station based on a specification drawn up by Cllr Gordon-James. Three contractors quoted for the works: Steve Castle, Royal Wells Decorating and Superior Decorating Ltd and the Committee considered these quotes

002228 RESOLVED to accept the quote for £3,700+VAT from Royal Wells Decorating for external works at Groombridge Station.

Under the terms of the sublease, SVR is liable for 30% of costs. The rest would be covered by budget line 4500 Office Associated Repairs and EMR333, as outlined in the Budget and Precept paper to Council January 2022.

8. STREETLIGHTS UPDATE

Following the January F&A meeting the Clerk requested a preliminary survey of Withyham Road from ES Highways Streetlighting Department. This survey indicated that, to meet modern streetlighting standards, either the existing streetlights on Withyham Road would have to be removed and new ones installed at the junctions, or new streetlights would be required for the entire length. A Design would be required at £950 and either scheme would require significant investment beyond the Council's budgets. Such an approach would also be unsustainable for similar issues on other roads in the parish.

The Clerk had raised this with County Cllr Taylor who referred the issue to Karl Taylor at ESCC. Karl Taylor responded "*whilst the current lighting and the work requested by the parish does not meet modern lighting standards, [ESH] will carry out the repair and LED upgrade work the PC wishes once the scope of work is agreed and has been instructed*".

The Clerk had responded to Cllr Taylor to thank her and query whether this applies only to the lights at Withyham Road and the next 6 LED replacements, or to all future works also.

002229 RESOLVED to re-instruct the repairs at Withyham Road, and up to 6 more LED upgrades (2022/23 budget) now that a full new lighting design would not be required.

9. POLICIES

9.1 Health & Safety

002230 **RESOLVED** to recommend the Health & Safety Policy for review in 3 years.

9.2 Responsibilities: Grass, Verges, Hedges, Trees

002231 **RESOLVED** to recommend the Policy for Grass, Verges, Hedges, Trees for review in 3 years.

9.3 List of Fees & Charges

002232 **RESOLVED** to recommend the List of Fees & Charges for review annually.

9.4 Risk Management Policy

002233 **RESOLVED** to recommend the Risk Management Policy for review in 3 years.

9.5 Pay Policy

002234 **RESOLVED** to recommend the Pay Policy for review in 3 years.

9.6 Business Continuity Plan

002235 **RESOLVED** to recommend the Business Continuity Plan for review in 3 years.

9.7 Financial regulations (Clerk's levels of authority)

At the December 2021 internal audit, the Auditor recommended that, based on the financial size of the council and the experience/knowledge level of the Clerk, the expenditure amount delegated to the Clerk to authorise on revenue items within approved budgets should be increased. The Clerk had sought additional advice and he had recommended raising the limit from £500 to £1,000, citing other similar sized councils in Wealden.

002236 **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council amended Financial Regulations showing the Clerk's delegated limit for expenditure on revenue items within approved budgets increased to £1,000.

At the January Council meeting a Councillor requested that the Clerk/RFO's levels of delegation in the case of emergencies should be reviewed following the instruction to undertake the damp works at Phoenix House.

The Clerk asked the Auditor for his views on whether the Clerk's actions was appropriate and he confirmed that he felt they were. The Chair and Vice-Chair confirmed that they had also been involved in the Clerk's decision making.

The Committee therefore agreed that protocol had been followed appropriately and within the authority of the Financial Regulations. The Committee AGREED that the Clerk's level of authority in cases of extreme risk to the delivery of council services should remain at £5,000.

10. ACCOUNTS & FINANCE

10.1 To note expenditure against budget report to March 2022

The Clerk confirmed the expected year-end position and the report was noted.

10.2 To consider any virements and journals required

None required.

10.3 Phoenix House - update on loan expenditure and rental income in 2021/22

The Clerk presented figures showing actual expenditure and income at Phoenix House in 2021/22, and projected figures for 2022/23. The Committee noted these within the context that Phoenix House is a long term investment and has required works initially, and anticipate positive figures in future years.

The Clerk was asked to provide an annual update to the Committee.

11. MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA

Matters for next agenda:

- St John's Preschool access path
- Old Station maintenance works (kitchen roof/ceiling)

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 23rd May 2022 at 7.30pm at the Old Station.

The meeting ended at 8.30pm