

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

PRESENT: Councillors Nick Anderson, Andrew Fane, Robert Gordon-James, Diana Kelly, Paul Watkins (Chair), Linsey Winter (Chair for item 5)

In attendance: Deborah Siddle – Clerk
Natalie Brett - Assistant Clerk (prior to the meeting)

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 no members of the public present.

The Assistant Clerk was present to notify the meeting of some information which might affect the budget (item 6.2). Having attended some training on Government reforms to the Planning System, it is likely that Government will encourage towns and parishes to have their own Design Guides to settlement level. These will be optional, but where there is not one provide by the town or parish then developers would be able to do it instead. It was therefore suggested that the Committee consider keeping the £500 in budget code 4006 Neighbourhood Plan expenditure, in case professional advice is needed in 2023/24 as to how to proceed.

The Assistant Clerk left the meeting.

1. **ENQUIRE WHETHER ANYONE PRESENT INTENDS TO FILM, PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR RECORD THE MEETING** - none.
2. **APOLOGIES** – None
3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – Cllrs Kelly and Watkins are Directors of the CIC that runs Groombridge Post Office and Shop, so declared interests under Appendix B of the Code of Conduct. This would normally mean that they could speak but not vote, however as the subsidy request would have an impact on the budget and Precept (item 6) they agreed to leave the room for item 5, to ensure separation of duties.

4. MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2022

002393 RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2022, which were duly signed by the Chairman

6.2 Matters outstanding from these minutes:

Completed actions from previous minutes

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2501	Next Council agenda	Considered consultation on additional equipment for Balls Green Community Space
Pg. 2501	Cllr Tarling	Resigned therefor unable to assist with specification for Old Station maintenance works (kitchen roof/ceiling)

Finance/28.11.2022 – 002621

Pg. 2334	Clerk	Maintenance Contractor contacted regarding works on Assets
Pg. 2584	Cllr Anderson	Taking responsibility for keeping the WPC post office noticeboard up to date
002364	Clerk	Made grants to Kings' Hall Withyham, Clued Up, Groombridge Bowling Club and St John's Church Crowborough totalling £4,934
002365	Clerk	Recommended to Council an additional £6,000 subsidy to Withyham Parish Community Interest Company for the Post office and Shop in 2022/23
002366	Clerk	Factored costs of the Teasley Mead goal (£650) in to the 2023/24 budget for replacement then
002367	Clerk	Recommended to Council that Contractor 1 undertakes the next 3 year grass cutting
002368	Clerk	Tree surgery works not required following Inspection
002369	Clerk	Teasley Mead dog bin not to be moved following discussion with resident
Pg. 2590	Assistant Clerk	Next newsletter to request volunteers to look after Balls Green Community Space
Pg. 2590	Clerk	Landlords contacted regarding the Old Station lease, meeting being arranged
002370	Clerk	Paid for a block of 5 hours support from HR Partnership
002370	Clerk	Vired underspent budget 4007 or 4009 to 4041 for HR Partnership
002371	Clerk	Recommended the Protocol for Capital Expenditure to Council
002372	Clerk	Recommended the Prepaid Card Policy to Council
Pg. 2590	Clerk	Arranged a meeting with the Playground Group regarding fundraising

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. 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
Pg. 2286	Clerk	Source and set up a third bank account
Pg. 2287	Clerk	Set up the bank mandate for the third bank account
Pg. 2330	Clerk	Proceed tree surgeon works at Blackham/A264 fingerpost and Blackham bus shelter

Finance/28.11.2022 – 002622

Pg. 2333	Clerk	Obtain fencing quotes for Reading Room for agreement at next Finance meeting
Pg. 2588	Clerk	Maintenance contractor to rake over the woodchips at Groombridge playground
Pg. 2588	Clerk	Maintenance contractor to secure surface under swings at Balls Green with cable ties
Pg. 2588	Cllr Anderson Clerk	Enquire what funds GSGA has
Pg. 2588	Clerk	Before signing a contract with grass contractor, costs to be clarified at the Tanyard and revised spec for the Newton Willows to be notified
Pg. 2590	Clerk	Provide a two year budget once 2023/24 budget/Precept setting process complete

Actions from this meeting

Page No	Who	Action
002394	Clerk	Recommend to Council a subsidy of £18,000 for 2023/24 for WPCIC
Pg. 2623	Clerk	CIC's Strategic Plan to next meeting
Pg. 2623	Clerk	CIC's up to date cashflows to every meeting
Pg. 2623	Clerk	Allocate time to seeking other funding alternatives to Precept
002395	Clerk	Recommend 2023/24 budget and Precept of £170,834 to Council
Pg. 2624	Clerks	Consider how 2023/24 Precept will be communicated to residents
Pg. 2624	Clerk	Recommend Ear-marked Reserves for 2023/24 to Council
Pg. 2625	Clerk	Notify Groombridge Men's Sheds that WPC will not be undertaking works to adjacent Oak
Pg. 2625	Clerk	Notify resident that WPC will not be undertaking works to bay tree at Phoenix House
Pg. 2625	GOSL Working Group	Consider having a measured plan of the Old Station building drawn up to assist lease renewal
002397	Clerk	Imburse the Phoenix House tenant the £400 Energy support in monthly increments
Pg. 2626	Clerks	Post a sign in the Withyham bus shelter asking users to respond to a brief survey
002398	Clerk	Journal £180 expenditure from 4003 to 4407
Pg. 2626	Clerk	Updated 2023/34 Grant paperwork to be circulated to local groups and organisations
002399	Clerk	Recommend the Child Protection Policy to Council
Pg. 2626	Clerk	Next Committee agenda to include kitchen ceiling/roof, CIC cashflow and strategic plan, Old station lease update

5. SUBSIDY REQUEST FOR THE POST OFFICE AND CORNER SHOP (2023/24)

Cllrs Kelly and Watkins left the room for this item, having declared an interest.

Cllr Winter Chaired this item.

Withyham Parish Community Interest Company had provided cashflows and requested a subsidy of £18,000 for 2023/24. One set of cashflows showed the impact of also receiving a grant from the Prince's Trust, the other showed the impact without.

The Clerk was asked further information and it was confirmed that:

- The cashflows are estimates based on trading figures so far
- The building is being reviewed by the Valuations Office and it is unclear whether there would be a charge for Business Rates, but the likelihood would be that they remain zero.
- The CIC intends to identify other funding streams in addition to the Prince's Trust grant.
- A Strategic Plan had been agreed by the CIC which was being put into action by the Shop Manager and the Council's Assistant Clerk.
- The CIC asked to be paid monthly, drawing down as required by their cashflows up to the £18,000 request. Should they not require the full amount (for example by receiving additional grants) they would not request it

002394 RESOLVED to recommend to Council a subsidy of £18,000 for 2023/24 paid monthly and drawn down as required by the cashflows up to the £18,000 request.

The Finance Committee requested the CIC's Strategic Plan to their next meeting and up to date cashflows to every Finance Committee meeting. Council would continue to receive an update twice a year.

Cllrs Kelly and Watkins returned to the room

6. BUDGET AND PRECEPT (2023/24)

6.1 To receive cashflow to end of 2022/23 to show projected Reserves

The Committee had been provided this prior to the meeting and noted the projected year end carry forward figure (Reserves) of £78,503.

6.2 To consider the budget for 2023/24, and Precept required (to recommend to Council)

The Committee had received detailed papers prior to the meeting advising on each budget line for 2023/24, and a proposed budget. The Committee considered and agreed those recommendations in the papers, and in addition agreed to retain £500 in budget code 4006 Neighbourhood Plan in case professional advice was required on Design Guides. The Committee recognised that this budget has been kept tight in recognition that parishioners will be experiencing the effects of the cost of living crisis and that should unexpected expenditure arise then the Reserves would need to be reviewed. The Clerk was also encouraged to allocate time to seeking other funding alternatives.

This resulted in budgeted 2023/24 expenditure of £214,384 and expected income of £43,550. This leaves a gap of £170,834 to find from Precept.

In 2022/23 the Precept was £163,253. The difference between £163,253 and £170,834 is £7,581 which represents a 4.6% increase. The provisional tax base for 2023/24 has not yet been confirmed but, based on the 2022/23 figure of 1,333.2, a precept of £170,834 would be £128.14, an increase of £5.69 (11p per week).

The Clerks were asked to consider how this will be communicated to residents.

002395 RESOLVED to recommend the above budget, and Precept of £170,834 to Council.

6.3 To provisionally consider the Ear-marked Reserves for 2023/24

Ear-marked Reserves for 2023/24 were also considered and it was AGREED to recommend them to Council as follows:

Code	Name	Proposed 23/24 (£)
325	Teasley Mead Play Equipment	2,500
329	Road Safety Projects	3,000
332	WPC Volunteers (ringfenced as this was a grant from WDC)	2,000
333	Parish Office Repairs	3,000
337	Parish Assets	3,000
338	Environmental Improvements (Parish Plan environment/climate)	5,000
New	Streetlights	3,000
New	Post Office/Phoenix House Maintenance	3,000
New	Elections	7,000
		31,500

7. TREES

7.1 To receive Safety Inspection for Trees on Parish Council Land and consider any works

An independent inspection of all trees on Parish Council land at The Reading Room, Groombridge Recreation Ground and Newton Willows had been undertaken in November to inspect the health and safety of the trees and carry out a risk assessment to inform recommendations for tree works. This report had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting.

The Committee noted that 13 trees had been identified for re-inspection in 18 months but there were no recommendations for tree works on health and safety grounds.

The arboriculturist had informed the Clerk that he had been approached by a member of Men's Sheds who requested that the oak adjacent to the building should be reduced by 30%. The arboriculturist explained to the Clerk why this would cause harm to the tree and suggested instead reduction of the longest branch, but confirmed that at this time works were not required for safety reasons. The

Committee considered this, with reference to the Council's Tree Policy which states "it is the policy of Withyham Parish Council to only undertake health and safety work to trees on Parish Council land". Works were therefore not agreed to this tree.

7.2 To consider request regarding tree at Phoenix House

The Council had been asked to consider a bay tree in the garden of Phoenix House, which the adjoining neighbour asked to be removed due to concerns of it causing damage to their property. The Clerk and Cllr Gordon-James had inspected the tree and reported that there was no visual evidence of the tree causing damage. It was also noted that the tree shields an extraction system on the adjacent roof.

The Committee considered this with reference to the Council's Tree Policy and agreed that, in the absence of any evidence that the tree is causing any problems, the Council would not remove it.

8. GROOMBRIDGE OLD STATION LEASE

8.1 To confirm Terms of Reference for Working Group

A Terms of Reference had been drafted and circulated prior to the meeting.

002396 RESOLVED to agree the Terms of Reference for the Groombridge Old Station Lease Working Group.

It was reported that the landlords had confirmed their terms for renewing the lease and a meeting was being arranged with the Groombridge Old Station Lease Working Group. Consideration would be given by the Working Group to having a measured plan of the building drawn up prior to that meeting. The Landlords would also be undertaking some works to secure an Energy Performance Certificate of E or above before the lease was renewed.

9. PHOENIX HOUSE – ENERGY SUPPORT

As the Council has a contract with a commercial electricity provider, the Government Business Energy Bill Relief Scheme had still not been applied at Phoenix House and The Post Office. The residential tenant had been in touch regarding receipt of the Energy Support Scheme.

The Committee noted that a separate meter had not been installed for the residence due to cost which is why there is one meter with a spur on a commercial contract, but the tenant should not be impacted financially because of that.

002397 RESOLVED that WPC will imburse the tenant the equivalent of the £400 support that householders receive in monthly increments, as a reduction to the invoice.

It was noted that whilst the Post Office would not receive this, it would receive the benefit of a lower Kw/h charge when the Relief Scheme was applied.

10. QUOTES

10.1 To consider quotes for Withyham bus shelter

When the Parish Council assets were inspected in the summer it had been recorded that the Withyham bus shelter required a new roof and slat repairs to the walls. Two quotes for £2,900 and £1,332 had been obtained and the Committee noted that these costs are high, and the structure would require additional work.

The Committee noted that this shelter is on the 291 route which is well used but queried how many people use the shelter. It was AGREED that a sign should be posted in the shelter asking users to respond to a brief survey. This will inform the Committee how best to proceed

10.2 To agree quote for structural testing of goals at Groombridge Recreation Ground

The annual ROSPA play inspection noted that the structural tests on the goals had not been done during this inspection and could be conducted by separate arrangement. The Clerk had obtained a quote which had been circulated to the Committee. It was agreed that as this was not a high risk on the report there was no urgency to do this.

11. ACCOUNTS & FINANCE

11.1 To note expenditure against budget report to November 2022

Noted.

11.2 To consider any virements and journals required

002398 RESOLVED Journal £180 expenditure from 4003 to 4407 to ensure correct coding of salary expenditure.

11.3 To receive interim internal Audit report (winter)

Received and noted. The auditor had queried how payments would be made should the Clerk be incapacitated and unable to release them online. It was confirmed that urgent payments could be made by cheque, signed by two councillor signatories.

12. GRANT APPLICATION PACK PAPERWORK FOR 2023/24 BUDGET

Updated paperwork had been circulated prior to the meeting, which included the request that applicants explain how their proposal meets the Council's Parish Plan priorities. The paperwork was AGREED.

13. POLICIES TO REVIEW:

13.1 Child Protection Policy

002399 RESOLVED to recommend the Child Protection Policy to Council.

14. RFO REPORT

Nothing further to report.

17. MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA - to include:

- Parish office kitchen roof/ceiling
- Post Office/Shop Strategic Plan and up to date cashflow
- Groombridge Old Station lease renewal update

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING –Monday 23rd January 2023 at 7.30pm at The Parish Office unless otherwise notified by the agenda

The meeting ended at 9pm