

Minutes of a meeting of the **FINANCE** Committee held at **GROOMBRIDGE OLD STATION** on **Monday 2nd December 2024 at 7.30pm**

PRESENT: Councillors Nick Anderson, Andrew Fane, Robert Gordon-James, Penny Lawne, Linsey Winter (Chair)

In attendance: Debbie Siddle – Clerk
1 grant applicant

The Chair welcomed the representative for Tiny Fishes. They explained that they were applying for £331 towards some pieces of equipment and toys for the Tiny Fishes playgroup which meets weekly at Groombridge Village Hall.

As there is an affiliation with St Thomas' Church, which had already received a grant in the 2024/25 financial year, the Committee asked for clarification about that relationship. The representative explained that St Thomas' Church paid for the hall hire ever since the previous group help at the hall stopped operating. There is some Christian content but they welcome people of all faiths or none and try to be inclusive. St Thomas' Church was unable to provide any financial support in addition to hall hire.

The applicant was thanked for their time and they left the meeting.

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

2. APOLOGIES – Cllr Diana Kelly – family commitment
Cllr Deviani Parekh-Jones – family commitment

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Gordon James for item 8 as he is a Director of Withyham Parish Community Interest Company (WPCIC). Cllr Lawne's husband is one of the Directors of WPCIC but she does not have a direct interest so the Clerk advised that she is able to take part in discussion.

4. MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 25th June 2024

002811

RESOLVED to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 30th September 2024, which were duly signed by the Chairman.

4.2 Matters outstanding from these minutes:

Completed actions from previous minutes

Page No	Who	Action
Pg.2733	Clerk	Medium term budget taken to December meeting
Pg 2812	Clerk	Alternative streetlighting contractor contracted
002772	Clerk	Grant made to Folly Wildlife Rescue
Pg.3037	Clerk	Site visit arranged to Folly
Pg.3038	Clerk	Footpath volunteers permitted to install a pipe at GRG/FP33
Pg.3038	Cllr Gordon-James	Roof works for further leak at Phoenix House clarified
Pg.3038	Clerk	Authorised further roof works at Phoenix House

Pg.3039	Clerk	Reconvened Buildings Group
002775	Clerk	Recommended updated Financial Regulations to Council
Pg.3039	Assistant Clerk	Offered overtime to Christmas to support Clerk

Outstanding items from previous meetings

Page No	Who	Action
Pg. 2002	Clerk	Pursue free opportunities for advertising the meeting rooms
Pg. 2945	Assistant Clerk	Promote school safety signs to our schools with information on alternative funding
Pg. 2992	Clerk	Check with Auditor whether GPoC negates need to report other legal powers in minutes
Pg. 2992	Clerk	Process to review supplier bank details to be put in place for every two years
Pg. 2993	Clerk	When smart meter fitted arrange to export electricity generated from the solar panels
Pg.3037	Clerk	Tighten up on Grants monitoring
Pg.3037	Clerk	Put process in place to report grant monitoring back to Committee
Pg.3037	Clerk	Use grant monitoring to better inform publicity
Pg.3038	Clerk	Monitor the GRG drainage situation and notify any complaints to Finance Committee

Actions from this meeting

Page No	Who	Action	Completion Date
Pg.3077	Clerk	Contact Groombridge Tennis Club about the timetable for their grant	January 2025
002812	Clerk	Make a grant of £331 to Tiny Fishes	December 2024
Pg.3077	Clerk	Notify Tiny Fishes and St Thomas' Church that it is exceptional to give two grants in the same year	December 2024
Pg.3077	Committee	Review approach to repetitive applications and whether grants should be used for one off expenditure rather than annual maintenance	March 2025
Pg.3077	Clerk	Stress to grant applicants the competitive process	January 2025
Pg.3077	Clerk	Arrange for a Councillor to be photographed with the Groombridge Cricket Club mower	Early 2025
Pg.3078	Clerk	Seek further information from GSGA regarding Tanyard grass cuts	December 2024
Pg.3078	Clerk	Circulate GSGA response on email to Committee	January 2025
Pg.3078	PMP	Groombridge play area actions	December 2024
002813	Clerk/PMP	Weed membrane at Balls Green Community space	Early 2025
Pg.3078	Clerk	Write to Good Company People about meeting rooms	December 2024
Pg.3079	Clerk	Notify WPCIC that WPC does not feel there is a need to amend the lease	December 2024

002814	Clerk	Recommend to Council the WPCIC subsidy for 2025/26	December 2024
Pg.3079	Clerk	Circulate WPC/WPCIC memorandum of Understanding	December 2024
Pg.3079	Clerk	Arrange a meeting between WPC and WPCIC	January 2025
002815	Clerk	Recommend the 2025/26 budget and Precept of £235,675 to Council	December 2024
Pg.3080	Committee	Confirm 2025/26 Earmarked Reserves closer to new budget year	March 2025
002816	Clerk	Recommend the Risk Assessment & Management Policy	December 2024
002817	Clerk	Recommend the Petty Cash Policy	December 2024
Pg.3080	Clerks	Complete Risk Assessments	January 2025
002818	Clerks	Accept the quote for SME to continue providing IT support	March 2025
002819	Clerks	Move web hosting to IONIS	March 2025

5. GRANTS (2024/25 BUDGET)

5.1 Note grants made from the budget and funds remaining

It was noted that Groombridge Tennis Club intends to begin work on the Paddle Court by the end of this financial year, if not then they would be expected to return the grant and reapply next year as per the conditions in the Grants Policy.

5.2 Consider Grant applications received to this meeting

An application had been received from Tiny Fishes for £331 towards equipment and toys for the playgroup. The Committee noted that the application implies that this is a St Thomas' Church initiative and that Church had already received a grant in this financial year towards the upkeep of the burial ground. However, the Committee felt that the governance connection was loose enough, the purpose of grant was different to the previous application, and it was coming to the end of the financial year with £640 still remaining in budget.

It was therefore AGREED to fund the application at £331 but to be clear to both Tiny Fishes and St Thomas' Church that it is exceptional to give two grants in the same financial year.

002812 RESOLVED to fund Tiny Fishes (St Thomas' Church bank account) at £331 from the 2024/25 Grants budget.

The remaining Grants budget for 2024/25 is £309.

5.3 Review Grants paperwork for 2025/26 applications

The Committee AGREED that it should discuss its approach to repetitive applications and whether grants should be used for one off expenditure rather than annual maintenance.

When the paperwork is circulated to potential applicants in January the Clerk was asked to stress that it is a very competitive process and they may not receive the full amount they apply for.

The Clerk was asked to arrange for a Councillor to be photographed with the mower that Groombridge Cricket Club had received a grant for.

6. GRASS CUTTING – consider future contributions from GSGA for the Tanyard grass cuts

The February 2023 Finance Committee had agreed that in 2023/24 WPC would continue to pay for all 21 cuts at the Tanyard but would expect GSGA to contribute at least 30% in 2024/25, with 2025/26 to be confirmed with an expectation for GSGA to contribute more.

The Committee felt it required more information. The Clerk was asked to ask GSGA about which groups use/hire the ground and for them to make the case for WPC to continue funding grass cuts and provide evidence for what percentage contribution they can make. Once received, the Clerk was asked to circulate this information on email to the Committee for them to make a decision for the 2025/26 year.

7. COUNCIL LAND AND ASSETS

7.1 Receive any updates from inspection reports

Actions required from the Sovereign Groombridge playground check had been circulated prior to the meeting. The Committee noted that they were all low risk and would go onto the Parish Maintenance Person's worklist.

7.2 Consider pathways at Balls Green Community Space

The paths at Balls Green Community Space have no weed barrier which results in the Parish Maintenance Person being asked on a regular basis to remove the weeds. The Parish Maintenance Person had recommended that a weed membrane is fitted to stop recurring weed growth.

002813 RESOLVED to purchase the materials.

7.3 Note monetary value of Old Station meeting room hirings

Following a request by the Internal Auditors to review in-kind support, information had been circulated prior to the meeting showing the monetary value of free room hire that three groups had benefitted from over the previous year. It was noted that two of these groups, Wealdlink and Withyham Parish Community Interest Company, receive subsidy from WPC and so it makes sense that WPC does not charge them for meeting room use.

The third group, Good Company People, had received agreement from Council in September 2022 to use a meeting room weekly for free. The Committee recognised that when this was agreed they were a new organisation and needed grass roots support and that in the past year they had benefitted from £1,845 in kind support from free meeting room use.

The Committee felt that Good Company People could now likely afford to pay for hirings as much as other groups could, and that in granting them free use WPC might be treating other paying groups unfairly or have to turn away other paid-for bookings. The Clerk was asked to explain this to GCP and that from 1 April 2025 they are welcome to hire the meeting rooms at the usual rates.

8. WPCIC (GROOMBRIDGE POST OFFICE)

As Cllr Gordon-James is a Director of WPCIC he left the room for this agenda item.

8.1 Agree legal costs for amended lease

Withyham Parish Community Interest Company had asked WPC to amend the lease for Groombridge Post Office as the changes to the building in 2022 had led to them occupying more floor space than the lease includes.

The Committee confirmed that the lease no longer reflects the area occupied but noted that there is no risk to either WPCIC or to WPC and that the legal costs to regularise the lease are high. It was therefore AGREED that there is no need to make the changes.

8.2 Consider and agree 2025/26 subsidy request

WPCIC had provided a subsidy request for £12,000 for 2025/26 and were thanked for providing clear figures to demonstrate their need.

Members of the Committee noted that:

- The amount of investment is significantly more than the subsidy when the costs relating to the property that Groombridge Post Office occupies are taken into account
- WPC charges no rent, which in itself is subsidy in kind
- Post Office Ltd's commission is low and the income from the Shop helps cover salaries
- WPCIC has said that it hopes to increase the Shop income but it is hard to see that any increase would be substantial enough to decrease WPC subsidy significantly
- That being said, the subsidy request for 2025/26 is less than 2024/25 and there appears to be a better grasp on the finances

002814 RESOLVED to recommend to Council that the WPCIC subsidy for Groombridge Post Office is up to £12,000 for 2025/26, paid on invoice on a monthly basis. Should the full amount not be required then it should not be drawn down.

The Committee asked the Clerk to share the Memorandum of Understanding on email as this requires review.

It was AGREED that it would be helpful to meet with WPCIC in the new year to discuss the Memorandum of Understanding and shared expectations about the WPC subsidy.

9. BUDGET AND PRECEPT (2025/26)

9.1 Consider the budget for 2025/26, and Precept required (to recommend to Council)

The Committee had received detailed papers prior to the meeting advising on each budget line for 2025/26, and a proposed line by line budget. The Clerk was thanked for the thorough paper.

The Committee noted that in the current financial year there had been unexpected expenditure on Phoenix House, and that last year the Auditor had raised concerns about General Reserves being depleted. The Committee confirmed therefore that it was prudent to ensure sufficient budgeting in 2025/26 to protect the Council's finances and continue to build reserves with a further £35,000 from Precept to the Earmarked Reserves Assets line.

This resulted in budgeted 2025/26 expenditure of £264,466 (including £35,000 to Earmarked Reserves) and expected income of £28,791. This leaves a gap of £235,675 from Precept.

In 2024/25 the Precept was £225,641. The difference between £225,641 and £235,675 is £10,034 which represents a 4.4% increase.

The provisional tax base for 2025/26 has not yet been confirmed but, based on the 2024/25 figure of 1,338.8, a Precept of £235,675 would be £176.03, an increase of £7.49 (62p per month) per Band D property.

002815 **RESOLVED** to recommend the above budget, and Precept of £235,675 to Council.

9.2 Provisionally consider the Ear-marked Reserves for 2025/26
Earmarked Reserves for 2025/26 would be confirmed closer to the new budget year.

10. POLICIES

002816 10.1 Risk Assessment & Management Policy
RESOLVED to recommend the Risk Assessment & Management Policy to Council.

002817 10.2 Petty Cash Policy
RESOLVED to recommend Petty Cash Policy to Council.

10.3 Review current list of risk assessments (Health & Safety)
The current list of risk assessments and recommendations were noted, Clerks to complete outstanding actions.

11. ACCOUNTS AND FINANCE

11.1 Note expenditure against budget report to November 2024
Noted.

11.2 Note Summary financial position November 2024
Noted.

11.3 Receive cashflow to end of 2025/26
Noted.

11.4 Receive 3-year workplan and budget 2025 to 2028
Noted. This will be helpful for workload planning.

11.5 Receive interim internal audit
Noted, the Committee were pleased to receive a positive report.

002818 11.6 Agree IT quotes
Paper had been circulated prior to the meeting.
RESOLVED to accept the quote for SME to continue providing IT support for the next 3 years.

002819 **RESOLVED** to move web hosting to IONIS and to budget for up to 5 hours per year for additional web design.

12. RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER (RFO) REPORT

Nothing further to report.

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

- Review approach to repetitive Grant applications and whether grants should be used for one off expenditure rather than annual maintenance
- Confirm 2025/26 Earmarked Reserves

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 24th March 2025 at 7pm at Groombridge Old Station.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm