Minutes of the **FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING** held on
23rd June 2025 at 7pm at The Old Station, Groombridge

PRESENT Cllrs Nick Anderson, Robert Gordon-James, Penny Lawne, Linsey Winter (Chair)

In attendance: Deborah Siddle, Clerk (minutes)

1. ELECT CHAIRPERSON

002979 **RESOLVED** unanimously to elect Cllr Penny Lawne as Chairperson of the Finance Committee.

2. ELECT VICE CHAIRPERSON

002980 **RESOLVED** unanimously to elect Cllr Linsey Winter as Vice Chairperson of the Finance Committee.

The meeting closed for members of the public to speak.

Members of the public are encouraged to come to the meetings and there is a 10-minute opportunity at the start of the meeting for them to address the Council. There were 7 members of the public present, both in person and on Zoom, all of whom were representing grant applications.

The representatives for Groombridge Pre-school explained that Early Years provision is experiencing difficult times due to Government changes to funding. Their application was for equipment to allow their staff to run sports sessions rather than an external provider. They confirmed that they do have an accountant and their accounts can be made available to the Committee.

The representatives for Action Against Abuse (AAA) outlined the national statistics around domestic abuse. AAA find that Non-Molestation Orders put the onus on the perpetrator to leave rather than the family having to move and have expanded their work into Sussex, having worked in Kent for over 6 years, as there is no similar service in Sussex.

Since submitting their application AAA has attracted further funding from other Town and Parish Councils in Sussex. Grants contribute to their team of volunteers who support clients in Court and with their NMO applications, as well as Manager time to support the volunteers. By the end of the year AAA hopes to be able to pay for more members of staff but would continue to be based on the current volunteer model.

The representatives for Wealden Citizens Advice had provided parish level data from the previous financial year and reiterated that 50 Withyham parish residents had been supported with around 200 issues. She explained that they rely on funding from Town and Parish Councils, and all contributions are appreciated.

The representatives for Blackham Events Together for Social Inclusion (BETSI) explained that they were applying for further resources for their events and thanked WPC for the previous year's funding which had made a positive difference to their activities.

Cllr Lawne thanked the applicants for their contributions and explained that they were welcome to remain or leave the meeting and receive feedback from the Clerk.

All members of the public left the meeting.

3. ENQUIRE WHETHER ANYONE PRESENT INTENDS TO FILM, PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR RECORD THE MEETING: None.

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

Cllr Lawne expressed grateful thanks to the previous Committee Chair and Vice-Chair for their work.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – none.

6. MINUTES

6.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 24th March 2025

002981 **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 24th March 2025, which were duly signed by the Chairman.

6.2 Minutes of the Additional meeting held on 14th April 2025

002982 **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 14th April 2025, which were duly signed by the Chairman.

6.3 Minutes of the Additional meeting held on 27th May 2025

002983 **RESOLVED** to adopt the minutes of the meeting held on 27th May 2025, which were duly signed by the Chairman.

6.4 Matters outstanding from these minutes:

Completed actions from previous minutes

Page No	**Who**	**Action**
Pg.3038	Clerk	Drainage monitoring update provided to Finance Committee
Pg.3080	Clerks	Risk Assessments in progress
002819	Clerks	SME now responsible for our web hosting
Pg.3151/52	Clerk	Payments for successful grant applicants made
Pg 3152	Clerk	Reported back to GSGA and requested update to Autumn meeting
Pg.3152	Clerk	Contractor agreed to fewer cuts at the Tanyard
Pg.3153	Clerk	Council agreed to dispose of the Blackham bus shelter to BETSI
Pg.3154	Clerk	Reported back Finance Committee comments on planters to CEAG
002903	Clerk	Recommended Financial Regulations to Council
002904	Clerk	Recommended Finance Committee Terms of Reference to Council with amendment
002905	Clerk	Recommended revised Fees and Charges Policy to Council

002906	Clerk	Recommended Borrowing and Investment Strategy to Council	
002907	Clerk	Recommended Pensions Policy to Council	
002908	Clerk	Recommended the Risk Management Policy to Council	
002909	Clerk	Recommended the Pay Policy to Council	
002911	Clerk	Made the agreed Journals	

Outstanding items from previous meetings

- Further advertising of meeting rooms to be done. Positive comments received on new fee structure

Page No	**Who**	**Action**	**Completion Date**
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. 2993	Clerk	When smart meter fitted arrange to export electricity generated from the solar panels	
Pg.3152	Cllrs Kelly and Winter	Arrange visits with successful Grant applicants	Ongoing
Pg.3152	Committee	Consider treatment of repetitive and maintenance Grant applications during review of Guidelines	Autumn 2025
Pg.3154	Clerk	Chase WDC about run-off from Teasley Mead Recreation Ground	April 2025
Pg.3156	Clerk	Blackham village green request on a future agenda	tbc

Actions from this meeting

Page No	**Who**	**Action**	**Completion Date**
002984	Clerk	Make payments to Wealden Citizens Advice, BETSI, Groombridge Preschool and AAA	July 2025
Pg.3212	RFO	Chase outstanding 2024/25 monitoring forms from St Thomas' Church and Groombridge Tennis Club	September 2025
Pg.3212	Clerk	Enquire with WPC insurers whether benches that are not owned by WPC can be permanently on WPC land	July 2025
Pg.03213	Clerk	Chase contractor for the fort about the nuts and bolts if no response	September 2025
Pg.03213	Clerk	Contact The Pig about silted-up ditch by the Cricket Club land	November 2025

Pg.003213	Clerk	Place on a future Council agenda to review the current arrangement with MSporti	November 2025
Pg.003213	Cllr Anderson	Enquire whether GSGA and St Thomas' School can find a way for MSporti to return to the Tanyard	September 2025
Pg.003213	Clerk	Recommend to Council to dispose of the three gazebos	July 2025
002985	Clerk	Purchase new 3x3m gazebo	July 2025
002986	Clerk	Recommend the Financial Regulations and Standing Orders to Council	July 2025
002987	Clerk	recommend the Health & Safety Policy to Council	July 2025
Pg 003213	RFO	3 year budget to next meeting	September 2025
002988	RFO	Remove Cllr Fane from bank mandates, and add Cllr Gaukroger should he join the Committee	September 2025
002989	RFO	Recommend to Council to transfer funds from existing Nationwide account	July 2025
002990	Clerk	Recommend to Council accept the quote for replacing Streetlight Column 27	July 2025
Pg.003214	Clerk	Ask our contractor to return ornamental lantern from Column 27 to WPC	July 2025
Pg. 03214	RFO	Include a budget line for staff recruitment in the 2026/27 draft budget	October 2025

7. CONFIRM TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference had been agreed at the Annual Statutory Meeting. Finance Committee confirmed that they had no amendments.

8. GRANTS (2025/26 BUDGET)

8.1 Consider Grant applications received to this meeting

Cllr Lawne noted that following the last meeting there was £6,000 remaining in the 2025-26 Grants budget. Applications to this meeting totalled £4,297.89 but Air Ambulance Kent, Surrey and Sussex had not provided a representative to the meeting so their application was deferred as it was felt to be important that applicants attend to respond to queries from the Committee.

Wealden Citizens Advice had applied for £900 towards the running costs of their services for residents of the parish. The Committee liked the breakdown of information at Withyham parish level and were impressed by the range of issues that WCA has supported our residents with. They considered the application to be very strong and, as there was not an overwhelming pressure on the grants budget to this meeting, they felt that it merited funding in full. AGREED to fund £900.

Blackham Events Together for Social Inclusion (BETSI) had applied for £1,120 for a generator, flood lights, gazebos, urn, walkie talkies and a picnic bench for their events. The Committee recognised the very positive impact of the BETSI initiative on Blackham and the way that your events bring residents together. They were impressed by the application and the detail in it.

The Committee queried whether Groombridge Men's Shed might be approached by BETSI to make a bench at a more favourable price than quoted. The Clerk was asked to confirm that, if BETSI do use the funds for a picnic bench to be sited on Teasley Mead then it will be owned by BETSI and they will be responsible for its maintenance. The Clerk was also asked to enquire with WPC insurers whether benches that are not owned by WPC can be permanently on the land.

The Committee also noted that WPC funded BETSI for resources last year and were concerned about an over reliance on a single point of funding and repeat applications. The Committee encouraged BETSI to explore other funding opportunities, such as raffles and charging people where they can afford it, or applications to other funders. It was AGREED to contribute £750.

Groombridge Preschool had applied for £243.16 towards equipment for sports sessions. The Committee commented that it was a great initiative and that it was not for much money. They therefore AGREED funding in full at £243.16 but requested that, should future applications be made, they should be accompanied by a set of most recent accounts.

Action Against Abuse (AAA) had applied for £1,534.73 towards their support service in East Sussex. The Committee recognised the very important and positive impact of the work on families but was also mindful that the budget provided was now outdated as further funding had been achieved. They also noted that the request to WPC was similar to the amount given by Crowborough Town Council which has a significantly larger population and budgets. In addition, as the initiative is so new in this County, it wasn't possible to provide data on a more parish level yet. The Committee therefore AGREED to contribute a lower amount of £500 towards the service.

002984 **RESOLVED** to fund Wealden Citizens Advice, BETSI, Groombridge Preschool and AAA totaling £2,393.16 from the 2025/26 Grants budget.

The remaining Grants budget to March 2026 is £3,606.84.

8.2 Note Monitoring Forms received from successful applicants

Completed forms had been circulated prior to the meeting and the Committee had found these interesting to read.

The Clerk/RFO was asked to chase the remaining 2024/25 Grant monitoring forms from St Thomas' Church and Groombridge Tennis Club.

9. GROOMBRIDGE RECREATION GROUND

9.1 Receive recent playground equipment safety report and note actions

The Committee noted the report and the actions already undertaken by the Parish Maintenance Person. The Clerk confirmed that the contractor for the roundabout

had visited and rectified that issue, and the contractor for the fort was in contact with the supplier about the nuts and bolts that had rusted.

9.2 Note monitoring of drainage at the play area

The Clerk had provided an update on the drainage around the playground, and the Committee noted the previous consideration given at the September 2024 Finance meeting and that there had been no complaints.

The Committee noted that use of the Recreation Ground by the M-Sporti football club has caused damage to the grass and that it was always meant to be a temporary arrangement which would be reviewed as the recreation ground is not fit for purpose as a football pitch. The Clerk was asked to place this on a future Council agenda and Cllr Anderson would enquire whether Groombridge Sports Ground Association and St Thomas' School can find a way for it to return to the Tanyard.

It was raised that there is a silted-up ditch by the Cricket Club that is on land owned by The Pig. The Clerk was asked to contact The Pig.

10. GAZEBOS

10.1 Agree disposals to recommend to Council

Cllr Gordon-James and the Parish Maintenance Person had checked the three gazebos that WPC currently owns and found them to be broken, missing parts or not fit for purpose. It was therefore AGREED to recommend to Council to dispose of the gazebos.

10.2 Confirm purchases

It was AGREED that a 3x3m gazebo should be purchased for WPC to use, for example if attending fetes or running its own events. This should not be loaned out.

002985 **RESOLVED** to purchase one square 3x3m pop up gazebo at £81.99.

11. POLICIES

11.1 Review Financial Regulations and Standing Orders (references to Clerk/RFO)

The Financial Regulations had been amended to differentiate between the roles of Clerk and RFO with effect from 1 August.

002986 **RESOLVED** to recommend the Financial Regulations and Standing Orders to Council

11.2 Health & Safety Policy

002987 **RESOLVED** to recommend the Health & Safety Policy to Council

12. ACCOUNTS AND FINANCE

12.1 Note expenditure against budget report (to June 2025) – noted

12.2 Consider any virements and journals – none required

12.3 Note Balances (to June 2025) – noted

12.4 Receive 3-year budget 2025 to 2028 – deferred to next meeting

12.5 Confirm signatories on bank mandates

002988 **RESOLVED** to remove Cllr Fane and add Cllr Gaukroger should he join the Committee.

12.6 Review Nationwide account

The Committee had received a paper prior to the meeting.

002989 **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council to transfer funds from existing Nationwide account due to low interest rate and transfer to a higher interest rate account (95 day or 6 month fixed).

12.7 Consider Quotes: to include Streetlight Column 27

The Committee had received a paper prior to the meeting outlining the issue with the current column at the Victoria bus stop (column 27) and the contractor's advice regarding replacement. This included advice to replace the ornamental lantern with an LED which would be more appropriate for the location and size of column. The Committee noted that this was a significant sum of money but that the work is necessary.

002990 **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council accept the quote for replacement of the column and lantern at the Victoria bus stop, including disconnection/connection and traffic management at £5,042 + VAT utilising budget lines 4452, 4451 and EMR340.

The Clerk was asked to instruct our contractor to return ornamental lantern from Column 27 to WPC.

13. RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER (RFO) REPORT

The RFO outlined the places where the Clerk role had been advertised, including the £211 expenditure to advertise on the SLCC website. Cllr Gordon-James explained that 1 week's advertising with NALC would be £300+VAT and the Committee considered that this should be done if it is necessary to re-advertise.

The RFO was asked to include a budget line for staff recruitment in the 2026/27 draft budget.

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

- Autumn agenda to include Grant applications (including those deferred), monitoring forms, 3-year budget, GSGA grass cuts, grant guidelines (including a review of repetitive and maintenance applications).
- When capacity allows, an agenda to include request for Teasley Mead Recreation Ground to become a village green.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – to be held on 29th September 2025 at 7pm at Groombridge Old Station.

The meeting ended at 8.42pm