

HERSTMONCEUX PARISH COUNCIL

Agenda Item: Committee Reports – F&GP

Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on **Wednesday 02 September 2015** at Herstmonceux Village Hall, Hailsham Road, Herstmonceux.

Present: Councillors: Mrs J. Angear, M. Goodsell, Mrs H. Kenward, S. Nash, I. Stewart.

S. Goacher, RFO, attended and took the Minutes.

Members of the Public: None.

Apologies Received: Councillor M. Bradshaw.

FGP.1.09.15 Annual Estimate Template Completion: The Finance Officer reminded the meeting that the Council had introduced the Estimate Template for Committees and individual Members to be able to 'communicate' their financial projects and aims to the F&GP Committee, for consideration, and inclusion in the Council's annual estimates. The Finance Officer answered questions arising from this, but it was stated that the template forms, as presented and distributed to all Members of the Council, was considered a very good idea.

Councillor Mrs Angear felt that Council Members should have Identity Badges, especially when attending meetings with the public, other Town & Parish Council and outside body representatives. The meeting **RECOMMENDS** that estimate provision is made for all Council Members to have identity badges.

Councillor Stewart made a general statement that it was, in his opinion, that the Government could still be looking at the balances held by local councils in their accounts and that unless local councils have 'ring-fenced' money for certain projects or reasons, risk government intervention of reducing general levels of balances. The meeting felt that this was a very important point and **RECOMMENDS** that this is taken into account during the Annual Estimate process by 'Ring-Fencing' or 'Identifying' amounts held in Reserve Accounts.

Councillor Stewart referred to the recent decision of Full Council to take over the responsibility of the entrance road to the Village Hall / Doctor's Surgery sites, and requested that £1000 be placed into a Reserve Account during the next financial year. The meeting agreed and **RECOMMENDS** that this provision is made in a Reserve Account and identified.

Councillors also discussed the access road from the A271 into the Recreation Ground Car Park and it was generally agreed that a passing place or additional road construction was required and **RECOMMENDS** that a total of £9,000 should be included in the next year's estimates and placed in a Ground Committee Reserve Account and identified.

Councillor Goodsell asked the meeting what should be done with the current entrance gate, at the access road into the recreation ground car park, when taken away. The meeting **RECOMMENDS** that this is stored for future use.

Councillor Stewart indicated that there may be the possibility, over the next few years, that the proposed developments at both Lime Cross and Lime Roughs could involve the Parish Council incurring legal fees, even though it is not directly involved in any way in either of those developments, other local councils have fallen into such pitfalls. The meeting agreed and **RECOMMENDS** that provision of £2,000 be placed in a Reserve Account identified under the proposed Major Developments Committee of the Council, when constituted.

The above recommendations will be reflected on appropriate Estimate Template forms, on behalf of the F&GP Committee, to be signed by the F&GP Chairman for consideration in the Annual Estimate process.

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FGP.2.09.15 Council Diary for the Financial Year: The Finance Officer circulated a 'Diary' of work to be carried out over the financial year 2015-16, showing both Council and Committee actions, actions required by the Clerk and Chairman, and those of the Finance Officer. The Finance Officer outlined the idea of such a document was to provide a single reference point for both Council Members and Officers to be able to ensure that all the work, and recurring matters to be considered by the Council are identified and scheduled over the Council's year. The Finance Officer stated that the document, as presented, was not 'set in stone' but was an 'evolving' document which would change to reflect changes each year in the workload of the Full Council, Committees, individual Council Members, and Officers.

The meeting generally discussed the document and Councillor Mrs Kenward suggested that it would be very helpful if the document included the dates of meetings arranged throughout the year of both Full Council and Committee meetings.

Arising out of the discussion there was a general move towards the idea of trying to get Council business to be dealt with on particular days of the week, for example that all meetings would take place on Mondays and Tuesdays of a week. It was felt that Council Members and Officers would be able to arrange their Council responsibilities better if meetings were on set days.

After much discussion the meeting **RECOMMENDS** that the Council Year Diary be adopted by Full Council, but to include meeting dates, and on the understanding that the document will 'evolve' and change over the years. Council Members should look at the document, once distributed, and should bring forward in writing any comments, any additions, or amendments they feel are required to the Diary for consideration and updating by future meetings of the F&GP Committee. Revised and updated versions of the 'Diary' document would be issued to all Council Members and Officers as and when necessary.

The meeting additionally **RECOMMENDS** that Full Council consider a Review of its meeting dates and those of its Committee meetings so they are on set days of the week, as indicated above.

Councillor Goodsell gave his apologies and left the meeting at 20.15pm.

FGP.3.09.15 Auto-Enrolment – Workplace Pensions: The Finance Officer presented a report detailing the requirement and procedures to be followed by the Parish Council to implement Auto-Enrolment which introduces 'Workplace Pensions'. The Parish Council must provide a pension arrangement to its employees by its 'Staging Date' on 01 February 2017.

The Pension Regulator advises all employers that they will need 12 months to put auto-enrolment in place before its appointed 'Staging Date' the date when the employer has to enrol all of its employees.

The Council has to implement a workplace pension arrangement by 01 February 2017, whether or not any of its employees wish to join a pension scheme.

The Finance Officer stated that this was very important and that he had circulated the report, electronically, to all Council Members for their information.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS** that the F&GP Committee starts the procedure of implementing auto-enrolment on behalf of the Parish Council starting in January 2016.

FGP.4.09.15 Review of Banking Arrangements: The Finance Officer felt that changes to the regulations whereby local councils could now move on from the writing cheques to payment of its suppliers electronically, and online banking, should review its

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banking arrangements. The Parish Council has been with Barclays Bank plc for many years and it has been experienced that the Bank's ever changing processing requirements have caused difficulties for the Finance Officer to be able to undertake his duties on behalf of the Parish Council in being able to operate the Parish Council's bank accounts efficiently. Changes to bank procedures having forced the Parish Council's current account into 'overdraft' situations on more than one occasion.

The meeting agreed and **RECOMMENDS** that it was a good time to instigate a review of banking arrangements providing that internal procedures within the Parish Council, as well as those required by any bank provider, were put in place to prevent unauthorised access to the finances held.

FGP.5.09.15 Public Consultation Meeting re: Estimates and Expenditure of the Council:

The RFO referred to the Training recently attended by Council Members and the hand out which suggested that the Parish Council should hold a public meeting to discuss the Estimates and Expenditure of the Council. Councillor Bradshaw had brought this to the attention of the Council, together with other Council Members.

The meeting discussed this at length and it was thought that a special meeting for this purpose would not attract public attendance and, therefore, could not be justified. An idea of combining such a meeting with a public meeting on the matter of the continuation of the Neighbourhood Plan was not considered appropriate as the two subjects were completely separate.

The meeting felt that additional publication by way of fliers or high visible notices inviting public participation at the November F&GP Committee meeting, whereby the public could attend and listen to the meeting discuss the estimates, and the Chairman being able to permit members of the public to ask questions or comment perhaps at an 'open' meeting session during that meeting, more appropriate.

The meeting, therefore, **RECOMMENDS** that Full Council consider inviting members of the public to attend the November F&GP Committee meeting and to take part in an open meeting session on the estimate and expenditure of the Council.

FGP.6.09.15 Personnel Sub-Committee: The Finance Officer placed this item on the agenda to encourage the Members of the Personnel Sub-Committee to meet and discuss and formulate its Terms of Reference for consideration and agreement of Full Council.

The Personnel Sub-Committee needs to also have input into the employee costs to be included in the Council's annual estimates, by looking at the Council's current pay scales, the Governments directive to public sector pay awards, and to set up the Council's procedures in respect of annual appraisals of its employees.

Councillors Bradshaw, Nash, and Stewart are the appointed members of the sub-committee. Discussion took place as to whether the Chairman of the Council could attend meetings on certain items, as it was considered that there could be a conflict as the Chairman of the Council has to act as the Internal Arbitrator in the Council's grievance procedure in respect of its employees.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS** that the Personnel Sub-Committee meet as soon as possible and consider the pay scales, pay awards, and produce a staff appraisal scheme together with all appropriate forms for consideration of F&GP Committee and Full Council.

FGP.7.09.15 Close of Meeting: The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 21.25 hours.