

## HERSTMONCEUX PARISH COUNCIL

### Agenda Item: Committee Reports – F&GP

**Minutes** of the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on **Tuesday 05 January 2016** at Herstmonceux Village Hall, Hailsham Road, Herstmonceux.

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

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

Members of the Public: None.

**FGP.1.01.16 Apologies Received:** None.

**FGP.2.01.16 Declaration of Interests:** Councillors Mrs J. Angear and I. Stewart: Herstmonceux Village Hall. Councillor M. Goodsell: small contracts around the parish.

**FGP.3.01.16 Dispensation Requests:** None.

**FGP.4.01.16 Current Year Expenditure:** None.

**FGP.5.01.16 Annual Estimates (Version 4A):** The Finance Officer had circulated version 4 and 4A to all Members attending prior to the meeting. The Finance Officer explained that he had included erroneously a couple of Accountancy principals that had an effect on the forward estimation of Precept requirements beyond 2016-17, and that constituted the difference between the two versions.

The Finance Officer stated that the Annual Estimates, as presented, included all the items that Committees or individual Councillors have wanted included in the Annual Estimates for forthcoming financial years 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19.

The Finance Officer reminded the meeting that many of the items that were included had not been discussed or approved by Full Council, and therefore, it would require Committees to formulate reports on the items included in the estimates and submit reports to Full Council providing information on the background to the project, the basis of the cost provision included, whether the project is a 'one-off' project or one which is to be phased in over a number of years, or if it is a provision that is being built up with an intention to carry out the project so many years down the line. Full Council will need to discuss and adopt such reports and these to become 'Policy' of the Parish Council, so that future estimates can include suitable provision, culminating with the project being provided in accordance with that Policy.

Committees should meet and formulate their reports and submit these to Full Council over the next three months and continue to put in reports where new projects arise so that Full Council can discuss and adopt such projects and these will be ready for the next round of estimates in October 2016. **Committees should, therefore, prepare required reports for Full Council within the next three months.**

The Finance Officer informed the meeting that in their present form the Annual Estimates were to have a 17% increase on the level of the required precept over and above that of last year. Whereas, at present there is no 'capping' imposed on precept levels of local councils, and that the District Council cannot amend or reduce the precepts submitted by a local council, Councillors should be aware that it is the local council that must be in a position to justify any increase in its precept to its residents of the parish.

Councillors agreed that it would be down to the Parish Council to justify any increase in the Precept and on looking at the estimates the meeting identified that the largest costs were in connection with updating the street lighting within the parish, by the introduction of LED lighting. Councillor Bradshaw explained that a

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recent meeting with a representative of the East Sussex County Council had said that the lights would have to be upgraded in three years under law. The meeting discussed the matter of street lighting in depth, querying why individual lights couldn't be changed as they were needed. It was stated that LED lights could not be introduced piecemeal. Councillor Stewart understood that provision for the street lighting changes to LED lights will need to be made, but would like to see the requirement to undertake the change to LED lighting in writing, so that the Parish Council is fully aware of its obligations in this matter.

Looking at the provisions made within the estimates, the meeting queried LED lighting for the school car park, and it was agreed that the £4,000 provision in 2016-2017 should be deleted, as this item could not be identified.

Councillor Bradshaw stated that the provisions included in the Annual Estimates were based on costings for LED lights indicated by East Sussex County Council, but it was understood that the lighting units could be obtained at a much lower cost. Councillor Bradshaw suggested to the meeting that the provision for Gardner Street of £15,250 could be reduced to £11,250 in 2016-17. The meeting agreed this reduction, but asked Councillor Bradshaw to obtain exactly what was required of the Parish Council by East Sussex County Council with regard to changing the street lighting in the parish to LED lights.

The Finance Officer having applied the suggested reductions in the Street Lighting Reserve Account and in the contributions needed to be made into that Reserve Account from the General Account, informed the meeting that the required increase in the precept level had reduced to 4.43%.

The meeting agreed to **RECOMMEND to Full Council** that the provisions for the Street Lighting should be reduced by a total of £8,000 in 2016-2017, £4,000 being deleted in respect of the School car park, and a further £4,000 in respect of LED lights in Gardner Street during 2016-2017. Proposed by Councillor Bradshaw; Seconded by Councillor Stewart, All Councillors in favour.

Councillor Nash drew the attention of the meeting to the fact that the highway verge-cutting contract had not yet been let. The Finance Officer had found out that the Contractor for 2015-2016, had to undertake further training by attending a NRSWA qualification course at an estimated course fee of £500. The Finance Officer read an e-mail from East Sussex County Council in which the County Council had offered to fund 50% of the course fee should the Parish Council offer to pay the course fee on behalf of the contractor. The meeting discussed the matter and agreed to **RECOMMEND to Full Council** that the Parish Council invite the contractor to re-tender for 2016-2017 highways verge-cutting and that the Parish Council pay the course fee on the contractor's behalf. It is also **RECOMMENDED to Full Council**, that the contractor be invited to put in a contract price for the clearance of the bank adjacent to the A271, Hailsham Road, opposite to the entrance to the Village Hall. Proposed by Councillor Nash; Seconded by Councillor Bradshaw, All Councillors in favour.

*[Subsequent to the meeting the Contractor confirmed that the course fee was £130 plus VAT (£156) and that he had booked himself on the course to take place in February 2016]*

### FGP.6.01.16

**PRECEPT 2016-2017:** Following the discussions on the Annual Estimates and taking into account the reductions recommended to Full Council, the Finance Officer informed the meeting that the level of Precept required to be levied on Wealden District Council for 2016-2017 would be £62,920.00.

The total receivable from Wealden District Council for 2016-17 would amount to £66,570.00, comprised of the precept requirement of £62,920.00 plus the Parish Council's proportion of the Council Tax Support Grant amounting to £3,650.00.

The increase in the precept level over and above the 2015-16 precept is 4.43%,

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and the increase to a Council Tax Band 'D' taxpayer would be 2.26% or £1.35.

The meeting agreed to **RECOMMEND to Full Council** that Herstmonceux Parish Council levy a Precept of £62,920.00 for 2016-2017 on Wealden District Council.

Proposed by Councillor Bradshaw; Seconded by Councillor Mrs Kenward, All Councillors in favour.

### FGP.7.01.16

**Procurement of Audit for smaller authorities:** The Finance Officer had circulated a 'factsheet' and a combined letter from NALC, SLCC, and ADA (Association of Drainage Authorities) explaining that the previous Government having abolished the audit commission, NALC and partners have been permitted to form a Sector Led Body (SLB) to procure audit services on behalf of local councils, which will start in 2017-2018.

The new arrangements will come into force on 01 April 2017.

The new arrangement allows smaller local councils, those with a turnover of £25,000 or less, to opt-out of the SLB and procure its own auditors. It is prudent for local councils to consider in its budget arrangements funding to meet the costs of audit, which Herstmonceux Parish Council does as a matter of course. The previous audit costs were negotiated several years ago and included some cross subsidy from larger councils so audit costs may increase in future years. The one-off SLB fee is estimated to be less than £100, however, this may change as the SLB is set up.

The meeting discussed the matter and agreed to **RECOMMEND to Full Council** to remain in, rather than opt-out, the new SLB arrangement, and to convey to NALC that audit fees for local councils should remain at the current levels as far as possible, not increasing because of having to set up a Sector Led Board.

Proposed by Councillor Stewart; Seconded by Councillor Bradshaw, All Councillors in favour.

### FGP.8.01.16

**Herstmonceux Village Hall – Access Road Contribution:** Full Council has already agreed that it would contribute one third of the maintenance costs of the access road to the Herstmonceux Village Hall / Herstmonceux Doctor's Surgery site. Similarly, meetings with Dr Simmonds has led to the Doctor's agreement to provide a one third contribution.

The meeting was in some doubt as to whether the Clerk had written formally to the Village Hall Management Committee to ascertain its agreement to a one third contribution. Councillor Stewart, disclosing his interest, indicated to the meeting that he was of the opinion that the Village Hall finances would not be able to match a one third contribution, at present. The meeting was generally of the opinion that the Parish Council had always done its best to assist the finances of the Village Hall, and that this would be something that it would have to take into account in future.

**The Clerk is to be asked to update the next meeting of Full Council** on the progress of the variation of the lease to cover the three way split of the access maintenance costs and the outstanding 'right of way' issue for the Doctor to access his land via the upper entrance by the new Pharmacy.

### FGP.9.01.16

**Close of Meeting:** There being no other business, the Chairman, Councillor Mrs Angear thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 21.00pm