

HERSTMONCEUX PARISH COUNCIL

Agenda Item: Committee Reports – F&GP

Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on **Monday 01 March 2016** at Herstmonceux Village Hall, Herstmonceux.

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

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

Members of the Public: None.

FIN.01.03.16 APOLOGIES: Councillor I. Stewart.

FIN.02.03.16 DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS:

Councillor Mrs. Angear: Herstmonceux Village Hall, Herstmonceux Bowls Club
Councillor Goodsell: Various small maintenance contracts.

FIN.03.03.16 DISPENSATION REQUESTS: None received

FIN.04.03.16 CURRENT YEAR EXPENDITURE:

Councillor Mrs. Angear informed the meeting that she would be taking over the investigation of the provision of Defibrillators within the parish. Councillor Mrs Angear reminded the meeting that the Parish Council had received from the Wealden Community Dividend Fund a sum of £2,185, and that the Parish Council had agreed to purchase a defibrillator situated at the Parish Office, but she felt that a second defibrillator should be provided in Cowbeech. It was suggested that a defibrillator could be provided at The Merrie Harriers Public House, with consent, or within the old Red Telephone Box, MAS could be asked to undertake an electrical requirement and to quote for both sites. Once installed the meeting agreed that permanent signs be included in each parish noticeboard stating where the nearest defibrillator is located.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that a second defibrillator be purchased and sited in Cowbeech, that MAS be asked to undertake an electrical investigation, and to provide a quotation, and that all Noticeboards carry a notice providing the locations of defibrillators within the parish.

Proposed: Councillor Bradshaw, seconded: Councillor Nash, All Councillors in favour.

FIN.05.03.16 COMMITTEE REPORTS: The Finance Officer reminded the meeting that all Committees are required to submit reports to Full Council on all items within their jurisdiction and which have been included in the Annual Estimates for 2016/17, to enable Full Council make a decision on:

- The item being approved and implemented.
- Whether Full Council needs to adopt a Policy.
- The item is part of a long term project or, an item which is initially only for one specific site in the parish but which may be requested by parishioners in other parts of the parish e.g. salt/grit bins.

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The reports were required within the first three months, but in the circumstances that the Parish Council will have a period without a permanent Clerk, Committees are asked to ensure that reports are generated as soon as a new Clerk is in post.

Councillor Bradshaw brought up the news that the East Sussex Fire Service were to undertake the cleaning of road signs etc., and wondered if the local Fire Station could be contacted to clean all fingerposts, where algae were forming and turning them green. Councillor Nash was of the opinion that the East Sussex Fire Service were to undertake cleaning of signs under the guise of road safety, cleaning such signs as '30mph', 'Bend Ahead', etc., etc.

FIN.06.03.16

THE OLD SURGERY, WEST END: The Finance Officer read an email from APC Care Ltd asking if the company provided loft insulation, could the Parish Council get it installed in the Old Surgery. The Company was, currently, incurring excessive electricity heating bills. Councillor Bradshaw informed the meeting that the property would have to meet EU requirements being introduced in 2017. Councillor Nash recalled that this was talked about at the time of refurbishing the property but at the time the Council did not consider the installation of loft insulation.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that a local builder or handyman be engaged to install the loft insulation provided by APC Care Ltd, with the proviso that the insulation is of the correct specification required for the property.

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

The Finance Officer reported that in meeting with Mrs Gardiner of APC Care Ltd, it was mentioned that a neighbouring property owner had complained about the amount of ivy growing along fences. The ivy has also attached and grown along the Parish Council's fence along to the side gate. Councillor Goodsell stated that if the ivy was removed there was the possibility that the fence would collapse.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that Mr Goodsell is engaged to remove the ivy on the Council's fencing and to renew the fencing, should it need renewal on removal of the invading ivy. All ivy to be treated accordingly.

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

The Finance Officer suggested to the meeting that in the circumstances of the Parish Council reviewing its insurance providers, that it would be appropriate to have the Old Surgery property revalued for insurance purposes by the District Valuer. Councillor Bradshaw informed the meeting that there was to be a general revaluation of commercial property undertaken by the Valuation department during 2017, and suggested that an approach to Mr Tingley maybe an idea at this time to undertake a valuation of the property.

The meeting discussed the matter and **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that Mr Tingley be approached to undertake a valuation of the property of The Old Surgery for insurance purposes.

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

FIN.07.03.16

HERSTMONCEUX VILLAGE HALL: The meeting discussed the matter of the Variation of Lease in respect of the removal of the access road from the existing Lease with the Herstmonceux Village Hall, the Maintenance Agreement between the Village Hall, Doctor Simmonds, and the Parish Council to contribute one third of any maintenance costs of the access road by each party, and the easement

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over land by Doctor Simmonds to access the Pharmacy site.

The Village Hall Management Committee had complained at the length of time that it was taking to sort out the matter, and the Finance Officer acquainted the meeting with the timetable and sequence of events leading up to getting all parties to agree to a contribution of one third each. The Finance Officer also suggested that the matter of the complaint to the Wellers Law Group in respect of charges for the underlease of the Old Surgery had 'muddied the waters' as far as progress in this matter.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that the Clerk instructs the Wellers Law Group to act on behalf of the Parish Council and undertakes to take immediate action on this recommendation by issuing the instruction without further delay, providing all appropriate information to enable the matter to proceed.

Proposed: Councillor Nash, Seconded: Councillor Mrs. Kenward, All Councillors in favour.

Councillor Mrs Kenward brought to the attention of the meeting that the Clerk was reporting Councillor Stewart to the Monitoring Officer in connection with the Variation of the Lease to the Village Hall. Councillor Stewart had drafted a Lease on behalf of the Village Hall and presented it to the Clerk for possible reference to the Parish Council's legal Advisors. The Finance Officer suggested that there was a misunderstanding of the Clerk's actions in this matter, and that the Clerk was seeking advice from the Monitoring Officer, as Councillor Stewart has declared an interest being a Member of the Village Hall Management Committee and also the Honorary Treasurer of the Village Hall. Councillor Kenward requested that a copy of any advice received from the Monitoring Officer, in respect of this matter, is circulated to all Councillors once received.

The Finance Officer suggested that he writes to the Village Hall Management Committee to enquire if it has considered having the property of the Village Hall revalued for insurance purposes, as it is required to ensure that the property is adequately insured under the lease. The meeting was in favour of the Finance Officer writing accordingly.

FIN.08.03.16

LEGAL SERVICES: Councillor Bradshaw requested that the Parish Council go out to open tender for its Legal Services due to the general Quality of Service not being up to standard from its current Legal providers. Councillor Bradshaw made it clear that the Council should not preclude its current Legal providers from tendering, but it was good practice to go out to tender for such services.

The meeting discussed the matter and asked the Finance Officer to undertake and research of other Town & Parish Councils as to their legal providers and of SALC as to the options available to the Parish Council in respect of provision of legal services. The Finance Officer was asked to report back to a future Finance & General Purposes Committee on his findings.

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

FIN.09.03.16

OFFICE EQUIPMENT FOR NEW CLERK: The meeting discussed, in particular, the purchase of a new laptop for the Parish Council, and the benefits to the Parish Council of approaching an IT Consultant to draw up a specification appropriate to the Parish Council for use with the new website, Microsoft Office, email and internet connection, rather than buying 'off the shelf'.

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Similarly, the Finance Officer had found that there were so many 'deals' currently in respect of Mobile Telephones that it was difficult to resolve what to recommend as the right 'deal' for the Parish Council.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that IT Consultants be approached to specify for an appropriate laptop computer, quote for setting up and the transfer of all data from the existing laptop and to maintain the machine on behalf of the Parish Council. That the Finance Officer investigates whether and what Mobile Telephones are provided and contracts other Town & Parish Councils within Wealden have entered into.

The IT Consultants recommended are:

- Applied Electronics of Magham Down.
- Ian McInnes of Hastings
- James Gallifant of Crowborough (current webmaster to the Parish Council)

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

FIN.010.03.16 DEFERMENT OF PROCEDURES/POLICIES: The Finance Officer reminded the meeting that the Internal Auditor, in his 2014/15 Audit report, had directed the Parish Council to the Procedures/Policies required within the 'Governance and Accountability for Local Government' (GALC). The Internal Auditor had specified the following as outstanding:

- Employees' Code of Conduct [Draft ready for discussion]
- Procedure documented re Responses to Consultation Requests [Draft ready for discussion]
- Procedure documented re the handling of correspondence, circulation, responses, filing and retention [to be drafted]
- Procedure (documentation not required) agreed re the recording and monitoring of Councillors' Gifts/Hospitality received [Draft ready for discussion]
- Procedure (documentation not required) agreed re the monitoring of Grants or Loans made or received [Draft ready for discussion]

The Finance Officer had investigated with the Clerk as to the progress in drafting the required documentation and had found that documentation was at the stages shown in brackets, above.

A Procedure/Policy in respect of the website has also been drafted, by the Clerk, and is ready for discussion.

In the circumstances the meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that the above Procedures/Policies are deferred until such time as a new Clerk has been appointed and is in post.

Proposed: Councillor Nash, Seconded: Councillor Goodsell, All Councillors in favour.

FIN.011.03.16 REVIEW OF HIRE CHARGES AT LIME CROSS SPORTS GROUND, RECREATION GROUND, and VILLAGE GREEN: The Finance Officer had brought a report to the meeting, in the absence of a meeting of the Ground Committee, and/or Environment Committee, as it was now time to render accounts for the ensuing year. The Finance Officer suggests a 2% increase in all hire charges above the amount of £99.00 per annum.

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Councillor Bradshaw suggested that the charge in respect of water to the Herstmonceux Bowls Club should be raised from £62 to £65 per annum. Councillor Nash stated that there was no football on the Recreation Ground permitted because of damage to the ground, therefore, the charge for football on the Recreation Ground be deleted.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that the Finance Officer's report be adopted with the Football at the Recreation Ground being deleted and the water charge to the Bowls Club being increased to £65 per annum

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

Councillor Nash took the opportunity to inform the meeting that the Grounds Maintenance Contractor had brought to his attention that remedial work was needed to the Recreation Ground, excluding the Cricket Pitch. Various options had been suggested from simple rolling to mole ploughing to improve the condition and drainage. Councillor Goodsell stated that mole ploughing at this time of year would cause problems to cricket balls over the ensuing season, mole ploughing should be carried out in the Autumn. Councillor Nash informed the meeting that apart from mole ploughing, which would be costlier, an indication of costs was between £120 and £250 for the remedial work.

The meeting discussed the matter and **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that Councillor Nash be authorised to negotiate the best remedial work possible at this time up to a cost of £300.

Proposed: Councillor Mrs. Angear, Seconded: Councillor Mrs. Kenward, All Councillors in favour.

The meeting would also suggest that the Grounds Committee (working Group) /Environment Committee should submit a report on the required phasing in of remedial works over a period of (say) the next three years with an idea of costing, so that Full Council can adopt a policy of updating any drainage requirements for the Recreation Ground and include these in future estimates.

FIN.012.03.16 REVIEW OF ALLOTMENT HIRE AGREEMENTS, TENANCY TERM, and OTHER DOCUMENTATION: Councillor Nash read out a report from the Herstmonceux Allotment Association Meeting of 24 February 2016:

'The purpose of attending the meeting was to ensure that contact with the Parish Council was maintained and to propose changes to the hire contract for the plots.

The Association is continuing to raise funds for its activities through subscriptions, the apple picking day and participation in the NGS open day. However, it was noted that the apple day cannot be relied upon every year. Bearing this in mind as large expenditure is due to replace equipment, a lawn mower, I suggested that they could always apply to the Parish Council to assist with any shortfall - especially as they are so enthusiastic in raising funds by themselves

The committee discussed the suggestion of moving the start date of plot contracts to either Oct or Jan of each year. Generally, it was felt that a start date of 1st January could be beneficial. However, in addition to this change I was asked if a waiver could be included in the contract to allow the Parish Council to forward contact details to the Association so that they could be included in any mail outs or announcements. Currently they do not have a number of the names, addresses and/or email addresses of the plot holders and it was felt that this is hindering getting information out.

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Separately I would like to suggest that we reduce the notice to quit time from 6 months to 3 months as this is largely ignored as it is and would reduce the need if not eliminate the need for refunds.'

The Finance Officer, suggested that the termination period should be further reduced to one month's notice.

Councillor Bradshaw was of the opinion that refunds to tenants terminating during the hire period should be stopped, and that the Parish Council adopt a 'No Refund Policy.

The meeting discussed all the points raised and **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that the Tenancy Period be altered to 01 January to 31 December in any year, that the require period to give notice of termination of tenancy be reduced to one month, that the refunding of partial hire charges on giving notice be stopped with immediate effect, and that the Tenancy Agreement should include permission for the Parish Council to provide Names, Addresses and contact details (to include email addresses) to the Herstmonceux Allotment Association.

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

FIN.013.03.16 REVIEW OF F&GP AGENDA: The Finance Officer requested that a 'preamble' item, an item that will appear on every agenda, should include 'To receive Personnel Sub-Committee Report'. All Councillors in favour.

Councillor Mrs Angear brought to the attention of the meeting that SALC had been asked to find a 'Locum' Clerk for the Parish Council in the interim period after the Clerk retires and the appointment and taking up of the new Clerk. SALC had requested additional information, such as the rate of pay, the required hours, and working arrangements.

Councillor Mrs Angear circulated a list of scheduled meetings to the meeting and discussed as to whether all the meetings were required. The meeting agreed that Full Council, F&GP Committee, Planning Committee were required meetings. The F&GP Committee is serviced by the Finance Officer, so no Locum would be required, in this case.

The Building Development Committee would need to be serviced as it was an integral part of the Councils work linking and dovetailing in with the work of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee.

The Environment group of working parties/Committees could submit any written reports direct to Full Council or for consideration via the F&GP Committee, so no additional Locum Clerk time required.

A Locum Clerk would be required to deal with any urgent correspondence as directed by the Chairman or Council, and to see to Agendas, posting of Notices, and Planning Application work. The Locum would be required to undertake all work at the Parish Office and be available on at least one day a week, for three hours to be arranged, for contact by Councillors, if necessary. It was envisaged that the minimum requirement would be 27 hours per month. The hourly rate to be offered by the Parish Council being the full £25 per hour.

Any Locum Clerk would be required to start on 22 March 2016 for a period ending 06 May 2016, with the proviso that the success of, or inability of the Parish Council to appoint a new Clerk may reduce or extend this period.

FIN.014.03.16 APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR: The Finance Officer had placed this on the Agenda, as it had been raised previously by Councillor Bradshaw. The

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current Internal Auditor had been appointed originally in October 2010, and his appointment renewed each year since. Councillor Bradshaw suggested that in the light of the new Audit regime being introduced from 2017 onwards, that this matter is deferred to the next F&GP Committee meeting.

FIN.015.03.16 AUTO-ENROLMENT: The Parish Council is required to have in place a pension scheme available to its officers to join by 01 February 2017. The Finance Officer suggested that a timetable be introduced whereby the Personnel Sub-Committee should prepare its final report to Full Council by December 2016 (two months prior to the Council's Staging Date). The Finance Officer also informed the meeting that some local Town and Parish Councils were pre-empting their staging dates and introducing a pension scheme now, and in some cases backdating them. The Finance Officer suggested that the introduction of a pension scheme should not necessarily be considered on its own, but as part of a recruitment package. If local councils wish to attract a fully qualified Clerk, then in the opinion of the Finance Officer, the recruitment package must be attractive, and must contain a decent pension scheme.

Councillor Nash asked if the Finance Officer could provide any names of Schemes available, and the Finance Officer stated that he could provide a list deriving from a payroll system he used.

FIN.016.03.16 PUBLICATIONS: SALC had approached the Parish Council to ask its requirement of numbers of the publication 'Local Government Review'. Currently the Council buys two copies a month at an annual cost of £34. The meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that two copies were adequate.

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

FIN.017.03.16 INSURANCE REVIEW: Councillor Stewart had kindly undertaken a comparison of the current Insurance Policy with that of another recommended by Councillor Bradshaw, on renewal last June. The Council had instigated a Review of its insurance providers and the Finance Officer was concerned that a report needed to be submitted to April Full Council with recommendations for the Council's insurance provision over a period of one to five years. Councillor Bradshaw offered to work alongside Councillor Stewart to undertake a full review of insurance providers to the local council sector.

The renewal date of the current insurance arrangement being 01 June 2016.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL** that Councillors Bradshaw and Stewart considers all insurance providers to the local council sector and to produce a costed report to the April Full Council covering periods of one to five years long term agreements, for its consideration.

FIN.018.03.16 CLOSE OF MEETING: There being no other business, the Chairman, Councillor Mrs. Angear thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 21.50pm