

HERSTMONCEUX PARISH COUNCIL

Agenda Item: Committee Reports – F&GP

DRAFT MINUTES of the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on **Tuesday 05 July 2016** at Herstmonceux Village Hall, Herstmonceux.

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

S. Goacher, RFO, took the Minutes,

Members of the Public: None.

FIN.01.07.16 APOLOGIES: None.

FIN.02.07.16 DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS:

Councillor Mrs. Angear: Herstmonceux Village Hall, Herstmonceux Bowls Club, Angears Builders.

Councillor Goodsell: Various small maintenance contracts.

Councillor Stewart: Herstmonceux Village Hall.

FIN.03.07.16 DISPENSATION REQUESTS: None received

FIN.04.07.16 PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS: None.

FIN.05.07.16 CURRENT YEAR EXPENDITURE:

The Playground, Horseshoe Inn, Windmill Hill: The RFO referred to the meeting an email that the Clerk had received from Chris & Penny Barry of the Horseshoe Inn regarding the revival of the rundown and unsafe playground at the Inn. The RFO reminded the meeting that the playground was attached to the Horseshoe Inn which were commercial premises. The meeting discussed the matter and it was unanimously agreed that the RFO be asked to reply indicating the general support of the Parish Council in the playground being revived, that the Parish Council advised the need to consult with neighbours in this matter, but that the Parish Council has no powers to provide any financial support for such a project. There may exist some form of financial assistance for regeneration projects available from Wealden District Council, and, therefore, it may be of assistance for the Barry's to contact Wealden accordingly.

Street Lighting: The RFO brought to the attention of the meeting the need for a column in Bagham Lane to be 'tested' as it was now some 20 years old. The cost to the Parish Council of such testing amounts to £10 per column, plus an overall administration fee of £60 to each local council (plus VAT). The RFO will issue an official works order for this column.

Whilst in contact with Simon Hall of East Sussex, the RFO obtained a listing of columns and locations which will be required during 2018-19 (7 columns) and 2020-21 (22 columns), which may change following the testing undertaken in 2018-19. The RFO asked that the **Amenities – Street Lighting Working Group** build the appropriate costs into its reports for inclusion in the 2018-19, and subsequent years estimate requirements.

Handrail, Bagham Lane: Councillor Goodsell referred to the handrail that had been installed in Bagham Lane. Councillor Goodsell stated that he had been approached by an elderly resident who had found that the handrail did not accommodate any assistance to the very top step, and really needed extending. The meeting discussed this and asked Councillor Goodsell to inform the **Amenities – Footpaths Working Group** costs of extending this handrail, so it can be considered at Full Council.

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FIN.06.07.16 PERSONNEL SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT: No Report had been received.

RFO Staff Appraisal: Councillor Stewart informed the meeting that he had undertaken the RFO's staff appraisal on 04 May 2016, and that the RFO had signed his agreement to the comments made on completion of the appraisal form. Councillor Stewart has signed off the report which will be filed accordingly.

Locum Clerk: Councillor Mrs Angear raised the matter of the continuing employment of Mrs. K, Crowhurst as Locum Clerk in the circumstances of the Clerk's impending holiday arrangements. The Clerk is due to be absent from her duties between 25 July and 09 August next, and although the Clerk will make every effort to undertake as much pre-committee work as possible, there will be Committees which will need to be covered. The RFO will also be away but will be taking the F&GP Committee, as usual.

The meeting was very mindful of the additional pressure that the Clerk would be experiencing prior to her holiday and it was decided that the Clerk should contact Mrs. Karen Crowhurst, Locum Clerk, with a view of arranging cover for the meetings taking place during her absence. On the Clerk's return the subject of the requirement for the continuation for the need of engagement of the Locum Clerk would need to be discussed and resolved by the Personnel Sub-Committee.

The New Website: Councillor Nash asked that the Personnel Sub-Committee consider the implementation of the new website and its continued maintenance, which from a recent meeting of the Communications Working Group would become part of the Clerk's work. Councillor Nash envisaged that there would be additional hours required, certainly in the lead up to the website going 'live', and that the date of the website going live should be agreed in complete consultation with the Clerk, not just imposed in any way or form. There is also the consideration of the additional work involved in the Clerk undertaking the website maintenance and whether this would require any increase in the Clerk's contractual hours. There are to be issues with the existing webmaster, to be sorted, which the Clerk is to have a meeting with in the near future. Councillor Von Barnholt is to sort out the issue of 'hosting', all of which is required to be in place prior to the website going 'live'. The meeting agreed that the Clerk's hours should be investigated by the Personnel Sub-Committee and a written report be prepared for consideration by a future meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

FIN.07.07.16 AUTO-ENROLMENT (Workplace Pensions): The RFO had circulated three reports to the Members of the Finance & General Purposes Committee for their consideration. Auto-Enrolment for Herstmonceux Parish Council, an Auto-Enrolment report taking the Council through the various stages of the introduction of Auto-Enrolment, and a report on the Local Government Pension Scheme.

The RFO reminded the meeting that the 'staging' date, the date set by the Pension Regulator when the Parish Council must have a pension scheme in place, is 01 February 2017, however, the Parish Council may introduce a scheme prior to this date, if it so wishes. The RFO was tasked to produce a report which looked at the top pension scheme available, the Local Government Pension Scheme and one in the 'middle' range of schemes on offer, but to ignore NEST the government's base pension scheme. The RFO stated it was almost impossible to designate any schemes that are out in the marketplace as 'middle' of the range, so picked two providers which may be well known, Aviva, and Standard Life. The RFO felt that the Parish Council should also consider NEST, as the scheme offered variables in the calculation and managing of the contributions payable by both employee and employer.

The RFO suggested to the meeting that the reports, as presented, should be referred to the Personnel Sub-Committee so that it may consider the content, refer back for more information, or to consider other schemes not yet considered by the

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RFO. The Personnel Sub-Committee to then provide a written report with its recommendations and reasoning for further consideration by a future meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee. The meeting was in complete agreement with this suggestion, and, therefore, the matter was referred to the Personnel Sub-Committee.

FIN.08.07.16 THE OLD SUGERY: The RFO brought to the meeting on the recommendation of the Chairman of the Council, Councillor Stewart, the matter of the apparent withdrawal of the offer by Mrs. Gardiner of APC Care Ltd, to provide loft insulation material if the Parish Council would arrange and pay for its installation. The RFO read extracts from a series of emails from and by the RFO on this matter starting with an email dated 15 February 2016 in which Mrs. Gardiner said 'This is to inform you that the heating at our offices are not good and if we were to supply the insulation would you be able to get them fitted in our loft.'

The RFO had managed to engage someone to install the loft insulation and on this person approaching Mrs. Gardiner was told that she had not agreed and would not be providing the insulation material to be installed.

The meeting discussed the matter at some length and the RFO was asked to reply to Mrs. Gardiner stating that she had offered the material provided the Parish Council would arrange and pay for its installation and that she has reneged on her agreement. The Parish Council, as her Landlord, in the circumstances will not, therefore, be undertaking the installation of loft insulation material.

FIN.09.07.16 BANKING PROVISION: The RFO had circulated an interim report on Banking Provision, in which he had stated that he had approached all the major banks in Hailsham, Barclays (current provider), HSBC, Lloyds, and the National Westminster Bank. The RFO also approached the Halifax and Nationwide Building Societies, both of which do not provide Community or Commercial banking facilities. The RFO stated that none of the banks offered in branch new banking interview facilities, except for HSBC which the RFO has an appointment later in July.

The RFO felt that the Parish Council ought to update to online banking facilities with its current provider, Barclays Bank, so that it can begin to introduce online banking into its financial administration. The Parish Council would require to have its designated signatories and would require the RFO to be a signatory so that he could administer the online banking facility on a day to day basis. Signatories would be required to have access to a computer, which raised the issue of Councillor Goodsell, who has no computer and does not regularly use a computer. The meeting discussed the matter, and Councillor Mrs. Angear stated that she was willing to step out of the role as signatory to the Council's accounts, at this time.

The RFO had also stated that the reduction from £85,000 to £75,000 in the Financial Compensation Scheme was exposing the Parish Council to approx. £100,000 of its current balance to 'risk', and advocated that the Parish Council would need at least one more bank provider and/or investment to defray the current risk.

It is the intention of the RFO to be able to provide a further report on Banking Provision at the F&GP's August meeting, failing that, a future meeting.

The meeting **RECOMMENDS to FULL COUNCIL** that the Parish Council invoke online banking facilities with Barclays Bank plc as soon as possible, and that it appoints Councillors Bradshaw, Mrs. Kenward, Nash, and Stewart as its bank signatories. That the RFO should become a signatory to all bank accounts to enable him to administer the online banking system(s) and that he should be able to transfer funds between the Current, Business Premium and High Interest Business Premium accounts, and that of any other accounts in the name of the

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Parish Council, as required. That the Parish Council consider investing or placing two further amounts of its current bank reserves of (say) £50,000 each, elsewhere, with an approved banking institution to defray risk. All Members in favour.

FIN.10.07.16 CONSIDERATION OF BREXIT ON PARISH COUNCIL FINANCES: Councillor Nash requested this item be placed on the agenda to highlight the matters of the Parish Council's finances and the possibilities of greater monitoring or restrictions that may be placed on local councils as a result of the general finances of the country following the Referendums result for the UK to leave the EU. The meeting acknowledged that there was to be a period of great uncertainty with regard to the country as a whole, but also felt that there would be repercussions that may well extend down to the financial aspects of local councils. There have been in the past an expectation that the government may well have a look at the balances that are held by local councils and in some way try and claim back or place restrictions on the amounts of precepts that any local council may levy in future. The Parish Council has taken various steps, one being to 'allocate' or 'designate' the majority of its balances for specific use or projects.

The RFO is of the opinion that the Parish Council must continue through its Committee system and its working groups to ensure that there are **written audit trails, with good reasoning** for why the Parish Council has allocated or designated various amounts in its balances and to show the expectation as to when those amounts are to be spent.

The current situation will also lead to local councils having to work together more to provide services under joint partnership agreements, and to achieve 'value for money' wherever it can.

Councillor Bradshaw also stated that the financial aspects of the Parish Council's balances must form part of its Risk & Disaster Management Policy. The RFO also reminded the meeting that all Committees were to have identified areas of 'Risk' appropriate to their Committee for inclusion in the Parish Council's Risk & Disaster Policy review by 30 June 2016. **This is now an outstanding matter.**

FIN.11.07.16 DATES FOR F&GP COMMITTEE: The meeting discussed at length as to whether there needed to be a F&GP committee meeting every month of the Parish Council's calendar year. It was decided that the first Tuesday of each month be set aside for an F&GP Committee meeting, and meetings would only be held if they were absolutely necessary. Items such as Final Accounts, Grants, Estimates, and the setting of the Precept dictated the need for a meeting at a certain times of the year. The requirement for other F&GP Committee meetings would be down to the RFO, who will produce a list of meeting requirements, stating the major items that will need to be discussed at those meetings, and other dates will then be available should there be a need arise for a meeting to take place. All Members in favour of this approach.

FIN.12.07.16 ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA: Grant Application Report
Electronic Banking / Banking Provision

FIN.13.07.16 CLOSE OF MEETING: There being no other business, the Chairman, Councillor Bradshaw thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 20.15pm