

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
HELD ON 24th FEBRUARY 2021 virtually via Zoom

PRESENT: Mr D Boswell (Committee), Mr L Burrows (Chairman), Mr M Irwin (Committee), Mr M I O'Brien Baker (Committee), Mr M Williamson (ex officio). Mrs J Hall.

There were no members of the public.

In attendance: Mrs S Robertson (Clerk), Mrs D Linsley (Deputy Clerk).

1. Apologies: Ms Jones.

2. Interests

2.1 Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI): None declared.

2.2 Local non-pecuniary interests (LNPI): None declared.

3. Actions from last Meeting

Ongoing or on agenda.

4. PUBLIC FORUM

4.1 To allow members of the public to address business on the agenda

There were no issues raised.

4.2 Any issues raised by the public

There were no issues raised.

5. Financial Matters

5.1 Cheques signed between meetings CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

DECISION F2021/2a: To ratify payment of cheques signed between meetings (filed in the office together with minutes). **Agreed.**

5.2 Any pending expenditure transactions

There was no pending expenditure list circulated as there was only one invoice for approval.

DECISION F2021/2b: To pay the following pending expenditure transaction: Code 4062, cheque no. 106080 to BNP Paribas Leasing Solutions – photocopier quarterly rental - £125.45 + VAT £25.09 = £150.54 **Agreed.**

5.3 February Admin Income & Expenditure Report CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes. Noted.

5.4 Financial Review: meeting held on 15.02.21 CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

The Chairman highlighted aspects of the review.

The Clerk reported that changing the cheque signatories was continuing to be difficult with Barclays Bank. She will be requesting a new form and starting the process of adding a new signatory again to try and resolve this ongoing issue.

DECISION F2021/2c: To accept the Financial Review undertaken on 15.02.21. **Agreed.**

5.5 Scope of internal audit: instructions to the internal auditor CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

RECOMMENDATION F2021/2a: That the internal auditor follows the approach for testing as set out in Appendix 9 of Governance & Accountability for Local Councils 2014. **Agreed.**

5.6 Suffolk Pension Fund Annual LGPS Return 2020/21: Clerk to return data by 21.04.21 Noted.

5.7 Rialtas Business Solutions Year End Accounts Preparation: Clerk to carry out initial checks by 09.03.21; on-line closedown 27.04.21 Noted.

5.8 Mandate change form/internet banking Verbal update by the Clerk under item 5.4. Noted.

5.9 Bank reconciliation verification December 2020

Mrs J Hall undertook a bank reconciliation verification (December 2020) on 20.02.21 and reported via email that: "Based on the documents you [the Clerk] have provided, I can confirm that the accounts and bank statements reconcile and that I have no further questions." Noted.

6. Clerk's Report

6.1 Record of decisions made by the Clerk between meetings (as required by The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014

To be presented to the full PC at its March meeting for ratification.

6.2 Council Strategy – to inform next Personnel Working Group meeting in March 2021

Consider agreed RECOMMENDATION F2020/12g: That there is a reappraisal of the Council's direction and how its committees are structured, e.g. with more focus on subject matter such as the Climate Emergency, the Built Environment, Health & Wellbeing (Resolution C2021/1n).

There are a few areas of work where different aspects of the same topic have been dealt with by more than one Committee, but this had not been a problem in the past.

It was noted that the Development Plans Committee had recently been restructured to become the Development, Environment & Transport Committee.

Mr Irwin suggested that the F&GPC's work could be described as focusing on 'compliance' i.e. making sure the PC complies with legislation and best practice with the addition of the 'general purposes' element of its work which covered management of the office and parish room.

6.3 Possible return of face-to-face meetings from 07 May 2021 CR1

The consensus was that many people are still very nervous of face-to-face meetings during the current phase of the Covid-19 pandemic and would continue to be so in May as risks of spreading the virus would still be relevant for many. The measures outlined by NALC (see CR1) would be difficult to address e.g. finding an appropriate venue large enough with all the necessary safeguards in place. Masks would need to be worn making discussions difficult to hear for some. Many venues, larger than the Community Hall, had decided not to open until the end of June at the earliest. Hybrid meetings also require legislation before they can be considered a possible option and require appropriate equipment to allow inclusive participation.

Thérèse Coffey MP had supported the need for the Government to extend the current legislation allowing virtual meetings to take place.

It was noted that the Annual Parish Meeting in April & Annual Parish Council meeting in May can both be held virtually because they both take place before 07 May 2021. Staff can continue to work from home after 07 May 2021. The main difficulty, if legislation does not change, will be the approval of the end of year accounts.

It was not felt necessary to convene a meeting of the Covid-19 Response Working Group at the present time.

This F&GPC agenda had been extended to deal with some items normally considered at the May meeting with a view to shorten potential face-to-face meetings if they are imposed.

The result of widespread lobbying of the Government to extend the legislation is awaited.

7. Annual Review (please note that some policies were missed last year so are included on this agenda, also they are being reviewed now with a view to shortening potential face-to-face meetings)

7.1 Annual Review Programme CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

DECISION F2021/2d: To remove the Quality Parish Council status item in the March section of the Annual Review Programme. Agreed.

Mr Irwin volunteered to undertake the 'Apportionment of overheads' for this year. Agreed.

Clerk to check whether the Lone Working Policy was reviewed in 2019.

DECISION F2021/2e: To accept the Annual Review Programme with the amendment agreed in Decision F2021/2d and any updates necessary with regard to dates of policy reviews. Agreed.

7.2 F&GPC Terms of Reference CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

RECOMMENDATION F2021/2b: To accept the F&GPC Terms of Reference without amendment. Agreed.

7.3 Five Year Plan CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

DECISION F2021/2f: To agree the Five Year Plan without amendment. Agreed.

The Committee considered the following 4 agenda items en bloc:

7.4 Grant Policy CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

7.5 Parish Room Policy CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

7.6 Health & Safety Policy CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

7.7 Equal Opportunities Policy CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

RECOMMENDATION F2021/2c: To agree the Grant Policy, Parish Room Policy, Health & Safety Policy and Equal Opportunities Policy without amendment. Agreed.

7.8 Assets Register (changes in red on full register) CPs – full & summary circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

RECOMMENDATION F2021/2d: To agree the Assets Register 2020/21 as amended by the Clerk. Agreed.

7.9 Employment law, policies, pay

There was nothing new to reported. Noted.

7.10 Facilities e.g. Parish Room (see 5-Year Plan)

Modifications to the Parish Room will need to be made due to the pandemic e.g. the installation of sanitiser dispensers. NALC guidance to be used to help identify necessary modifications.

The Clerk expressed her concern that enough time is given to prepare the office and Parish Room for the safe return of staff to work e.g. adequate time is given to clean both rooms and to ensure documents are properly collated. This would require a temporary halt to work on current projects.

The Clerk highlighted the problem with the current air conditioning system; a closed system whereby the same cooled or heated air is circulated within the office space. The air conditioning maintenance contractor has confirmed that, due to Covid-19, only one member of staff would safely be allowed to work in the office when the air conditioning system was in use.

The office is no longer large enough to accommodate all staff at one time due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The Clerk to begin to plan for staff to return to the office. The Clerk to look into staff continuing to work from home and costings regarding office modifications etc. Agreed.

7.11 Freedom of Information Publication Scheme CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

RECOMMENDATION F2021/2e: To accept the Freedom of Information Scheme without amendment. Agreed.

7.12 Safeguarding Policy CP circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes. Consider RESOLUTION C2020/3g: To withdraw RECOMMENDATION F2020/2c in order to further review the Safeguarding Policy, in particular, the fourth bullet point.

RECOMMENDATION F2021/2f: To accept the Safeguarding Policy as per previous Recommendation F2020/2c which includes volunteers. Agreed.

It was noted that the Village Fete had a Safeguarding Policy which including briefing its volunteers on the matter.

Mr Irwin is the PC's Safeguarding Officer. Noted.

Clerk to add Safeguarding Officer to the list of appointments reviewed annually in May. Agreed.

7.13 CCTV Operational Procedure CPs circulated via email and filed in the office together with these minutes.

RECOMMENDATION F2021/2g: To accept the CCTV Operational Procedure without amendment.

Agreed.

To review the guidance from the Surveillance Camera Commissioner when time allows. **Agreed.**

7.14 August Workshop on Climate Emergency 04.08.21 Noted.

8. Any items for the next agenda

Annual reviews including reminder to complete Registers of Interests.

9. Martlesham Newsletters/Website/Facebook

9.1 Contributions/what has this meeting achieved?

Advertise April Annual Parish Meeting. The committee continues to ensure the Council complies with legislation and best practice, and it carried out a Financial Review.

The following item was not taken in camera as no new information had been received about staff pay.

10. Staff Matters

10.1 Staff pay

No new information received.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 8.55pm.

M. Williamson

Chairman, 03 March 2021