

ALRESFORD PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING - THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 21st November 2023 at 10.00am

Present: Cllrs Frank Belgrove (Chairman), Linda Belgrove, Alistair Broom, Ernie Osborne and Rubina Swash.

Also Present: Mr M Cooke (Clerk) and Mrs A Baxter (RFO and assistant clerk)

Absent: Cllr Ann Wiggins

23/001 Apologies for absence: *To note any apologies.*

Apologies were received from Cllr Wiggins.

23/002 Declaration of interests: *To state any interests in the below agenda items.*

Cllr Swash declared a personal interest in the hanging baskets.

Cllr F Belgrove declared a pecuniary interest in the allotments and the chairman's allowance. He has requested and been given a dispensation to participate on these items.

23/003 Minutes of the last Meeting: *To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting of the 21st November 2022.*

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting of 21st November are true and accurate subject to the following change. To add that Cllr Osborne seconded the proposals in item 22/027 for the grants budget increase to £6,000, the Pavilion Maintenance budget decrease to £5,000 and the approval of the staff budgets.

Proposed: Cllr Broom, Seconded: Cllr Osborne, all in favour.

23/004 To receive an update on actions from the last meeting not covered elsewhere in this agenda.

22/025 Cllr F Belgrove has now been appointed an executive of EALC and will raise value for money and ensure that councils get value. Cllr L Belgrove added that it was only the EALC subscription which went up significantly, we should ask why.

22/026 Done.

22/028 The application form is with Cllr Osborne to complete. This will be done after the meeting.

23/005 Summary of 1st and 2nd Quarters of 2023/24.

The summary has been circulated. To review any material variances and answer any questions. To review reserves.

It was noted that there has been a drop in recycling credits, and it was asked if we can monitor the figures. It could be a timing issue. It was suggested that we ask other councils if they are getting the credits they expected via TDALC.

There is a VAT refund to be claimed on the first half of the 23/24 year as a significant amount of VAT was spent on purchases made with s106 funding.

The increase in pension costs was queried. This is because the basis on which pension contributions are calculated has changed.

We are looking into the latest invoice for the PCSO due to her finish and start dates.

For office equipment we can expect to see the new laptop in expenditure soon.

Mrs Baxter is to share the latest Public Works Loan information with the committee.

The Pavilion lighting and heating is expensive, it was noted that getting solar panels with the aid of a grant should be a priority.

It was asked what is in line 19 Other (Pavilion). These are small one off items that don't fit into the other cost codes, and it isn't worth making new costs codes for them. A detailed breakdown can be provided.

The Pavilion maintenance budget was high because we had budgeted for refurbishing the meeting room.

It was discussed whether items such as borehole maintenance could go into a reserve rather

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than be budgeted for every year.

The clerk has had a staged quote to have the CCTV upgraded and it is expensive. We still need to seek two other quotes from limited specialists.

We were expecting the highways expense to be high with the works that have been done.

Mr Cooke gave an update on Staunton Gate. Our solicitors have completed the conveyancing on our behalf. We are awaiting Tendring's final sign off on the North. Our solicitor has said that TDC are looking to do a direct handover of the south side to us, and our solicitor is pursuing this to ensure that the land is transferred as soon as possible.

We should then receive an amount that can only be spent on maintenance on that site.

We haven't spent much on streetlighting because the account was in credit, but we have reached the end of that credit and now started to pay.

It was noted that the EALC subscription increased by a significant percentage (30%). Cllr F Belgrove will raise it at his first meeting.

It was suggested to thank the volunteers who work on the Alresford Advertiser.

The new equipment at the playground has had fantastic feedback from residents, all paid by s106 funding.

The elections cost approximately £2,700, there was enough in the earmarked reserve to cover it.

The RFO reported that if you removed the capital expenditure from the expenditure then we have spent 49% of the budgeted expenditure. The capital expenditure was all funded by s106 amounts, and it was agreed this was a good result.

23/006 Draft Budget for 2024/25.

To review a draft budget and discuss a precept recommendation for 2024/25. (To be finalised once the tax base figures are known).

The committee reviewed the draft budget. In general a 5% inflation rate has been used, either on known actuals or last year's budget.

No changes to the budgeted income.

No changes to the budgeted staff costs, it was noted that there are staff costs increases which are linked to pay scales.

Budgeted office costs were reduced, by £1,000 for training and £350 for office equipment.

No change to chairman's allowance from 2023/24.

Pavilion maintenance was discussed, and it was decided to put £5,000 into reserves as a separate ringfenced amount. This would then reduce the overall Pavilion budget to £11,140, whilst keeping an amount available for maintenance.

Under playing field costs it was agreed to reduce playground maintenance to £2,300 as there is a lot of new equipment and a lot of the maintenance is now done by the handyman.

The borehole maintenance of £1,150 is to be moved to reserves as a separate ringfenced amount. This reduced the Playing Field budget to £5,300.

The CCTV budget was also to be moved to reserves as a separate ringfenced amount.

For allotments the budgeted water rates look high against the actual spent in 2023/24 but we were previously overcharged by our provider, so we have been offsetting our expenditure against a credit.

The budget for St Peter's Church was discussed. Cllr Osborne asked if the church should still be asking for the annual £600 if the council is paying for more maintenance now. It was discussed that we should ask for a breakdown of what that money is spent on.

It was agreed to reduce the St Peter's Church budget to £3,000 as a more accurate reflection of likely expenditure.

It was agreed to reduce the hanging baskets budget to £1,100. The cost shown for 2023/24 includes the maintenance figure and that cost was used to calculate how much was needed next year.

The Staunton Gate budget does not impact the precept because it will be paid for by funds to come from the developer. When calculating the precept the RFO reduces the budget by

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this figure.

For streetlighting it was discussed that no LEDs have needed changing since they were upgraded.

Under General Expenses the waste bin provision budget was reduced to £1,000.

It was asked what was needed for a website budget, as we need to go across to a gov.com domain and update councillor e-mail addresses. The website needs to comply with legislation and GDPR. It was agreed to budget £1,500 for it.

The grants budget was discussed. It was increased to £6,000 for 2023/24 because of the economic climate and to reflect the 2022/23 costs. It was asked whether we should keep it as £6,000 or reduce it. It was agreed to reduce it to £5,000 which was the 2022/23 budget.

Reserves budgets were discussed (amounts that add to reserves), and it was suggested that as the council will still have some elections reserves left after paying for its May 2023 elections it could take a break from increasing its reserves in 2024/25. We could do this for 3 years and then see how the reserves are looking in the fourth year before the next election. For capital expenditure there is £7,000 in reserves, it was asked if that needs to be increased. It was decided not to do so.

Public realm was discussed, and it was agreed to keep the budget as the council has committed to public realm improvements.

Cllr F Belgrove said that a Band D property in Alresford pays £90.11/year whereas there are quite a few similar sized local Parishes that pay more. Some of the other communities don't get the service of a PCSO. It was suggested that we should publicise this.

It was calculated that the draft budget has been decreased by about £17,500 - £18,000, giving a net budget of about £93,000. The 22/23 precept was £88,230.

A potential increase in the precept was discussed. The clerk suggested that a 5% increase to match inflation would be sensible. The RFO advised that once the tax base increase is known it will be better understood how that will offset the precept increase in terms of individual liability increases. It was suggested that if a £4,000 increase to precept was made, the difference between that and the budget could come from reserves. The amount of desired general reserves was discussed. As it currently stands there is just under £90,000 as a general reserve which is close to the annual budget.

There were different opinions as to whether the budget increase should increase the precept or not.

It was resolved that an increase of £4,000 to the precept is considered once the tax base is known. Proposed: Cllr L Belgrove, Seconded Cllr Broom, all in favour.

23/007 **Barclaycard credit limit.**

To discuss making a recommendation to council to increase the credit limit from £500.

It was discussed that the current limit is too low and is adversely affecting council operations. The £500 limit is reached very quickly over a month. Nothing is purchased on the Barclaycard without it being authorised either by council in a meeting or by the authority of the clerk or RFO in conjunction with the chairman for items below £500.

It was resolved to recommend to council that the Barclaycard credit limit be increased to £1,500. Proposed: Cllr Osborne, Seconded: Cllr Swash, all in favour.

23/008 **Budgetary control and authority to spend.**

Financial Regulation 4.1. To consider making a recommendation to council to increase the limit on the following delegated authority:

the Clerk or RFO/Assistant Clerk, in conjunction with Chairman of Council or Chairman of the appropriate committee, for any items below £500.

It was resolved to recommend an increase to this limit to £800.

Proposed: Cllr Osborne, Seconded: Cllr Swash, all in favour.

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23/009 Financial Regulations.

Review of Financial Regulations. This may possibly be deferred until the next meeting.

Cllr F Belgrove raised FR 5.2 and suggested a slight change to the wording regarding the schedule of payments. FR 5.8 wording needs to reflect the council agreement for the Finance Committee to be able to approve grants up to a maximum of £5,000 in total.

FR 6.7 to remove the approval of direct debits every 2 years by the council.

FR 6.18 it was suggested to remove the clause regarding debit cards. We don't have a debit card, but we'll leave it in.

FR 6.21 a) to change "shall" to "may" in terms of the maintaining of petty cash.

FR 7.3 to add in a clause to state that changes may happen to employee salaries where pay scale changes occur.

Proposed: Cllr L Belgrove, Seconded: Cllr Broom, all in favour.

23/010 Date of next meeting.

The next meeting will be to review the third quarter finances.

This will be in January. Allotment rents are to go on that agenda.

23/011 Review of quarterly bank reconciliations by a non-signatory of the bank account.

These will be reviewed once they have been printed.

23/012 Meeting closes. The meeting closed at 11.41am.

Minuted by Angela Baxter – RFO & Assistant Clerk Contact foapcessex@outlook.com

Table of Abbreviations

TDALC	Tendring District Association of Local Councils
EALC	Essex Association of Local Councils
EH	Essex Highways
SLCC	Society of Local Council Clerks
CiLCA	Certificate in Local Council Administration
FR	Financial Regulation

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