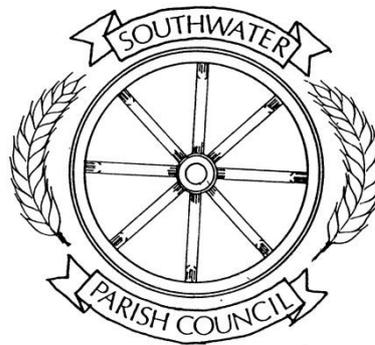


Southwater Parish Council



Finance and General Purposes Meeting Draft Minutes

Wednesday 10th January 2018, 7.30pm
Beeson House
Lintot Square
Southwater
Horsham
RH13 9LA

Committee Members

Cllr Michael Neale (Chairman)
Cllr Geoff Cole (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Laurie Apted
Cllr Pauline Flores-Moore
Cllr Derek Moore
Cllr Hayley Timson
Cllr Claire Vickers
Cllr Graham Watkins
Cllr Neil Whitear

Non Voting Committee Member

Mr Geoff Scoon



SOUTHWATER PARISH COUNCIL

Beeson House,
26 Lintot Square,
Fairbank Road,
Southwater,
West Sussex
RH13 9LA



Clerk: **Mrs.C.M.Tobin**
Cert.Ed.L.Pol.FILCM.,

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DRAFT MINUTES

The Draft Minutes of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSE COMMITTEE meeting held on Wednesday 10th January 2018 in the Council Chamber, Beeson House, Southwater, West Sussex, RH13 9LA commencing at 7.30pm.

Present: Chairman: Cllr M Neale

Cllr G Cole	Cllr P Flores-Moore
Cllr D Moore	Cllr H Timson
Cllr C Vickers	Cllr G Watkins
Cllr N Whitear	

Clerk: Mrs C Tobin

Parish Consultant: Mr D Carden

County Councillor: Not present

District Councillors: Not present

Press: Not present

Members of the Public: None

FG140/01/18 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman asked those present to turn mobile phones to silent for the duration of the meeting, unless the phone call is urgent in which phone calls may be received with permission from the Chairman. In the event of a fire alarm sounding, everyone should evacuate the building via the exits indicated.

The Chairman advised that the meeting was being recorded in accordance with Standing Orders for minute purposes.

FG141/01/18 APOLOGIES

There were apologies noted and agreed from Cllrs Apted and non voting member Mr Scoon.

Councillors NOTED and APPROVED the absence.

FG142/01/18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Clerk to the Meeting referred Members of Council to information issued in relation to the Member's Code of Conduct and Standing Orders and asked whether any Member had anything of note to declare at this point in the meeting.

There were no declarations of interest received.

FG143/01/18 MINUTES

It was RESOLVED by all present having been proposed by Cllr Watkins and seconded by Cllr Moore that the Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 13th December 2017 be accepted as a true and correct record of the meeting.

FG144/01/18 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman indicated that he had no announcements.

FG145/01/18 CORRESPONDENCE

The Clerk indicated that there was no correspondence for consideration at this meeting other than that previously circulated.

Councillors NOTED the information.

FG146/01/18 ACCOUNTS & FINANCIAL MATTERS

The Chairman referred Members to the meeting pack circulated prior to the meeting, containing the sales ledger, income and expenditure and the balance sheet detailing current assets and liabilities up to 4th January 2018.

The Clerk also provided a copy of Month 9 Income and Expenditure and Ring-fenced Accounts.

The meeting pack containing the financial information relating to the current financial position of the Council was APPROVED by all present.

Members present also APPROVED the Month 9 Figures for Income & Expenditure and Ring fenced Reserves produced as at 10th January 2018.

FG147/01/18 BANK RECONCILIATION

Members were referred to the Bank Reconciliation in the meeting pack circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk informed Members that Month 9 was closed on 10th January and copies had been provided.

It was RESOLVED* by all present that the Bank Reconciliation dated the 4th January 2018 and 10th January 2018 (closure of Month 9) was APPROVED*.

FG148/01/18 PAYMENTS SCHEDULE

The Clerk presented to the Council the payment schedule to 10th January 2018 to the sum of £9,524.65.

It was AGREED by all present that the payment schedule dated 10th January 2018 to the sum of £9,524.65 be APPROVED.

The Chairman referred Members of the Council to the proposed budget circulated prior to the meeting and explained there was one change regarding the Leisure Centre pension contribution. He then read out the following statement.

There was an employment body press release on 5th December 2017 regarding the Council employees pay offer. Council employees have been offered a two year pay increase from 1st April 2018. The majority of employees, those on salaries starting £19,430 per annum would receive an uplift of 2% on 1st April 2018 and a further 2% on 1st April 2019. Those on a lower salary scale will receive a slightly higher increase, which is variable according to the pay band. The lower element for Parish Council staff applies to around 23 of the 30 staff.

This offer also includes the introduction of a new pay spine from the 1st April 2019. The effect of the new pay spine still needs to be investigated. With the current staff, this would mean that the current total pay elements base would change the current budget from £401,751 to £406,335, a raise of approximately £4,584 without any grade increases through performance etc. There was an incorrect assumption in 2017/18 that the pension was based on the previous year's figures. This resulted in a variation of around £16,530. The net effect to the Council is 5.25% pay increase on all the elements of pay.

So, the budget for the Council overall is produced to reduce the net effect. In order to get to this position or close to it, the Council has deemed it necessary to consider staff costs and their implications. This is subject to further consultation with relevant persons.

The Council has commissioned a report in relation to the Leisure Centre in order to reduce the deficit, which is currently at £53,782 with the year end prediction of £81,365.

Therefore, in order to get to the position that the Council wants, which is zero budget and in anticipation of the Council's report, the budget for the leisure centre (in that the largest cost is staff and maintenance) there is a need to review these costs. So within the budget, a number of staff options have been looked at and those have been built into the figures presented.

The Committee were asked to consider approval of the staff costs allocated on the budget which is a reduction from last year.

In addition; there is a review regarding the permanent let of Easteds Barn to be carried out; there is a need to budget an extra £30,000 for the neighbourhood plan for consultancy fees. This is due to the increase in the Neighbourhood Plan justification requirements; there is a need to add £30,000 to the open space budget for grounds maintenance budget. This is needed as the current ring fenced monies is insufficient to cover the new grounds maintenance, which after consultation with the residents of Southwater, they agree is required.

The current draft budget includes the Neighbourhood Wardens which have a year 1 cost of £82,000 with a potential grant for set up of £30,000 in year 1. So with that you have the proposed budget figure of £507,644, with a precept of 25.9% increase, which is now open for discussion.

During the meeting, it was clarified that the budget needed to be presented to Horsham District Council by the end of January. So, although the Finance Committee was not designated to make the decision in the meeting, it would need to make a recommendation to Full Council for a final decision on the 31st January 2018.

The Clerk on several occasions during the debate, re-iterated the view of the Internal Auditor, that the general reserves of the Parish Council were dangerously low and needed addressing.

A discussion ensued regarding the implications of the National Joint Council pay rise offer for all local government staff and likely impact on the budget. The Clerk clarified the situation as the staff contracts were now subject to NJC conditions of service.

The Clerk explained that historically, local government staff had not received pay rises for a number of years and some of the pay adjustments were to bring staff in line with the National Living Wage. The Clerk explained the pay offer had been awarded by the national employers for local government and was still in discussion with Unions and since this was the likely agreement, it needed to be accounted for. Pay would also be back dated once an agreement had been reached.

Councillors debated the funding of Neighbourhood wardens; during which several Members expressed concern that currently, insufficient information was available regarding the role and in consequence, the benefits of having Neighbourhood Wardens were not yet fully understood. Neighbourhood Wardens from other Parishes were willing to come and present to Council and time constraints would prevent this course of action being taken before the budget deadline.

The following pertinent points were made during the Neighbourhood Warden debate:

There was acknowledgement that anti-social behaviour was still a problem within Southwater, although it had been worse in previous years.

The offer from Horsham District Council to cover the recruitment costs of Neighbourhood Wardens (and included a grant of £30,000 to Parish Councils in Year One) was a one time offer and would expire on 31st March 2018. If Parish Councils accepted the grant, they were obliged to keep the wardens for a minimum of two years.

A recent public consultation asking if members of the public would support a precept increase resulted in ten responses, of which five said no, two said yes and three did not offer an opinion.

The possibility of alternative funding was considered to include Neighbourhood Wardens in the budget without incurring an increase in the precept to fund them.

Cllr Flores-Moore stated she would not support an increase in the precept to pay for the introduction of wardens.

Cllr Watkins stated although he felt they would be a benefit, he would not support Neighbourhood Wardens, unless they could be shown as cost neutral on the budget and would not incur a precept increase.

Cllr Neale stated he would like them in an ideal world, but felt the Parish Councils financial position would not support it at present.

Cllr Moore stated he felt that Committee could not recommend Neighbourhood Wardens to Full Council at this time and more information should be sought for consideration at a later date.

Cllr Cole stated that any monies potentially allocated to Neighbourhood Wardens should go to building the Parish Councils reserves.

Councillors then addressed the budget allocated to the Southwater Youth Project. During this debate the following points were made:

The actual cost to the Parish Council is £17,000 per annum plus business rates, room hire and utility bills.

There is a question of quantification of value for money and benefit to the local community.

A question was raised regarding whether the current location was the most cost effective for the Parish Council and suitable and sufficient for the purpose of the Youth Project.

The Southwater Youth Project should be included in the budget for 2018-19 and more investigation was required in future years.

Members RESOLVED to recommend the following budget proposal for a final decision at Full Council on Wednesday 31st January 2018. That Full Council consider two proposals:

Firstly, to consider a budget of £511,107 equating to a 25.90% increase reflecting a Band D property of £24.16 per annum. This includes provision for Neighbourhood Wardens as consulted.

Secondly, to consider a budget of £458,107 equating to a 12.85% increase reflecting a Band D property of £11.98 per annum. This precludes provision for Neighbourhood Wardens.

FG150/01/18 COUNCIL PREMISES & LAND*

Leisure Centre

The Clerk advised Members that she had authorised a replacement drinks cabinet for the café area, the previous unit was no longer useable in order to store drinks on sale. The cost of the new fridge unit would be £349.91+VAT.

Councillors NOTED and APPROVED the expenditure incurred.

Members were informed that the independent report commissioned regarding the

review of the leisure centre should be available in early February 2018.

Councillors NOTED the information.

Woodhatch Play Area

As instructed the Clerk had asked that she instruct solicitors for the transfer of this play area from Horsham District Council for a nominal £1. The Clerk has received a letter of instruction with the legal costs being £621.48 plus VAT; this would include all searches and land registration fees. Solicitors are asking for a standard fee on account of £700.

Members were reminded that this area does not come with any commuted sum and that the Council were adopting the land in order to work with local residents who wish to create a local community garden once adoption had taken place.

All present NOTED and APPROVED the legal costs (£621.48+VAT) in relation to the transfer of the Land known as Woodhatch Play Area from Horsham District Council.

Beeson House

The Clerk informed Members that Horsham District Council had provided Tenancies at Will not sub-leases in order to regularise the new rents for the long standing tenants. Most tenants have signed however the Council are being asked to sign a Variation in relation to the Head Lease which, according to legal advice, relates to car parking spaces.

During 2016 all Council documents were moved from CooleBevis to Hedleys, the Clerk has therefore asked for their return to CooleBevis which should then enable Council to check on the original plan of the car parking and building. Once the Clerk is able to verify the changes, the Chairman and Vice Chairman will be asked to sign the relevant documentation and send this to Horsham. The Clerk still awaits two tenancies at will which were issued by Horsham, so that these can be co-ordinated with the others.

Councillors NOTED AND APPROVED THE actions taken and to be taken in relation to Beeson House.

The Clerk reported that the Council were still in communication with Lambert Smith Hampton regarding the service charges for Beeson House, which they have still failed to rectify; once this is carried out then payment will follow.

The Clerk has been advised that the 10% rebate on rents and service charges will be put in the Council's accounts. The Clerk will be writing for confirmation as to how this was calculated, in order to tie up monies being received.

Councillors NOTED the information provided.

At this point the Chairman proposed the suspension of Standing Orders in order to discuss matters relating to personnel.

‘Confidential Minute’

It was RESOLVED that the staff costs reflected in the draft budget be retained and the questions it raised be considered by Full Council on 31st January 2018, but Members noted that any shortfall would fall on the Council should this be necessary.

Members AGREED that the Clerk should write to all Councillors asking them to make every effort to attend the Full Council Meeting on 31st January 2018, as the Budget should be set on that date so that Horsham District Council could be provided with the figure for Southwater Parish Council’s precept on 1st February 2018.

FG152/01/18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 14th February 2018

Meeting finished at 9.35pm.