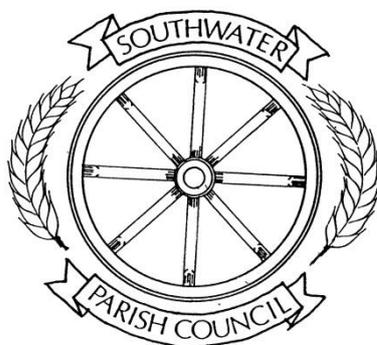


Southwater Parish Council



Full Parish Council Meeting Draft Minutes

Wednesday 7th February 2018, 7.30pm

Beeson House
Lintot Square
Southwater
Horsham
RH13 9LA

Committee Members

Cllr Graham Watkins (Chairman)
Cllr Michael Neale (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Laurie Apted
Cllr Geoff Cole
Cllr Ross Dye
Cllr Pauline Flores-Moore
Cllr Joy Hutchings
Cllr Grant McGill
Cllr Derek Moore
Cllr Rachael O'Toole-Quinn
Cllr Geoff Scoon
Cllr Hayley Timson
Cllr Barbara Varley
Cllr Claire Vickers
Cllr Neil Whitear

Non Voting Committee Members

Vacancies



SOUTHWATER PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on Wednesday 7th February 2018 at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber, Beeson House, Lintot Square, Southwater, RH13 9LA.

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| Present Were: | Cllr G Watkins (Chairman) | |
| | Cllr G Cole | Cllr R Dye |
| | Cllr P Flores-Moore | Cllr J Hutchings |
| | Cllr G McGill | Cllr D Moore |
| | Cllr M Neale | Cllr R O'Toole-Quinn |
| | Cllr G Scoon | Cllr H Timson |
| | Cllr B Varley | Cllr C Vickers |
| | Cllr N Whitear | |
| Co-Opted Non-Voting* | Vacant | |
| Clerk: | Mrs C Tobin | |
| County Councillor: | None | |
| District Councillors: | None | |
| Members of the public: | One | |
| Press: | Not present | |

F111/02/18 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended a warm welcome to new councillors Mr McGill and Mr Scoon. He then asked those present to turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the meeting, unless in an emergency, when they should go through 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 for the purposes of minute taking.

F112/02/18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies noted and agreed from Cllr Apted.

Members NOTED and APPROVED the absence.

F113/02/18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

There were no declarations of interest made.

F114/02/18 MINUTES

Minor amendments were proposed and accepted by the Chairman and so it was RESOLVED* by all present, having been proposed by Cllr Neale and seconded by Cllr Dye that the Minutes of the Full Parish Council meeting held on Wednesday 31st January 2018 be accepted as a true and correct record of the meeting.

F115/02/18 PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET 2018/19

Members were referred to the draft budget for 2018/19. The Chairman asked the Vice Chairman to lead the discussions in relation to the Parish Council Budget for 2018/19.

Cllr Neale responded with the following statement: *“For the budget I would just like to make a statement first which covers some of the points in the budget so that it does go on record. There was an employment body's press release on the 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 be uplifted by 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.*

A review of Easteds Barn is to be carried out with the aim to have it permanently let. This has the potential to increase the income for Easteds Barn from a budgeted £15,000 to £26,000 with a reduction in the overheads.

There is a need to budget an extra £30,000 for the Neighbourhood Plan for consultancy costs. This is due to the increase in the Neighbourhood Plan justification requirements.

There is a need to add £30,000 for public open space money for grounds maintenance budget. This is needed as the current ring fenced money is insufficient to cover the new grounds maintenance contract, which after consultation with the residents of Southwater, they agree is required.

The current budget as you have today has Neighbourhood Wardens included which have a basic cost of £70,000 per year and there is a potential for a £30,000 grant for the set up in year 1. In this budget the current split is £20,000 for the Neighbourhood Wardens, which would equate for 3 months (budget for) Wardens and £60,000 for general funds recovery. So the total will come to £80,000. This point will be for discussion in the meeting but that's what is in the proposal in front of you.

At the recommendation of the auditors the Council should aim to increase its general fund by £30,000. Hall hire, allotment costs and MUGA are to be increased by 3% at the recommendation of auditor. Again, this figure is not shown because the budget was produced before this recommendation was made. But this does represent a potential for extra income. That is the end of the statement”.

Cllr Neale then stated that with regard to the Community Wardens, after consultation with Horsham District Council, it was confirmed that Wardens could be recruited to start from 1st April 2018. This option would incur the full project cost of £70,000. The alternative would be to start part way through the year, on a pro rata basis. The proposed budget reflected Wardens starting three quarters of the way into the financial year. In that situation, the other £60,000 would then be allocated to sit in the general funds recovery pot. This process is flexible; however the Parish Council should aim to have a minimum of £30,000 in the general fund recovery pot by the end of the financial year. Horsham District Council is already in a recruitment phase for two other Parish Councils so would prefer the proposed budget option. It was confirmed there are no termination costs beyond the mandatory two year period from commencement.

The topic was then opened for discussion.

Cllr Flores-Moore said she would like to make a statement thanking Cllr Neale and Cllr Watkins for all of the hard work they had put in to securing the information from Horsham District Council and speaking to the auditor. The confidence of the auditor in this proposed budget satisfied Cllr Flores-Moore that the Parish Council was conducting its business correctly, especially with regard to the proposed correction to the general reserves.

Cllr Watkins stated that the District Councillor needed to be added to the list of thanks. Cllr Vickers added her thanks to both for the amount of effort put in to address the huge amount of concern about the reserve funds and she was pleased that the auditor was happy with the proposed budget. She confirmed that Horsham District Council were pleased to spread the load of recruitment and implementation of Community Wardens and confirmed that they would need to be kept on for a period of two years from the date of commencement. This would potentially take the Parish Council into a third budget, but the cost to the Parish Council in the first and third years would be not as much as if the scheme had been carried out over two years.

Cllr Watkins stated that he thought these budget discussions were important, as the outcome has been to spread the cost over a longer period of time and make Community Wardens a viable option. There would be a need to negotiate with Horsham District Council what role the Wardens will perform for Southwater Parish Council. A working party would be set up to negotiate the roles with Horsham District Council as long as the Parish Council was in agreement with the Neighbourhood Wardens and the proposed budget before them.

The Clerk clarified that the auditors recommended that where budget increases have been carried out in the past they have not been minuted and the 3% increase must be minuted in the future.

Cllr Whitear passed on his thanks for the work that had been carried out. He then asked for confirmation as mentioned that although provision for Community Wardens was in the budget, the Parish Council were not agreeing to have per se and this was subject to the outcome of the working party.

Cllr Watkins stated that they were agreeing to have the Wardens subject to the outcome of the working party and the ability to comply with the desires of the Parish Council. This is also subject to approval at a later Parish Council meeting.

Cllr Neale stated that in the budget, figures are included for the income (i.e. Horsham District Council grant) and expenditure of the Wardens so the agreement of the Parish Council of this budget would include the recruitment of Community Wardens at some point during the financial year.

Cllr Vickers concurred the Council could have to commit to the scheme otherwise the grant will not be received.

Cllr Whitear stated that in that case, two items were required to be voted on; both Community Wardens and the proposed budget and if that was the case, Cllr Whitear could not approve.

Cllr Neale stated that if Members voted for the budget as it stands, the precept increase of 25.41% would include Community Wardens. If it was the desire of the Parish Council to have the Wardens removed then the figure could be revised to reflect this.

Cllr Watkins stated that as far as he was concerned, the Wardens would only go ahead if the role complied with the desires of the needs of the village.

Cllr Whitear stated that the Parish Council did not at this time know what the outcome of the working party would be and asked how it was possible for Parish Councillors to approve something that has not happened yet.

The Clerk explained that Parish Councillors could decide the remit of the Neighbourhood Wardens which would go to Full Council for approval. If the Council desired changes at that stage, then change would be possible before the remit was formally agreed and circulated.

Cllr Watkins stated the Council would agree to the Community Wardens if the agreement with Horsham District Council concurred with the needs of Southwater Village.

Cllr Whitear stated that Members were being asked to vote on an unknown and asked if the majority of the Council disagreed with the recommendations of the Working Party, was it an option not to have the Neighbourhood Wardens?

The Clerk explained that the Working Party would be made up of a selection of Councillors and herself and the negotiations with Horsham District Council would be based on a list of requirements for Southwater Parish.

Cllr Cole made the point that in the previous meeting it was quite clearly stated

that there would be some sort of consultation with the public.

Cllr Watkins said his view would be to include a consultation.

Cllr Cole then stated that the decision would appear to have been made before the consultation could take place.

Cllr Vickers clarified that if the Council did not commit to wanting the Community Wardens they would not receive the grant from Horsham District Council, therefore the decision was quite simple.

Cllr Whitear stated that the Councillors hands were being forced before a chance had been made to make an informed decision.

Cllr Vickers stated that Councillors had the flexibility to pull out of the decision but the commitment in principle needed to be made subject to getting the right agreement in place.

Cllr Flores-Moore stated her understanding was that Neighbourhood Wardens would be included in the budget and a working party would be created and go out to consultation. Then, if a significant proportion of the population presented views against wardens, the £30,000 grant would be handed back to Horsham District Council.

The Clerk stated that what goes in the budget is set in the budget and Councillors would have to go ahead based on that. A working party would need to be formed. As for a consultation, in her view Councillors could not raise a budget then go out to consultation with the public and then say they were not going to do it, because that represented false accounting. It was for the Council to decide the remit for the Community Wardens as they had already consulted with the public.

Cllr Flores-Moore stated that made her feel a bit uncomfortable.

The Clerk reaffirmed that the residents had been consulted although very few returned an opinion.

Cllr Vickers stated that she thought that a decision should be made by the Council on what it thought was in the public's best interest.

Cllr Flores-Moore asked how the Council could make decisions on behalf of the desires of the village, as what she required and what the village required could be two different things.

Cllr Vickers stated that it was not possible to please everybody.

Cllr Flores-Moore stated the Community Wardens deployed in other communities performed different functions and so it was important to get a steer from the community in Southwater before a decision was made.

Cllr Watkins asked Members to focus on the way forward. He summarised that this was a cost exercise that was being looked at and it was in the remit for the

Wardens to comply with what the community required. It was the responsibility of the working party to identify that requirement and if they wanted to consult with members of the public, which he hoped they would do, then that would dictate what the working party would put to Full Council. If the members of the public indicated they did not want Community Wardens then that would be reflected in the recommendation from the working party.

Cllr Whitear stated that if he voted to agree the budget then he accepted the Parish Council would instruct Wardens and until the steering group has reported back he did not feel that he could vote for them.

The Clerk explained that she could not show it on the budget any other way. If the council voted to take Wardens on later in the year and £30,000 was placed in the reserves the budget would need to be revised. She reminded Councillors that it was their duty to set and agree to a budget by the end of the meeting.

The Clerk insisted that a commitment to the budget was a commitment to take Wardens. The auditor made it very clear that an item that resulted in a different action and outcome could not be shown. Hence the reason it had been shown as £20,000 and £60,000. It was quite clear that the intention was to take Community Wardens on in the last quarter of the financial year. Part of the reason for the significant increase in precept was to include Community Wardens.

Cllr Watkins stated that he was just trying to focus on finding a way to make Community Wardens work for Southwater since there appeared to have been a request for them. This had been achieved by understanding the cost implication and then setting up a working party. The working party would have to negotiate a situation in which the role of the Community Wardens would comply with the desires of the Southwater community.

Cllr Scoon asked what the normal budget setting process was. Did a consultation take place prior to budget setting or did the Parish Council set the budget and then put it out to consultation?

The Clerk stated that the budget setting normally followed a consultation. Cllr Scoon asked that if that is the normal process, why was there deviation?

Cllr Watkins responded that this was a different circumstance and then explained that transparency meant setting a budget with Community Wardens included. If it got to the stage where the working party could not negotiate a satisfactory outcome then the Council will not take them on.

The Clerk stated that should the Parish Council decide not to go ahead with Wardens, in terms of transparency, she was not worried about the £30,000 grant from Horsham District Council but she was worried about the accounts being transparent. Her advice was if having agreed the budget the Parish Council decided not to go ahead after raising 18p on a Band D property, a question mark would hang over what to do with that money? It could not be put into reserves but would need to be taken out and the reserves shown differently.

Cllr Cole asked what would happen to the money designated for the provision of

Wardens if the Parish Council decided not to go ahead.

Cllr Watkins stated that the Parish Council had to enter into a partnership agreement with Horsham District Council for the Wardens. If the partnership agreement was unacceptable to the Council at a later stage when the working party entered their negotiations, then the contract would not move on and would stop.

Cllr Cole said that in that case the Parish Council would end up with money which was effectively illegal money.

The Clerk stated that in the event of that situation, she could not see how that money could be placed into reserves.

Cllr Cole asked what could be done with the money.

The Clerk explained that the money had to be shown differently and she would need to seek further advice. She emphasised that a budget needed to be set at the meeting. A discussion had occurred at the last meeting where the Clerk and Cllr Neale were asked to consult with the auditors. This budget represented the best advice if the Parish Council wanted Community Wardens. If the Parish Council did not want Wardens then they should be deducted from the budget with the suggested reserves left in.

Cllr Timson summarise by stating it was basically a choice between Community Wardens in or Community Wardens out.

Cllr Neale and the Clerk concurred.

Cllr Neale stated that with the provision for Community Wardens removed, he calculated the precept increase would be 22.94% and this figure would require confirmation.

Cllr Cole said that he felt that was not the question being asked. The question being asked in his view was, "was the Parish Council going to have Wardens or not and would the Parish Council agree the budget". He believed these were two separate questions.

Cllr Neale stated there was no way to secure a position with Horsham District Council to negotiate the intended role of Community Wardens within a week.

Cllr Watkins stated that he felt the option was to commit to the full budget of £80,000 for Community Wardens and the reserve fund and enter into negotiation with Horsham District Council. If a satisfactory outcome was not met then the money would be transferred into reserves. This could be done if the Wardens were not put in as a specific cost centre item.

The Clerk stated that she would have to take further advice regarding this potential course of action. She added that a public consultation of Community Wardens had already been carried out through social media and the Parish Council newsletter. The volume of responses to that consultation was irrelevant. The Parish Council were the elected Members of the community and it was to them to make the

decision.

The Clerk concluded that at the point of consultation the exact cost to parishioners was stated clearly and she would take exception to any comment suggesting otherwise.

Cllr Watkins stated that he had held various discussions over the last week and generally the discussions had been on the basis of the Parish Council budgeting for Wardens. Everyone was aware of it. Then the Parish Council would pursue a working party to secure an agreement with Horsham District Council. If the partnership agreement could not satisfy the members of the Council then Horsham District Council would be told that Wardens would no longer be pursued. The intention was that Wardens would be agreed, subject to a partnership agreement.

The Clerk stated that she had given her advice to Council and that she could not say anymore.

Cllr Cole returned to how decisions were made within the Parish Council and asked if it meant that the way everything else was run within the Parish Council would be established by these proposals in the budget. For example, were no changes going to be made to other functions in the Council because once a choice had been made it would have to be adhered to. He referred to the Leisure Centre as an example.

Cllr Neale said that with regard to the Leisure Centre the budget had been set with the information available. So if a subsequent review made recommendations contrary to that budget then it would be reviewed.

Cllr Cole asked how else a budget would be constructed and that it was not based on absolute decisions which were invariable.

The Clerk stated that with regard to the Community Wardens, at the end of the day Members either take it out of the budget or leave it in. She reminded them that they were subject to scrutiny by members of the public and the auditor and that transparency was important because this was a new project.

Cllr Watkins stated that Council was not going down the route of raising money with the intention of not spending it.

The Clerk stated that she would hope that the Parish Council would come up with a remit and do the right thing and if the budget was agreed with the Wardens included, that Wardens would be taken on as proposed.

Cllr Watkins stated that he was not proposing an intention not to take the Wardens but that a negotiation would commence to take them on and if it was proved that it was not possible then it would have to be revised accordingly.

Cllr Vickers stated that at Horsham District Council huge budgets were set and it was often the practice to include projects in the budget that did not happen. In that case the monies were transferred to the general reserves and were spent on other projects. As long as the intention was there, it was not an issue, as projects were

always subject to partnership agreements and other funding arrangements that may not happen.

Cllr Scoon stated that the principle of agreeing the budget was that they were agreeing the budget, not that the Parish Council must effect all projects stated within it.

Cllr Watkins stated that it was like other projects like the intention of the Parish Council to outsource Easteds Barn was an intention and to revitalise the Leisure Centre was an intention. The Leisure Centre was in deficit and the intention was to reduce the loss by the end of the current year. What he had been discussing would result in a reduction in that loss which would reflect an increase in the reserves.

Cllr Scoon asked a question regarding the budget allocation for the Parish Council employer's pension contribution and other staff related matters.

At this point in the meeting, as a result of staff related matters to be discussed, the Chairman proposed the suspension of Standing Orders due to the confidential nature of those discussions. This was approved by all present. The member of the public left at this point.

‘Confidential Note’

It was acknowledged by all Councillors present that they were aware of the impending discussions with staff in terms of potential redundancies and those affected by the changes which were discussed at a previous council meeting these being in relation to maintenance and that of public open space.

The Chairman re-instated Standing Orders.

A motion was proposed by Cllr Watkins and seconded by Cllr Neale that a vote be taken on the budget as it stood on the basis that Community Wardens be included in the budget to the sum of £20,000 and a grant application be made to Horsham District Council to the sum of £30,000 in a 12 month period. This agreement would be subject to negotiations via a working party with Horsham District Council to enter into a partnership agreement and would need the approval of the Parish Council prior to commencement. Failure to agree partnership terms would result in Community Wardens not being pursued.

Councillors RESOLVED to AGREE the proposed motion in a vote of thirteen to two in favour of APPROVING the budget of £509,107 a Band D cost of £117.00, which represents a 25.41% increase on the terms stated above.

At this point the Chairman of Council read out the following statement:

It is the intention of this Council and should be the intention of future Councils to maintain a reserve fund of £200,000 as requested by the internal auditors Mulberry & Co. This fund should be achieved within a four year period from this current budget and the fund should be maintained at that level for future years. This is a recommendation of our internal auditors and I hope you will all take that on board at this current time.

All Councillors NOTED and APPROVED the statement.

The Chairman clarified that there would be a quarterly Council review of income and expenditure across all cost centres.

Councillors NOTED the information.

Cllr Moore requested that a statement be made and sent out to all members of the public. The Chairman informed Councillors that arrangements had already been made for a statement to be included in the next Parish Council newsletter and on the Parish Council website.

Councillors NOTED the information.

F116/02/18

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 28th March 2018

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Draft