

Minutes of the meeting of Belbroughton Parish Council Finance Committee held on 21st January 2013 in Belbroughton Recreation Centre

Present: Councillors J Kitson, J Bradley, T Jones, S MacDonald, D Roberts, P Shotton and C Scurrall.

In attendance : Katie Limm (Clerk).

018/13 Apologies : Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs Green and Hine.

019/13 Declarations of interest

No interests were declared on this occasion.

020/13 Minutes of the meeting on 10th December 2012

The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

021/13 Bank reconciliations

The bank reconciliations for the Council's two accounts were noted.

022/13 Accounts for Payment

In addition to the list of payments for January the Clerk circulated a note about the main items since the total payments amounted to just over £23,500. Of this £3,300 was VAT and could be reclaimed. The unusually high expenditure was due to:

- an overtime claim by the Clerk for work connected with the collapsed wall
- the annual payment for the Belbroughton.com domain name and web hosting
- payment of £3,800 for improvement work on the Belbroughton Rec/School footpath
- payments totalling c £13,500 for work connected with the collapsed wall
- payments totalling £2,800 to WCC for a replacement street light and the 10 grit bins ordered last year

All payments were approved, including 2 capital grants: one to Fairfield School PTA for £423 towards the costs of a new storage shed and scooter rack, and the second for £936 to Fairfield Village Hall for work on their new boiler room door. The Committee declined a request from the Village Hall to cover the cost of new locks for the Barton Room since this expenditure did not meet the criteria for the Jubilee Grant. Just over £8,000 had now been paid to the Village Hall as part of this grant.

The Committee noted that expenditure on the lengthsman was running over budget. £2,900 of the £3,200 budget had been spent- leaving £300 for the remaining 3 months of the financial year. This would cover only a couple of hours work a week. The County Council would not reimburse the costs of hours in excess of their original allocation. Since other areas of the Council's Open Spaces budget were underspent- in particular the grass cutting budget was underspent by about £800 -the Committee agreed to vire funds from grass cutting to pay for the lengthsman to continue to work for 5 hours per week until the end of March.

023/13 Collapsed Wall, Belbroughton

An accurate estimate of expenditure on the wall could not yet be made since much depended on the views of the District's conservation officer about the extent to which the wall should be rebuilt. A conservative estimate was that work would cost a minimum of £25,000 if no further major work was needed.

The Clerk circulated a note about the Council's cash flow which demonstrated that there were sufficient funds in the Council's bank accounts and the 7 day notice account to meet

commitments until the first instalment of the 2013/14 precept was received on 1st April. A Natwest deposit of £25,000 would also be maturing on 25 February.

The Committee discussed how the costs of the wall should be funded in the longer term. Committee members views' differed on whether the costs should simply be met from the Council's capital without seeking to recoup the sum used or whether the aim should be to replace the capital from the precept over a number of years. Councillors who supported the former position argued that the cost was an unexpected one-off item and that it was appropriate to use the capital fund for a substantial repair to the Council's asset. Those who supported replacing the capital argued that the costs were a maintenance item and did not meet the criteria agreed by the Council for use of the capital funds. The costs should therefore be funded from the precept. This need not involve raising the precept but could be done by cutting expenditure over a run of years to enable gradual replacement of the capital.

The Clerk pointed out that a complicating factor was uncertainty about local government funding arrangements and whether Parish Councils' scope to increase the precept by more than a small percentage would be curtailed in future years.

The Committee was unable to agree on a recommendation and agreed that this issue should be considered by the whole Council in due course.

024/13 Risk Assessment

The Clerk had circulated the Council's risk management schedule and a suggested format for assessing risks. The Committee agreed that both documents were needed and that the risk assessment schedule should be developed for consideration at the next meeting. It should have separate columns for the probability of an event occurring and for an assessment of the impact. Councillors were asked to send any comments or suggestions to the Clerk.

It was agreed that the safety of the bridge at Dark Lane, Belbroughton should be included in the risk assessment schedule.

025/13 Grit Bins

The Committee considered arrangements for storing and replenishing supplies of grit and concluded that the one ton bags that the County could provide would be difficult to manage. It was agreed that the purchase of smaller bags should be explored as well as whether someone could be found to refill the bins.

It was agreed that additional bins should not be ordered for the current winter season. Since approval and delivery took some time they were unlikely to be in place to provide benefits for the current winter. If the logistics could be sorted out the Council should consider ordering additional bins before next winter. It was also suggested that the County Council should be asked to refill the bins at least once a year.

026/13 Clerk's laptop

The Clerk's current laptop was nearly 6 years old and was failing. The Committee agreed that the Clerk should buy a new laptop at a cost of up to £500 plus software. Cllr Roberts agreed to provide some advice.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

Signed.....Chairman