

Finance and Staffing Committee

Meeting held 7:30pm

Thursday 12th January 2017

Catshill Village Hall, Golden Cross Lane, Catshill

- | | |
|--|---|
| Members present | Cllrs – P Baker (Chairman), T Gillespie (Vice Chair), P Callaway, B McEldowney, M Shephard, O Sweeting |
| In attendance | Clerk - Rebekah Powell; Assistant Clerk – Jim Quinn |
| 1. Apologies for Absence | Cllr J Bate |
| 2. Declarations of Interest | None |
| 3. To consider Members written requests for Dispensation | None received |
| 4. Public Questions | No questions were received |
| 5. Re-opening the meeting | The meeting re-opened to consider the points below |
| 6. Minutes of previous meeting | The minutes of the meeting held 13/10/16 were approved as an accurate record and signed. There were no matters arising. |
| 11. Following confirmation that no support grant will be received by Councils for 2017/18 and recent advice from CALC, to review and confirm Precept requirements | <p>With the agreement of the Committee, item 11 was discussed at this point in the meeting.</p> <p>Members discussed the issue, looking at the Band D increase and the information from CALC regarding Parish Councils demonstrating restraint when setting increases that are not of a direct result of taking on additional responsibilities. It was discussed that the Council had additional responsibilities in the form of and including the Neighbourhood Plan, increased wages and related pension in the form of new employees.</p> <p>It was agreed to recommend to the Full Parish Council that the Precept for 2017/18 be £42,346 being an increase of just under £2 per year for a band D taxpayer from £16.16 to £18.11.</p> |
| 7. Clerks Report to include: | <p>7.1 Appointment of Assistant Clerk</p> <p>Assistant Clerk, Jim Quinn, was in attendance at the meeting. The contract had been signed by both himself and Cllr Sweeting and all Mr Quinn's initial queries had been discussed. An induction period was being carried out which allowed Mr Quinn to meet all Councillors, observe meetings and spend time with the Chair of each Committee relevant to himself.</p> <p>7.2 Communications with David Hunter in relation to the Lengthsman Scheme for 2017/18</p> |

The Clerk had been assured that the Lengthsman Scheme would continue for 2017/18 and although he could not advise the level of funding available until after budget he believed it would be in line with the current year which was £2104.00

7.3 Progress with Insurance Company Investigations

The Parish Council's Insurance is due for renewal in June 2017. The Clerk had contacted Came and Company Insurance Company for Local Councils who have provided a list of documentation that would need to be provided in order to obtain a quote for insurance. At the Clerk's Gathering there had been information provided that the company would come out and assess any assets that the Council have which could be a useful exercise.

The current insurers, Zurich, had been asked to provide a quote but had a 90-day window for this from the due date of the renewal. They did however, estimate £1128.33 to include 2% tax rise and subject to increases in cover, wage roll, employees and claims experience affecting the cover. They do not provide a service to assess assets. The current payment for insurance, to include the cover for the bonfire event and war memorial was £961.76. It was suggested that AON could be another company to approach for a quote.

7.4 Progress with Tender for new garden contract

The advert would be going into the paper that day for a week and would be an 8x3 inch advert in both the Bromsgrove and Redditch Standard and will be online for three weeks. The Clerk had already had contact from two contractors and would also be mailshotting other local contractors in addition to the advert, which would also be displayed on notice boards and on the website. A meeting had been arranged for 2nd February to open the tenders and review the contents with the suggested decision being taken to the FPC at the end of February.

It was requested that the mailshot include Birmingham City Council due to their assistance with the spring planting of bulbs and Singletons Nurseries.

7.5 To note the completion of the VAT return

The VAT return will be sent soon and will recall a value of £1805.88 into the bank account.

7.6 Investigations regarding:

7.6.1 Asset Register Figures

There had been some concern in the past regarding the asset register and the figures that are used in the document, which is currently the purchase value of the items. Following discussions at the Clerks Gathering the Clerk was informed that the asset register only needs to have this value for audit purposes. However, it can have a current replacement value added for Insurance purposes if the Council so wish, hence the Clerks request from the Insurance companies contacted so far.

7.6.2 Retention Policy

Investigations had been carried out regarding the policy, including templates from other Council's and a Legal Topic Note from NALC issued in September that year. The Clerk would continue with the research and produce a policy for consideration at a future Finance and Staffing Committee. The Parish Council already have the Worcester recommended retention document but to update this with relevant information and produce a policy would be beneficial.

Cllr Baker suggested he could assist with this.

7.6.3 Council Terms of Reference

The Clerk's research would seem to suggest that this is something that Town Councils have but not Parish Councils. The Clerk had contacted Richard Levett at CALC to confirm but was yet to receive a response.

7.6.4 Data Protection Policy Queries

The Clerk had provided a report with the answers to the queries raised about this document. (please see attached)

7.6.5 Freedom of Information Policy Queries

The Clerk had provided a report with the answers to the queries raised about this document (please see attached)

Advice had also been requested regarding the application of an 'Out of Office' response on emails. However, due to the way that the Clerk's emails work by being held on a server then downloaded, the out of office replies do not send until the email account is opened which does not assist with the need for an 'Out of Office' response. There doesn't seem to be another way around this.

Items Carried forward: Research regarding Corporate Strategy: Community Engagement document; Addition of Item to Media Policy (Communications Policy) in relation to procedure following possible unsatisfactory contact from Parishioners; Amendments to Internet and Email Acceptable Use Policy as per 16/02-8.5 (Cllr P Baker and Clerk); Creation of a document retention policy. It was noted that Cllr Baker would assist with these items.

8. **To discuss and agree in principle, options for the administration of the Village Hall Finances and Salaries**

Cllr Sweeting reported. The Council have previously agreed to assist the Village Hall with the employment and administration of a Village Hall Supervisor. Claire Wing was now in place in this role. Investigations into the admin of the HMRC side of the situation would mean setting the Village Hall up as an employer before being able to add Claire as an employee. This would be a fairly complex process possibly for a charity. The suggestion is that the contract remains with the Village Hall but the Parish Council operate the PAYE on their behalf, effectively acting as an agent. There would need to be a service level agreement in place in order to ensure the roles of the Village Hall and the Parish Council/Clerk are clear.

Cllr Sweeting discussed the possibility of the Parish Council taking over the entire administration of the Village Hall Finances.

Members discussed this in regards to process and risk involved.

It was agreed in principle to take the suggestion to the FPC that the Village Hall would employ the Parish Council to administer accounts subject to a satisfactory Service Level Agreement and Indemnity Insurance being in place against Financial Malpractice or debts.

9. **To receive a report from Cllr Callaway regarding a suggested Savings Account and possible alternative bank account for the Parish Council (as per minute 16/10-11)**

To include:

- **Agreement of location for future savings investment**
- **Amount to be invested, being 50% of the Precept**
- **Movement of any interest gained into the Council's main bank account and review of the Investment policy in relation to this**

Cllr Callaway had provided a report (see attached). Unfortunately, since this had been created the 31-day notice savings account had been withdrawn and as the other options did not allow instant access to accounts, these would not be suitable.

Further investigations would be carried out. It was suggested that there was an option to invest with WCC or BDC Finance Departments and that this

should be looked into.

Members discussed the suggested Natwest Community Banking Account for use as the Parish Council's bank account. It was noted that unlike the current bank, there was no charge for services and there was an option to obtain a debit card that could be limited for use by the Clerk when making purchases on behalf of the Parish Council.

It was agreed to move from Unity Trust Bank to Natwest Community Bank for the Parish Council's working bank account.

Members thanked Cllr Callaway for his hard work in researching the information.

10. **To review the following policies**

10.1 Employee Appraisal Policy (to be adopted)

It was agreed that Cllr Baker should reduce the document that was completed at appraisal to one page and include a section on training. This would be brought back to a future Finance and Staffing Committee.

It was agreed that Cllr Sweeting and Cllr Baker would conduct the Clerk's appraisal with this document as soon as possible.

10.2 Financial Regulations and Financial Controls

It was noted that the account name may need changing in this document subject to the agreement to move bank accounts.

It was agreed to endorse both these documents subject to this alteration.

10.3 Freedom of Information Publication Scheme

The Clerk noted that there was no longer a need for the reference to a Local Charter within the document.

It was agreed to endorse this policy subject to this alteration.

10.4 Investment Policy

It was noted that point 3.5 was not needed within this document

It was agreed to endorse this policy subject to this alteration.

10.4 Complaints procedure

Members discussed the need for a section regarding informal resolution of a complaint. A phrase to suggest the use of a 3rd party arbitrator subject to the complainant agreeing to abide by the decision, should be added to the policy

It was agreed to endorse the policy subject to this alteration.

10.5 Standing Orders

The Clerk informed Members that following previous agreement this document should include reference to the Co-option procedure that had been adopted. Unfortunately, the Clerk only had this document in PDF format which did not allow alteration. The Clerk had requested assistance to have this converted to a Word file but this had altered the layout a little so the whole document needed some work.

It was agreed to endorse the content of the Standing Orders.

10.6 Health and Safety Policy

There was discussion as to whether the Parish Council should be subject to PAT testing of equipment. It was not thought that this was needed, however, the Clerk would investigate further.

It was agreed to endorse this policy.

10.7 Dignity at Work Policy (Bullying and Harassment)

It was agreed to change the title of this document to Member Employee Protocol

It was noted that the Equality Act 2010 set out 9 strands of equality/discrimination and that these should all be included under section 12 of this document – race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief,

gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, age, marriage or civil partnership.

The Clerk suggested that the Media policy should also be checked for this as there was also a reference of this type within that document.

It was agreed to endorse the policy subject to these alterations.

11. **Following confirmation that no Support Grant will be received by Councils in 2017/18 and recent advice from CALC, to review and confirm the Precept requirements.** With the permission of the Committee this item was considered earlier in the meeting.
12. **To agree the expenditure for the Firework Display following a request for a quote from G Force Fireworks** Members discussed the options of differing displays and decided that the nature of the event did not require a display set to music for a higher expense. Members also discussed the need for a bonfire debrief and clarification as to who would be running the event this year following an expression of interest from the Meadow Committee.
It was agreed to hold the bonfire event on 4th November
It was agreed to purchase a firework display to the value of £2500 and that any additional expenditure due to increase in price of Fireworks would be dealt with at the time.
It was agreed that the Clerk would find out at what point the deposit for this event would be lost.
13. **To agree an additional meeting of the Finance and Staffing Committee to include consideration of the following:**
- **Comparison and agreement of Insurance Quotes ahead of renewal date in June**
 - **Review and agreement of Lengthsman Contract ahead of contract renewal in April**
 - **Agreement of Appointment of Internal Auditor, Diane Malley**
 - **Further policy reviews**
 - **Feedback from Internal Accounts Scrutiny**
- It was agreed** to hold a Finance and Staffing Committee on 2nd March 2017 at 19:30 hours in Catshill Village Hall Committee Room

This meeting ended at 21.25 hours

.....
Chairman, Finance Committee
Catshill and North Marlbrook Parish Council

Investigation into Data Protection Policy and Freedom of Information Policy

Minutes:

9.1 Data Protection Policy

Members discussed the element of the policy relating to the fee for administrative costs in section 3.1. **It was agreed** that the Clerk should carry out investigations as to whether it was a legal requirement for this to be included and if so, what the current maximum charge was for administration of this kind.

Findings:

Data Protection – Legal Topic Note (LTN) 38, January 2013

Rights of Data Subjects

16. A person about whom information is held (a 'data subject') is entitled (usually for the payment fee of £10) to be informed by any 'data controller' whether any information is held on him/her and to:

A description of the data; and

A copy of the information in an intelligible form

Freedom of Information – LTN 37 July 2009

20. A public Authority may charge a fee for dealing with a request. This is calculated according to the 'Fees Regulations'. An authority is not required to comply with a request if to do so means exceeding a cost limit set out in the regulations. This is £450 for local authorities. However, in such cases the authority may still charge for providing the information, but will have to calculate the fee according to regulations created for that purpose.

Minutes:

Members also discussed point 5 of the Procedure and the implications of a request that would take 18 hours of the Clerk's time, with the ability to refuse this. **It was agreed** that the Clerk would investigate whether this figure was a legal requirement or if it could be altered due to the impact a request of this magnitude would have on the Council and the Clerk.

Findings:

Information Commissioners Office – Requests where the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit – Freedom of Information Act

Page 4

Estimating the costs of complying with a request

Regulation 4(3) of the Fees Regulations states that a public authority can only take into account the costs it reasonably expects to incur in carrying out the following permitted activities in complying with the request:

- ☐ determining whether the information is held;
- ☐ locating the information, or a document containing it;

- ☒ retrieving the information, or a document containing it; and
- ☒ extracting the information from a document containing it.

10. All public authorities should calculate the time spent on the permitted activities at the flat rate of £25 per person, per hour.

11. This means that the appropriate limit will be exceeded if it would require more than 24 hours work for central government, legislative bodies and the armed forces, and 18 hours work for all other public authorities.

End of Report

Rebekah Powell

Clerk to the Council

Cambridge and Counties Bank – Savings Accounts **Research by Cllr Callaway**

The Cambridge and Counties Bank. They have 3 business savings accounts which are suitable for parish and town councils. They are:-

- a. 31 day notice Business Savings Account issue 1 paying 1.10% interest which is paid annually but calculated on a daily basis; or paid monthly at 1.09%. Minimum deposit is £10,000. Interest drops to 0.1% if the cash level drops below this amount. There are no transaction charges and has monthly statements. This account will be linked to the council's own nominated existing business current account which will be used for all withdrawals from and payments into this account. The application form can be downloaded and the account opened by sending in the completed form together with a cheque drawn on the council's own bank account.
 - b. 1 year fixed rate bond paying 1.40% interest on £10,000 minimum investment. No withdrawals are permitted and the account cannot be closed before the 1 year term is up.
 - c. 3 year fixed rate bond paying 1.90% interest. The conditions are same as for the 1 year bond.
- All further information on these accounts can be obtained from the bank's website.

Tel:- 0344 225 3939

Clerk's additional notes: As options b) and c) do not permit withdrawals these would not be an option for our Emergency Fund. In the same way, option a) needs 31 days' notice to obtain the money. However, in an emergency, it may be possible to fund from elsewhere whilst awaiting access to the account.

Bank suggested by Cllr Callaway

Natwest Community Bank- This bank issues debit cards on this business account. There are no charges for operating the account.

End of Report
Cllr P Callaway