

Minutes of the meeting of Belbroughton Parish Council Finance Committee held on 17th October 2011

Present: Councillors J Kitson, J Bradley, K Green, C Hine, T Jones, S MacDonald, D Roberts, and P Shotton. Clerk : Katie Limm.

315/11 Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillor Scurrall.

316/11 Declarations of interest

No interests were declared.

317/11 Minutes of the meeting on 19 September 2011

The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved and signed by Cllr Kitson as a true record.

318/11 Bank Reconciliations

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

319/11 Accounts for payment

Payments for October set out in a schedule circulated by the Clerk were approved.

320/11 Income and expenditure

The Clerk had circulated a budget update for the first 6 months of the financial year. The overall picture was that ordinary income and spending were in line with expectations. Other income was also in line - but the Clerk had written to Central Networks to ask about unpaid wayleaves for 2009/10 and 2010/11. If these were made 'other' income would be above projections. To date there had been little expenditure on grants or project for the current year- but payments of nearly £3,000 had been made for grants offered in 2010/11. Grants slightly exceeding the Council's budget of £5,000 had been offered for 2011/12; whilst expenditure of around £8,700 had been committed on projects (£1,450 on grit bins if approved by WCC; £1,700 on the Hartle Lane bus shelter; £500 on resurfacing in Forge Lane, Belbroughton; and £5,200 for the multi-goal at Fairfield Recreation Ground).

321/11 Parish Council's budget for 2012/13

It was agreed that a budget sub-group should be set up to make recommendations to the Committee at its November meeting. Cllrs Kitson, Green, MacDonald and Scurrall were nominated to serve on the sub-group.

322/11 Contracts

New grass cutting contracts were needed for 2012 onwards since the current three year contracts were coming to an end. One key issue was whether to offer further 3 year contracts. The current contracts had contained provision for the contract to be terminated if performance was unsatisfactory. Quality standards and monitoring needed to be considered for the new contracts. It was agreed that Cllrs Roberts and Jones would

review the current arrangements with the Clerk with the aim of making recommendations for consideration at the next Finance Committee meeting.

The Committee also agreed that the employment of two gardeners had been worthwhile and that definite improvements could be seen. It was therefore agreed to recommend that provision for gardening should be included in the budget for the next financial year.

323/11 Village Tidying

The Committee discussed the tidier's contract and performance. There were problems with monitoring since the job was flexible about when the hours would be worked. This had been made more difficult by the tidier's persistent failure to submit regular timesheets. However there was a very detailed specification of the roads to be tidied and how often. The general view was that the Council could not demonstrate value for money from the tidier's employment. The Committee agreed that the role should be reviewed, including considering the hourly rate paid for this work, and that the Council should consider terminating the current contract at the earliest opportunity. The Clerk was asked to explore this and provide further advice.

324/11 Double taxation

Peter Bridge spoke to the Council about an anomaly affecting parished areas which meant that residents of parishes could pay twice (through the parish and district/county precepts) for services like street lighting and maintenance of green spaces. The Clerk explained that the County and District Councils had powers to provide these services and to decide what level of service to provide. The County Council had decided not to provide street lighting outside the main urban areas. If the Parish Council did not provide lighting in the two villages then the County Council would not provide this. Similarly the District Council would not take on maintenance responsibility for the green spaces that the Parish Council had acquired or decided to provide. There was an apparent unfairness, but the District and County Councils' argument was that everyone (in parished and unparished areas) could benefit from the lighting and green spaces that they provided in the main centres of population. The parish precept paid for additional provision.

The Committee decided that, particularly in the current economic climate, it would not pursue this issue.

325/11 Christmas tree and lights

A decision about the purchase of a new tree and lights for Fairfield was deferred because the village hall committee was considering a potential new site for a Christmas tree. A proposal would be made by the Committee in due course.

Cllr Bradley undertook to check the arrangements for the tree in Belbroughton.

326/11 Finance Committee's role

It had been suggested at the previous Council meeting that the Finance and Planning Committees should consider whether there was any additional work that they could undertake to reduce the full Council's workload. It was agreed that Cllrs Kitson and Green would consider this with the Clerk, but the general view of the Committee was that the current scheme of delegation struck the right balance. The Clerk said that the Committee's planned review of the Council's financial regulations was also relevant.

327/11 Maintenance items

Cllr MacDonald said that he would report two items in Belbroughton to the County Council – damaged railings opposite the Talbot and a bus stop in Hartle Lane that was unstable.

Cllr Bradley said that one of the new trees on Sylvesters Corner had died and asked if the tree surgeon would replace it. It was agreed that the Clerk would pursue this and also arrange for him to undertake the Council's annual tree inspection.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm

Signed Chairman