

WESTERHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee
held on Monday 11th March 2024 at 7 pm in Russell House,
Market Square, Westerham

Present: Councillors: Mrs S Sheen (SS) - Chairman
Mr E Boyle (EB)
Dr S Kay (SK)
Mr N Proudfoot (NP)

In attendance: Town Clerk: Mrs A Howells (AH)
Finance/Project Officer: Mrs D Marshall (DM)

Item		Action
1.	<u>Apologies for Absence</u> Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Hussain – personal commitment.	
2.	<u>Declarations of Interest not previously declared</u> None.	
3.	<u>Minutes of the Meeting held on 8th January 2024</u> Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 th January were approved at Council on 22 nd January.	
4.	<u>Information items arising from the minutes of the previous meeting not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda</u> 5.5 Metro Bank – The Finance Officer to check if Cllr Lord had visited Metro Bank regarding signatories. 12 Cllr Proudfoot had received the Housing Stock information but had more queries which he would raise at Council.	
5.	<u>Finance</u> 5.1 Responsible Finance Officer Report (Finance Officer) – The Report was received with thanks. The Finance Officer reported that: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit - A clear mid-year internal audit report had been received. Committee noted its appreciation to the Finance Officer. • Election May 2023 - An invoice for the May 2023 Election costs had been received and was slightly lower than estimated. • Crockham Hill Car Park – Business Rates - Neither of the local town councils pay business rates on their playing field car parks, but they did on all their other car parks, regardless of whether there was a parking 	

fee or no charge. Sevenoaks Business Rates department had no record of WTC being sent the form and as it referred to a 'new property' they suggested that it may have been automatically generated by the planning system due to our planning application. They suggested that we return the completed form, as requested, and provide further information about the facility and how it was used. Government guidance on the rating of properties suggests that there should be an exemption: 'The exemption from rating of parks provided or maintained by a local authority, Para 15 of Schedule 5 to LGFA 1988 (as amended), extends to any part of such park as is available for the free and unrestricted use by members of the public for the purposes of sport or recreation, e.g. cricket, football, bowls, tennis etc.'

It was agreed that the Finance Officer would return the form and provide information about how the Playing Field was used.

- Russell House – Car Park re-surfacing - Southern Landscape Contractors (installers of the perimeter footpath around KGF) had agreed to provide WTC with a quote for resurfacing and an indication of when this would be appropriate based on the surface's current condition.

Following discussion, it was agreed to also ask the contractor if an ECO solution was available/suitable for this area.

- King George's Playing Field - The works to construct a perimeter path around KGF were completed mid-February, long periods of wet weather caused an inevitable delay. The works had been completed to a high standard, with very little impact to the field. The path had been well received by the public and was being well used. The works kept to budget, with the agreed additional expenditure to add additional spurs. Skatepark - Free skateboard lessons had been organised with Y&C for the Easter & Summer holidays. It was anticipated that once the new APFOS Clerk was established and the financial year end completed, planning steps for the final stage of KGF re-development could be undertaken in the second half of the year.
- The employee overtime was noted.

5.2 Payments and receipts list to 31st January 2024 – Cllr Sheen had no issues to bring to the Committee's attention, minor queries were explained. The Payment List would be recommended to Council for approval.

5.3 Committee Accounts to 31st January 2024 – The Accounts had been circulated and there were no queries. The Accounts would be recommended to Council for approval.

The Finance Officer reported the following in budget concerns: - F&GP had 4 budget lines that would be overspent: office expenditure, travel allowance, rates, jubilee clock. This expenditure would be funded by viring the underspend in other areas and by the increased interest received – it would not affect F&GP bottom line.

APFOS allotment water overspend would be funded by viring from the allotment maintenance budget. Seats and open space maintenance were also overspent, which were conscious decisions made by APFOS that would be funded by viring underspend in other areas. APFOS bottom line would remain within budget.

DM

	<p>H&L and Y&C had no budget concerns.</p> <p>5.4 Audit Plan 2024/25 – The Finance Officer reported that WTC operation had not changed nor had there been any financial or legal changes. Following discussion it was agreed to recommend the Plan to Council.</p> <p>5.5 Effectiveness of Internal Audit – The Effectiveness of Internal Audit had been circulated and reviewed and it was agreed to recommend its approval to Council.</p> <p>5.6 Financial Risk Assessment - The Financial Risk Assessment had been circulated and reviewed and it was agreed to recommend its approval to Council following some small amendments.</p>	DM
6.	<p><u>Land Issues</u></p> <p>6.1 Doctors Surgery – Surgery Rent - The Finance Officer had written to the Practice Manager outlining the process that had been followed to advise of the increased rent and asking for prompt payment of the shortfall. This was received by return.</p> <p>Following discussion, it was agreed to discuss the replacement of the main entrance to the Surgery at the next meeting.</p> <p>6.2 Churchill School – The Town Clerk reported that a quote of £2,350 plus VAT had been received to draft a new lease. Following discussion, it was agreed that this was too expensive as the annual rent was only £200 per annum. It was also agreed that the Finance Officer would research the cost of tree work over the last few years, future rent would be discussed at the next meeting.</p> <p>6.3 Currant Hill Allotments Working Group – Following discussion it was agreed to recommend to Council that a meeting be set up with the Landowner and WTC would be represented by Cllrs Kay and Lord to discuss a lease for Bloomfield Allotments.</p>	AH/DM
7.	<p><u>Russell House</u></p> <p>7.1 Maintenance Plan – The Maintenance Plan was noted.</p> <p>An email had been received from the Fire Risk Assessment Contractor stating if a review of the assessment was required, this could be carried out at a cost of £375. Following discussion, it was agreed not to undertake this until 2025.</p> <p>7.2 Photocopier contract – The Town Clerk had circulated three quotes and following discussion it was agreed to enter a five-year contract with Ricoh. This was based on cost and previous good experience of Ricoh machines and maintenance.</p> <p>7.3 Anti-social behaviour issues – minor littering only.</p>	
8.	<p><u>Policies and Procedures</u></p> <p>The following Policies had been circulated: -</p> <p>8.1 CCTV Policy – The Town Clerk reported that the CCTV Policy had been updated. Following discussion, it was agreed that the Policy would be recommended to Council for approval.</p> <p>8.2 Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Policy – Cllr Sheen reported that the ACAS Equality, Inclusion and Diversity recommended Policy had been used as WTC's Policy needed updating. Following discussion, it was agreed that the Policy would be recommended to Council for approval.</p> <p>8.3 Asset Register – The Finance Officer reported that the Asset Register had been updated. Following discussion, it was agreed that the Register would be</p>	AH AH

	<p>recommended to Council for approval subject to minor amendments.</p> <p>8.4 Remuneration Policy - Following discussion it was agreed that as there had been no new legislation and WTC practices had not changed, no changes were necessary. The Policy was approved.</p> <p>8.5 Overtime and Time Off in Lieu Policy – The Policy had been circulated and reviewed. Following discussion the Policy was approved.</p> <p>8.6 Employee Handbook – The Town Clerk reported that the Employee Handbook had been recently written due to two new employees joining WTC. This was a work in progress The Handbook had been circulated and was approved. Thanks were given to the Town Clerk for this work.</p>	DM
9.	<p><u>ECO Policy Action Plan</u> The ECO Action Plan had been circulated and the reducing plastics in the office environment had been noted.</p>	
10.	<p><u>Correspondence</u> 10.1 An email had been received from a developer regarding Currant Hill Allotments. The Town Clerk to respond that details would be kept on file.</p>	
11.	<p><u>Reports from Councillors</u> Cllr Sheen reported that she had attended a NALC seminar – Winning at the Strategic Funding Game on 15th December 2023.</p>	
12.	<p><u>TN16, Crockham Hill Village newsletter and Website</u> Finances - precept</p>	
13.	<p><u>Matters for District and County Councillors</u> None.</p>	
14.	<p><u>Further Matters for Consideration at the next meeting</u> Business rates.</p>	
15.	<p><u>Date of next meeting</u> Monday 13th May 2024</p>	
	<p>Part 2 Pursuant to Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (admission meetings) Act 1960. The Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the under mentioned item on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business concerned.</p>	
16.	<p><u>HR Minutes</u> 16.1 The HR Minutes were approved. 16.2 Details of the new Assistant Clerk who was commencing employment on 13th March were noted.</p>	

The meeting was concluded at 8.30 pm.

Minutes confirmed as a correct record:

Chairman