

EMPLOYMENT, FINANCE & STRATEGY GROUP MEETING

Thursday 19th September 2024, Minutes

1. **Present:** Cllrs Riordan, Hotson, Martin, Sharp plus Clerk and RFO (part)
2. **Apologies for Absence;** Cllrs Arger and Perry
3. **Dispensations – Cllr sharp and Martin regarding item 7 – will not vote**
4. **Minutes of previous meeting – 15th August 2024**

Cllrs present agreed.

Currently no sponsor for the Christmas Volunteer Awards – Usually about £300, Cllrs to ask around local business.

- **HR Group / training verbal update**

Clerk gave a verbal update regarding HR training for Cllrs. The basic agenda for the training is appraisals plus HR Law / Civility / Respect

Date and Time – 30th October 7:30pm

Venue Headcorn village hall – (thanks Stefan)

Trainer – KLAC / Worknest Trainer

Attendance 20 spaces available, potentially a few more.

Headcorn – 5

Staplehurst - 6

Marden – 4

Cranbrook - 4

Hawkhurst – 2

Fee spread between Councils based on attendees

1. Cost from KALC = £1,750 Plus VAT
2. 20 Cllrs = £87.50 per Cllr
3. If more attendees the cost per attendee will reduce (note Horsmonden now interested as well)

Clerk report to Council

5. **Action plan**

1. Risk Assessments – SCEnic need to consider Youth Club, Bell Lane and Surrenden Field then report back to Council

3 Struggling with Youth Club support – Clerk asked to email other Parishes

6 Volunteer Awards – seek new sponsors

9 Cllr Riordan organise Cllr Workshop on “Strategic Action Plan”

6. Caretaker Risk Assessment - attached

Group discussed draft Caretaker Risk Assessment and agreed unanimously to recommended approval to Council, continue to support and monitor Clerk seek Worknest advise and report to Council

7. Model Publication Information

The Group discussed the draft, Basic Parish Allowance, agreed Clerk to notify Council of increase at next meeting.

Then discussed Model Publication Information and Group agreed to recommend to Council the amended Model Publication Information report

8. Meeting with Developers Policy

The Group discussed the draft “Meeting with Developers Policy” and felt that Council can meet with Developers to try and get the best for the residents but only in either public presentation or with MBC organising the meeting.

Cllrs / Staff should not meet developers on their own or small groups informally, if they do they put themselves and the Council at risk.

Group agreed unanimously to recommend to Council the amended Meeting with Developers Policy

9. Contracts

The RFO to lead discussion;

Npower – unmetered street light contract, only supplier £410.49 annual contract roll over TV licence for Youth Club - £169.50 annual renewal

Escom – sani-bin at Bell Lane toilets - £106.23 annual contract

Group agreed unanimously to recommend to Council

10. Staff Holidays 2024/25 – verbal update note

Clerk – 11 days left, but already booked some holidays and will take all holiday entitlement by 31st March 2025

RFO – 20 days left, but already booked some holidays and should take all holiday entitlement by 31st March 2025

POA – 17 days left, but already booked some holidays and should take all holiday entitlement by 31st March 2025

until 31st March 2025

Caretaker – 0 days left until March 2025 – if take any more holidays, it will be unpaid

11. Budget setting 2025/26 – ask groups to put forward work programme / bids to be considered.

The Group discussed as some issues this year because groups did not submit proposals last year i.e. Greener Group.

Cllr Riordan emphasised this is important. If Council keeps using “ General Reserves for unbudgeted projects” it could put the Council at financial risk. The Council must keep certain level of reserves – recommended 3 months of costs at least.

Therefore agreed that RFO to contact Chairs of all the groups and ask them to put forward a work programmes / budget proposals for 2025/26 **by 31st October 2024.**

Clerk to remind Cllrs in Council meeting 7th October 2024 as well.

Group discussed a programme of meetings to set the budget – Clerk and RFO to finalise – see draft below

Date	Meeting	Actions
31.10.24		Groups return proposals to RFO
7.11.24	EFS Group	ESFG meeting to discuss group's proposals and Fees i.e. allotments, pitch hire, youth club
21.11.24	EFS Group	EFSG meet to discuss working budget
9.12.24	Council	Council discuss working budget
19.12.24	EFS group	EFSG meet to finalise budget
13.1.25	Council	Council meet at 7pm – single item agenda prior to Planning Committee to agree budget
RFO		Forward precept request to MBC

(RFO left the meeting)

12. Co-option process

The group discussed learning opportunities from the Co-option process;

- Clerk missed “Councillors casual vacancy policy” – as looking for co-option policy
- Then used “Councillors casual vacancy policy criteria”, but this was out of date and needed to be updated with LGA eligibility criteria
- Definition of “occupy?”. Most peoples definition is “a place where someone is living” but in the election / co-option eligibility criteria more flexible (own and maintain) – therefore Clerk took advice from Electoral Commission, MBC and KALC
- Council meeting 27.8.24 – confidential / matter deferred – this led to complaints / lack of transparency / impression of victimisation. Also should a Cllr be co-opted when not present at meeting (In current policy, yes they can be)
- Clerk, reviewed criteria again with Electoral Commission, MBC and KALC then advised all Cllrs (same conclusion) and then on request circulated all emails
- Co-option considered 16.9.24
- Initial learning
 - a. Unfortunate Clerk was off 27.8.24 Council meeting.
 - b. Moving forward Clerk should be present at Council meeting when co-options considered
 - c. Clerk will in future, (not in Policy) circulated to Cllrs how each candidate meets the eligibility criteria.
 - d. Can we review Council's Co-option policy at next EFS group meeting, yes
 - e. But, would need five Councillors to request Council to reverse decision to adopt the Co-option Policy (5.8.24) to be reviewed before February 2025.(six months)

Note; On 23.9.2024 the Clerk sent an email to all Cllrs asking if five or more wanted to reverse the decision to adopt Co-option policy, giving 7th October 2024 as deadline for five Cllrs to come forward.

13. Jubilee Field

General discussion

- SPC have a ground hire agreement with SMFC
- SPC have a pitch hire agreement with SMYFC
- SMFC CIC newly formed. We currently have no evidence (minutes of meetings) that SMFC and SMYFC have agreed that SMFC CIC can represent them despite having requested evidence on several occasions, at JFWG meeting 11.9.24 and raised again at Council meeting 16.9.24

Council agreed grounds maintenance amendments to the ground hire agreement with SMFC on 16.9.24.

Meeting on 26.9.24 with SMFC CIC and Football Foundation is in good faith and a listening exercise only.

Jubilee Field budget

Cllr Riordan felt that the increase in the Council Precept was supporting the football club at the JFWG.

2023/24 Precept	£224,317
2024/25 Precept	£262,247

Difference	£ 37,930
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In simple terms, as a Parish Council we set the budget by considering the estimated expenditure, deducting the estimated income and then seeking the difference as Precept from MBC.

With the Precept the Council has a balanced, Zero budget and the Precept supports all Parish Council services proportionately.

At the end of the year if the Council has exceeded its budget – it then uses funding from the General Reserves to balance the budget back to Zero.

At the end of the year if the Council comes under its budget – it can “top up” the General Reserves to balance the budget to Zero.

As a Council we need to manage our assets / facilities and services. If you consider any of our facilities as “a business or budget head” you would see less income than expenditure – but this is supported proportionately by the Precept to bring it back to a balanced, zero budget.

For example in 2024/25 budget figures are:

1. Bell Lane Toilets

Budgeted Expenditure	£15,000
Budgeted Income	£ 0
Difference	- £15,000
Portion of Precept	£15,000
Balanced, Zero Budget	£ 0

2. Surrenden Field

Budgeted Expenditure	£6,100
Budgeted Income	£ 0
Difference	-£6,100
Portion of Precept	£6,100
Balanced, Zero Budget	£ 0

3. Jubilee Field – including skatepark

Budgeted Expenditure	£	46,479
Budgeted Income	£	13,053
Difference	- £	33,426
Portion of Precept	£	33,426
Zero Budget	£	0

The Jubilee Field budget in 2024/25 is challenging as it is the first year and we are trying to resolve some legacy issues we inherited and manage our asset.

The next quarterly report to the JFWG, and then onto Council, will be in October 2024 for the period 1st April – 30th September 2024 (half year)

(Note Clerk has inserted actual figures in report).

14. Next Meeting 17th October 2024 – 1:30pm