

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY 26TH JANUARY 2006 AT 9.00 a.m.
AT THE PAVILION, MANOR FIELD, CHURCH ROAD**

Present: Cllr Mr C Alford (Chairman)
Cllr Mr A Barnett
Cllr Mr J Gaywood
Cllr Mr B Ramsay

In attendance: Mrs J Hoad (Clerk)
2 members of the public

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Mr L Abraham.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED: That, the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 30th November 2005 be approved and signed as a correct record.

4. Income and expenditure

The Committee examined a report detailing the Council's receipts and payments for the period from 1st April 2005 to 20th January 2006 and was satisfied the Council's expenditure was being contained within the current budgetary provision.

RESOLVED: That, the report indicating the Council's net financial position at 20th January 2006 and bank conciliation be noted.

5. Hartley Wood

The Committee considered a quotation dated 5th January 2006 from Glen Surveys Ltd setting out two options relating to stage 3 of the survey work in Hartley Wood required to define the boundaries of the land owned by the Council. Option 1 included the setting out and marking of the boundaries using 37 permanent ground markers for the sum of £1,800 plus VAT, whereas option two included the setting out and marking of the boundaries using 22 permanent ground markers for the sum of £1,200 plus VAT. Glen Surveys Ltd stated that the ground markers could be provided with upright yellow markers, but advised against their use as they could attract attention to potential vandalism. The Committee examined two site plans indicating the proposed position of the ground markers relating to the two options suggested by Glen Surveys Ltd.

RECOMMENDED: That, (1) the quotation dated 5th January 2006 from Glen Surveys Ltd for the sum of £1,800 plus VAT to set out and mark by permanent markers using 37 points be accepted and (2) the advice received from Glen Surveys Ltd to avoid the use of upright yellow markers be accepted.

6. Parish Office

The Committee considered a report on the progress to date in relation to the negotiations on the lease for the Parish Office. The report explained that difficulties had arisen as a result of advice received from Sevenoaks District Council stating that demands for non domestic rates must be directed to the occupier of the property, regardless of any provision that may

be contained within the lease. This being the case, the Estate Surveyor acting on behalf of Kent County Council was willing to recommend (as contained in e mails dated 6th January 2006 and 10th January 2006) that the lease should commence on 1st April 2006 and that the rent payable by the Parish Council should be the previously agreed rent of £1,500 per annum less the business rates and that this arrangement continue until 31st March 2011.

RECOMMENDED: That, the negotiations undertaken to date in relation to the granting of the lease on the Parish Office be endorsed and the proposals as recommended by Kent County Council relating to the rent, as set out above, be accepted.

7. Strategic Health Authority

The Committee examined three consultation documents on proposals to develop new roles and geographical boundaries for the Strategic Health Authority and Primary Care Trusts covering Kent and Medway, and the re configuration of NHS Ambulance Trust in England.

The Committee expressed a number of concerns over these proposals and in particular questioned the ability of the Strategic Health Authority and the Primary Care Trusts to manage these organisations over such a wide demographic area.

In addition, the Committee expressed concerns over proposals to merge the Kent Ambulance NHS Trust which had been awarded a 3 star performance rating in 2004/05, with Surrey and Sussex Ambulance NHS Trusts, particularly as Sussex had only been awarded a 1 star performance rating.

RECOMMENDED: That,

(i) the Strategic Health Authority be advised that:-

(1) the Parish Council is not convinced that the amalgamation of a number of existing Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts to form large administrative units is in the best interests of patients as they will be seen to be remote and less responsive.

(2) the Parish Council is disappointed that the retention of the existing Authorities and Trusts are not seen as an option for the future.

(3) if it has to express support for the options given, the Parish Council would prefer the following options:-

(a) a new SHA for Kent Surrey and Sussex, and

(b) three PCT's for Kent and Medway with Ashford included with East Kent.

(4) for the same reasons the Parish Council is very unhappy about proposals to merge the Kent Ambulance Trust with Surrey and Sussex as it considers that the creation of such a new body would not be in the interest of patients.

(ii) Councillor Mrs Coutts be appointed to represent the Council at consultation meetings arranged to explain the proposed changes..

8. Audit Fees

The Committee examined the Audit Commission's proposed scale of audit fees for local councils in England for the period 2006-11 and welcomed the reduction in audit fees from £650 to £550, as a result of the proposal to extend the threshold for the basic limited assurance audit from £100,000 to £200,000.

The Committee noted the skill related fee scales for 2006/07 for audit work carried out over and above the basic and intermediate audit requirements, which ranged in the south east of England from £315 per hour for a partner or District Auditor to £85 for other staff. The Committee reiterated views previously expressed, that residents wishing to raise issues relating to the audit should allow the Parish Council the opportunity to deal with the matter in the first instance in order to avoid additional and unnecessary audit costs.

RESOLVED: That, (1) the Audit Commission's proposed scale of audit fees for the period 2006 -11 be noted and, (2) local electors be reminded to address any query relating to the accounts directly to the Council, in order to ensure external audit fees be kept to a minimum.

9. Revaluation of the Pavilion

The Committee considered a quotation from the Valuation Office to re value the Pavilion, for insurance purposes, at a cost of £250 plus VAT. The Committee was reminded that since the Pavilion had been built in 1993, no re valuation of the building had taken place and that sum insured, in relation to the rebuilding costs of the Pavilion, had been increased annually by the Council's insurers. It was reported that the Pavilion is currently insured for approximately £180,000.

RESOLVED: That, no further action be taken.

10. Donations

The Committee considered requests for donations received from the WRVS, to support their fundraising activities for the next few years and the Open Spaces Society, to support the work of the Society to campaign for the best deal for commons and greens contained in new legislation being laid before Parliament.

RECOMMENDED: That, in accordance with powers under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, a donation of £30 to the WRVS to support their fundraising activities and a donation of £50 to the Open Spaces Society to support their work relating to new legislation affecting commons and green be approved.

11. Standards of Conduct in English Local Government : The Future

The Committee considered a discussion paper setting out the vision for a future comprehensive conduct regime for local authority members and employees. The Committee welcomed the proposal to reduce the number of personal interests which need to be declared and also welcomed the proposal to amend the definition of personal interest, so that members need not declare an interest where it is merely something that they share with the wider community.

RESOLVED: That, the discussion paper, "Standards in Conduct in English Local Government: The Future," be noted.

12. Kent Infrastructure Development Plan

The Committee considered the consultation draft of the Kent Infrastructure Development Plan, which outlined the first steps towards developing a stronger and sustainable infrastructure for the voluntary and community sector in Kent. The Committee expressed the view that it would like to have more information on the voluntary work undertaken in the Parish, to enable the Council to advertise the activities of local voluntary organisations and so encourage more residents to get involved with voluntary work. The Committee noted a list of local organisations is published by the "Hart" and is available in Hartley Library and the Parish Office. The Committee commented that the Parish Council may wish, at some time in the future, to consider publishing a Parish Guide, but it was explained that the Communications Working Group was investigating the possibility of producing some information leaflets for distribution locally.

RESOLVED: That, the consultation draft, “Kent Infrastructure Development Plan” be noted.

13. Kent Village of the Year

The Committee considered a letter from Action with Communities in Rural Kent advertising the launch of the 2006 Kent Village of the Year.

RESOLVED: That, the matter be referred to the Parish Plan Steering Committee, as it may wish to consider entering the competition in future years.

14. SEEDA Rural Towns Programme

The Committee considered a briefing paper on the SEEDA Rural Towns Programme. The Committee was unsure whether there were any projects in Hartley suitable for funding from the programme. It was reported that the Chairman of the Parish Plan Steering held a similar view, but nevertheless the Committee considered the Parish Plan Steering Committee may be interested in the information contained in the papers, as any additional funding for suitable projects would always be welcomed.

RESOLVED: That, the briefing paper on the SEEDA Rural Towns Programme be noted.

15. Date of the next meeting.

Wednesday 26th April 2006 at 10.00 a.m. in the Hartley Library.

The meeting closed at 10.10 a.m.

Signed:.....
Chairman of F & G P Committee

Date:.....

