

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES
COMMITTEE HELD ON 18th JULY 2007 AT 11.15 a.m.
AT HARTLEY LIBRARY, ASH ROAD**

Present: Cllr Mr L Abraham
Cllr Mr C Alford
Cllr Mr A Barnett
Cllr Mrs J Burns
Cllr Mrs P Cole
Cllr Mr B Ramsay (Chairman)
Cllr Mr V Sewell

In attendance: Mrs J Hoad (Clerk)

Apologies

Apologies had been received from Cllrs Mr J Gaywood and Mr M Harris.

1. Election of Chairman

RESOLVED: That, Cllr Mr B Ramsay be elected Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee until the Annual meeting of the Council in May 2008.

2. Election of Vice Chairman

RESOLVED: That, Cllr Mr L Abraham be elected Vice Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee until the Annual meeting of the Council in May 2008.

3. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Mr L Abraham declared a personal interest under minute item 10, Donations, as he was the Parish Council's representative at Rural Age Concern Darent Valley.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED: That, the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 18th April 2007 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5. Terms of Reference

The Committee examined its Terms of Reference as approved by the Council at the Annual meeting held on 14th May 2007 and was satisfied that they required no further amendment.

RESOLVED: That, the Terms of Reference, attached as appendix 1 to these minutes, be noted.

6. Internal Audit Summary Report

The Committee examined the Internal Audit Summary Report for the audit year 2006/07 and noted there were no significant recommendations requiring action in the previous year.

RECOMMENDED: That, the Internal Summary Report for the audit year 2006/07 be approved and the Clerk be congratulated.

7. Review of the effectiveness of internal audit

The Committee examined the draft review of the effectiveness of the internal audit.

RECOMMENDED: That, the review of the effectiveness of the internal audit, attached as appendix 2 to these minutes, be approved.

8. Receipts and payments for the period 1st April 2007 to 12th July 2007

The Committee examined a report setting out the receipts and payments for the period 1st April 2007 to 12th July 2007 and was satisfied these were in line with estimates for the year.

RESOLVED: That, the report be noted.

9. Parish Office

(a) The Committee considered a report on recent difficulties being experienced with Council's computer equipment.

RECOMMENDED: That,

(1) pursuant to Financial Regulation 3.3 the Clerk's actions to make arrangements for the repair to the e mail accounts on the old Evesham computer and to place an order for the supply and installation of 1 no new external back up drive, 1 GB Ram on the newer Evesham computer and AVG virus protection on 2 no PCs be confirmed and,

(2) an order be placed with Wrotham Computer care Ltd for the supply and installation of 1 no new Dell Dimension E521 computer including 17" flat screen monitor and Windows XP Professional at a cost of £400 plus VAT and installation.

(b) The Committee considered a report on a recent power surge experienced in the Parish Office which caused a fuse to blow on the old Evesham computer.

RECOMMENDED: That, an order be placed with Wrotham Computer Care Ltd for the supply and installation of 2 no Smart UPS 420VA systems at a cost of £89.30 plus VAT and installation.

(c) The Committee considered the installation of an additional telephone line into the Parish Office to reduce the problem of contacting the staff in the Parish Office at such times when the existing telephone line was engaged. It was reported that the 1571 service was available on the Parish Council's telephone, which allowed incoming callers to leave messages when the telephone was otherwise engaged. However it was reported that there could be occasions when considerable time elapsed before it was realised that a message had been left on the system. The Committee was informed that telephones could be obtained which indicated by means of a flashing light that a message had been left on 1571. This being so, the Committee felt that this may provide a more suitable means of ensuring staff could be contacted at times when the existing line was otherwise engaged.

RESOLVED: That, alternative means of contacting Parish Council staff along the lines with that discussed by the Committee be investigated.

10. Donations

The Committee considered requests for donations from the following organisations:

(1) Vitalise - Provides care breaks for disabled people and their carers. The charity had confirmed that one local resident had benefited from the work of the charity and enjoyed a one week break at their centre in Southampton.

(2) Open Spaces Society – To support the saving commons from clutter campaign. It was noted that the Council subscribed annually to the organisation.

(3) The Children's Trust – Provides specialist care, therapy and education for children with multiple disabilities and complex medical needs. The charity had confirmed that at present no one from the parish benefited from its work.

(4) Kenward Trust – Helps people suffering from substance and alcohol misuse problems. It was reported that the Youth Worker from HAWK was working closely with the Kenward Trust to deliver a project to help a number of local young people who were at risk of offending.

(5) West Kent Mediation – Offers a free mediation service to those living or working in West Kent.

(6) Swanley Volunteer Centre – Promotes volunteering, provides volunteering brokerage, enables participation in volunteering, provides information, training and research into volunteering, comments and campaigns of volunteering and develops volunteering. More recently the Volunteer Centre had arranged monthly drop in sessions in Hartley Library.

RECOMMENDED: That,

(1) the requests for donations from Vitalise, Open Spaces Society, Children's Trust and West Kent Mediation be declined and,

(2) in accordance with powers under Section 137 of the 1972 Local Government Act a sum of £50 be donated to the Kenward Trust and a sum of £50 be donated to the Swanley Volunteer Centre.

11. Police

The Committee considered a letter dated 28th March 2007 from District Chief Inspector Gill Ellis confirming that a Police Community Support Officer would be deployed to serve the area of Ash, Hartley & Hodsell Street sometime between June 2007 and March 2008. It was reported that an Officer had recently been appointed.

RESOLVED: That, the letter dated 28th March 2007 from District Chief Inspector Gill Ellis be noted.

12. Rural Post Offices

The Committee considered a letter dated 11th June 2007 from Dr H Stoate in response to the Council's concerns about the future of Hartley Post Office and a response received from the Post Office in a letter dated 22nd June 2007. The Committee noted that the Post Office would be consulting on proposals to restructure the network by closing upto 2500 Post Offices and replacing about 500 with new Outreach services including mobile branches in locations such as village halls. The Post Office confirmed that public consultation would commence in this area in late September and that any branch closures or changes to services would not be implemented until early 2008.

RESOLVED: That, the letter dated 11th June 2007 from Dr H Stoate and the letter dated 22nd June 2007 from the Post Office be noted.

13. Wind Power Generator

The Committee considered a letter dated 9th May 2007 from a resident referring to correspondence received from the Northfield Management Committee explaining that a wind powered generator could not be installed on Northfield. The resident requested that consideration be given to siting a wind powered generator elsewhere in the district. The Committee felt that the capital cost to purchase a wind powered generator would be beyond the means of the Council and that it would not be viable as it would take too long to recover the initial capital outlay

RECOMMENDED: That, the resident be thanked for his suggestion and be informed of the Committee's views.

14. Date of the next meeting

To be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 12.10 p.m.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee

Finance and General Purposes Committee

Terms of Reference

1. To make recommendations to the Council on the Budget for the ensuing year; such budget shall be prepared having regard to the Council's statutory duties, obligations and such objectives that the Council wishes to undertake for the benefit of the Parish.
2. To undertake quarterly reviews of expenditure against the approved budget and to report thereon to the Council highlighting any variations.
3. To consider applications for financial assistance including expenditure under the provisions of Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.
4. To undertake the evaluation of tenders and quotations for work to be undertaken on the Council's behalf and to recommend to the Council the most appropriate tender(s) for acceptance in accordance with Best Value guidelines, where these do not already fall within another Committee.
5. To ensure proper arrangements for the conduct of the half yearly audit of the Council's accounts and statutory annual audit, including the appointment of internal auditor.
6. To approve the Annual Statement of Accounts and submit them to Council for adoption.
7. To undertake the regular review of the Council's banking arrangements and investments.
8. To review the Council's financial risk assessment
9. To review the administrative functions of the Council and make recommendations as appropriate to the Council.
10. To review donations to outside organisations.
11. To review the subscriptions/licences falling to be paid annually
12. To review the assets and land leased by the Council annually
13. To review the Clerk's and the Assistant Clerk's terms and conditions of employment.
14. To review the Council's office accommodation.
15. To deal with any matters which do not fall within the Terms of Reference of any other Committee.

As approved by Council at its Annual Meeting on 14th May 2007.

Review of the effectiveness of internal audit

| Expected Standard | Evidence of Achievement | Areas for development |
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| 1. Scope of internal audit | <p>The internal auditor was required to undertake two internal audits during the financial year 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007; (1) for the period 1st April 2006 to 30th September 2006 (interim internal audit) and (2) for the period 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007(summary internal audit), and report findings, and where appropriate make recommendation, for consideration by the Clerk and the Council.</p> <p>The summary and interim internal audits were completed in accordance with guidance issued by CIPFA and the Audit Commission and with regard to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003. <i>(Refer to summary and interim reports, page 1, “Introduction”.)</i></p> <p>The summary internal audit undertaken by the internal auditor for the period 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007 examined all the requirements contained in section 4 of the Annual Return, based on an assessment of the Council’s risks and including a selective assessment of compliance with relevant procedure and controls. On the basis of the findings in the areas examined, the internal auditor was required to assess the objectives of internal control and summarise the audit conclusions.</p> | <p>Satisfied with current arrangements. No further action required.</p> <p>Satisfied with current arrangements. No further action required.</p> <p>Satisfied with current arrangements. No further action required.</p> |
| 2. Independence | <p>The internal auditor had direct access to those charged with governance.</p> <p>Reports were made by the internal auditor under the consultancy name of “Wealden Management Consultancy”.</p> | <p>Satisfied with current arrangements. No further action required.</p> <p>Satisfied with current arrangements. No further action required.</p> |

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| | The internal auditor was an independent consultant appointed by the Council, <i>(refer to letter dated 20th September 2002)</i> , did not have any other role within the Council and was not related to any Member or Officer of the Council. | Satisfied with current arrangements. No further action required. |
| 3. Competence | The Council had no evidence that the internal audit work had not been carried out ethically, with integrity and objectivity. | Satisfied with internal auditor's competency. No further action required. |
| 4. Relationships | <p>The responsible financial officer (RFO) was advised of the outcome of the interim and summary internal audit before completion of the internal auditor's report. The RFO was given the opportunity to ask questions of the internal auditor and visa versa.</p> <p>Members of the Council have been advised of the new requirements to review the effectiveness of the system of internal audit and have been provided with copies of the guidance paper issued by the Audit Commission with the 2007 Annual Return. <i>(Refer to the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 18th April 2007, page 2, minute item 4)</i>. Relevant training is awaited.</p> | <p>Satisfied with current arrangements. No further action required.</p> <p>Members and officers to be encouraged to attend training opportunities as and when they become available</p> |
| 5. Audit Planning and reporting | <p>The internal audit properly took account of corporate risk. <i>(Refer to the interim and summary internal audit reports (page 1, "Introduction"), which confirms the internal audits were completed in accordance with guidance issued by CIPFA and the Audit Commission and with regard to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003)</i>.</p> <p>The interim internal audit report for the period 1st April 2006 to 30th September 2006, including the recommendation contained therein, was adopted by the Council at its meeting held on 12th March 2007, <i>(refer to the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 5th February 2007, page 2, minute item 6)</i>.</p> <p>The summary internal audit was undertaken in the Council offices on 30th April 2007 and 1st May 2007 and the summary internal report will be reported to</p> | <p>Satisfied with current arrangements. No further action required.</p> <p>Satisfied with current arrangements. No further action required.</p> <p>Satisfied with current arrangements. No further</p> |

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| | <p>Council when it becomes available.</p> <p>Two members of the Council will interview the internal auditor when he next visits the Parish Council to undertake the half year internal audit inspection during the autumn of 2007. The purpose of the interview will be to establish how the internal auditor conducts the internal audit and to satisfy themselves that the internal audit complies with the requirements set out in section 4 of the Annual Return. The two members of the Council conducting the interview with the internal auditor shall report back their findings to the Finance and General Purposes Committee.</p> <p>The internal auditor currently works to an audit plan to examine and test each of the requirements set out in section 4 of the Annual Return. The internal auditor has agreed to provide the Council with details of this audit plan.</p> | <p>action required.</p> <p>Subsequent interviews with the internal auditor to be undertaken annually, at such times when he undertakes the half year audit of the Parish Council accounts.</p> <p>The internal auditor will be required to provide the Council with an audit plan.</p> |
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