

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES
COMMITTEE HELD ON 18th AUGUST 2010 AT 9.30 a.m.
AT HARTLEY LIBRARY, ASH ROAD**

Present: Cllr C Alford
Cllr R Coates
Cllr J Gaywood
Cllr B Ramsay (Chairman)

In attendance: Mrs J Hoad (Clerk)
1 member of the public

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Cllr Abraham, Cllr Barnett, Cllr Mrs Burns, Cllr Mrs Cole, Cllr Minns and Cllr Mrs Oxtoby.

2. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Gaywood declared a personal interest under minute item 8 in respect of the receipts and payments, as he was the recipient of the Chairman's allowance.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED: That, the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 28th July 2010 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. Local referendums to veto excessive council tax

The Committee considered a consultation document, "Local referendums to veto council tax increases", published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The Committee noted that the duration of the consultation ran for a period of six weeks from 30th July to 10 September. The Committee considered that the consultation timescales imposed by the DCLG were unreasonable, particularly as the consultation period extends through the month of August which, for most local councils, is a summer recess.

The Committee commented on the questions raised in the consultation document.

RESOLVED: That,

the Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman of the Council, be asked to respond to the questions raised in the consultation document, "Local referendums to veto council tax increases", published by DCLG, as discussed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee and as set out below:

Question 1. Do you agree that local precepting authorities, such as town and parish councils, should be included within the provisions for council tax referendums? If so

- are there details about the budget setting process for local precepting authorities which need to be taken into account?
- will the “double lock” mechanism work to protect the majority of town and parish councils?

Response. No, town and parish councils should not be included within the provisions for council tax referendums. Town and parish councils are not funded by Government grants and their primary source of raising funds is through precept.

Question 2. Are the Local Authorities (Conduct of Referendums) (England) Regulations 2007 the right model for organising and administering council tax referendums.

Response. No. The cost of any referendums triggered by the proposals would fall on the town and parish councils and impose an additional financial burden on local councils. Furthermore the cost of a referendum could exceed the value of what town and parish councils are seeking to raise through any increase in the precept.

Question 3. Are there any practical difficulties in requiring council tax referendums to take place no later than the first Thursday of May?

Response. Yes. Town and parish councils would have to prepare two budgets in case a referendum was triggered and the local electorate rejected a proposed increase in the precept. This would place unreasonable burdens on town and parish councils, both financially and in terms of staff resources. Most town and parish councils have limited staff resources at their disposal.

Question 4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of holding a council tax referendum on the same day as another local referendum, or jointly with a local and/or general election? Current regulations allow for higher expenses per elector in a referendum than in a local election – would this raise any concerns in both votes are held on the same day?

Response. It would be feasible to hold a referendum on the same day as local or general elections, but local elections take place once every four years. If a referendum took place on a year when there was no election, the cost of holding a local council tax referendum would fall on town and parish council, and would place an additional and unreasonable financial burden on local councils. Furthermore a referendum would impose another unnecessary layer of bureaucracy on local councils.

Question 5. What provision, if any, should be made for properties where the council tax payer is not a local elector?

Response. None. Rates collected from local businesses are paid to the Government.

Question 6. Does the timetable at Annex A provide sufficient stability and certainty for local authorities when planning their budgets? Does it provide sufficient time to organise and administer referendums?

Response. No. It is impractical and unreasonable to expect town and parish councils to prepare two budgets.

Question 7. Is it right to give local authorities the discretion to issue new bills immediately, offer refunds at the end of the year or allow credits against liability in the following year.

Response. Not relevant to town and parish councils.

Question 8. How should billing authorities treat bank interest earned on excessive increases that have been rejected in a referendum?

Response. Not relevant to town and parish councils.

Question 9. What practical difficulties, if any, would there be for a billing authority seeking to recoup the cost of a referendum held on behalf of one or more precepting authorities?

Response. Not relevant to town and parish councils.

Question 10. Are there any technical difficulties with the removal of alternative notional amount reports?

Response. No comment.

Question 11. With the abolition of capping, is there any reason why authorities should be required to calculate a budget requirement each year?

Response. Yes. A budget should be prepared each year by local councils.

General response to the consultation document. The timescales for the consultation imposed by the Department of Communities and Local Government are unreasonable, particularly as the consultation period extends from 30th July to 10th September during a period when most local councils do not meet due to the summer recess.

RECOMMENDED: That, the response to the consultation document “Local referendums to veto council tax increases”, published by the Department of Communities and Local Government, as discussed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee and as set out above, be confirmed by Hartley Parish Council.

5. Internal auditor

The Committee considered a letter dated 28th July 2010 from the Council's internal auditor explaining that he would not be available during November to undertake the Council's half year internal audit, but would be able to complete the work in October 2010 or from 10th December onwards.

The Committee expressed their satisfaction with the work undertaken by the internal auditor and the performance of the internal auditor is reviewed on an annual basis, as required under the Audit Regulations. Furthermore the Committee noted that the external auditor had not commented on the work undertaken by the internal auditor. The Committee considered that, for all of the aforementioned reasons, the services of Mr W Mzimba, as the Council's internal auditor, should be retained.

RESOLVED: That, the services of Mr W Mzimba of Wealden Management Consultancy, as the Council's internal auditor, be retained.

6. Audit for the year ended 31st March 2009

The Committee considered a letter dated 14th July 2010 from the external auditor in respect of an objection raised by a local government elector to the Council's accounts for the year ended 31st March 2009. The external auditor considered that the issue of a newsletter in April 2008 in respect of the Hartley Wood Village Green application may have constituted a breach of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, but no formal action would be taken due to the relatively small sums involved. It was reported that the cost of undertaking the investigation by external auditor was, at this stage, unknown.

RESOLVED: That, the letter dated 14th July 2010 from the external auditor in respect of an objection raised by a local government elector to the Council's accounts for the year ended 31st March 2009 be received and noted, and the Council re-confirms its commitment to comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

7. Interest

The Committee considered a report on the interest accrued by delaying the payment of Hartley Parish Council's precept.

The first instalment of the Council's precept of £54,250, amounting to 50% of the Council's precept of £108,500 was paid on 30th July 2010 and that interest of £108.16 had been accrued.

RESOLVED: That, the report on the interest accrued for the period 1st April 2010 to 30th July 2010 be received and noted.

8. Receipts and Payments

The Committee examined the Council's receipts and payments for the period 1st April 2010 to 12th August 2010.

The Committee noted that expenditure had been incurred on a Quantified Tree Risk Assessment on trees located on Council land and that further expenditure would be incurred to carry out the recommended treework.

The Committee noted the ongoing commitment in respect of legal costs in connection with the creation of an easement at Manor Field, the Transfer of the W.I. Hall to Hartley Parish Council, the provision of a new Burial Ground at Manor Field and surrender and grant of a new lease to Hartley Parish Council in respect of the Parish Office in Hartley Library.

The Committee was advised that solicitors had been appointed to recover the uninsured losses in connection with damage sustained to a vehicle parked on Billings Hill Shaw from a fallen tree branch on 14th November 2009. The matter had been referred to the Council's insurers.

The Committee was warned that costs were likely to increase and that was little provision within the existing budget to make any savings. It was generally considered that the reserve held in the general fund should not be used to fund revenue items and therefore, in order to balance the 2011/12 budget, it could be necessary to increase the precept.

RESOLVED: That, summary of the Council's receipts and payments for the period 1st April 2010 to 12th August 2010 be received and noted.

9. Hartley Parish Plan

The Committee continued discussions on the action points arising from the Hartley Parish Plan in relation to sections (8) Public Utilities, (9) Services for the Elderly and (10) Services for the Youth of Hartley.

RECOMMENDED: That, the comments and actions taken, as set out in the Hartley Parish Plan action plan attached as appendix 1 to these minutes, be approved and adopted.

10. Date of the next meeting

To be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 10.35 a.m.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee

PARISH PLAN ACTION POINTS

<u>Action Plan</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Action taken</u>
(1) History & the Community of Hartley		
(a) To lobby so that on any future re-organisation Hartley, Longfield and New Ash Green should be in the same local authority area, whichever that may be.	Do not agree with action plan.	Matter to be left pending review of boundaries by the Boundary Commission
(b) To lobby for a survey to be undertaken to identify whether the Bramblefield Estate should transfer to Longfield parish.	Do not agree with action plan. Railway line provides clear boundary line between civil parishes of Hartley and Longfield and New Barn. Not clear whether residents of Bramblefield want to transfer to Longfield and New Barn Parish.	Matter to be left pending review of boundaries by the Boundary Commission
(c) To encourage Hartley and Sevenoaks Councils to prepare impact assessments of relevant policy proposals that will affect the Wellfield area.	Not clear which policy proposals the Parish Plan action point relates to. Clarification required.	Seek clarification from Hartley Parish Plan Steering Committee
(d) To implement measures to encourage greater involvement in community issues by the residents of the Wellfield area.	Noted and will endeavour to engage with residents from Wellfield area	Continue to ensure Parish Council Newsletter delivered to every house in Hartley, including the Wellfield area.
(e) To promote the use of the Village Design Statement by developers and decision makers.	Village Design Statement formally adopted by Sevenoaks District Council and forms part of the Local Development Framework	No further action at this stage
(f) To encourage Sevenoaks District Council to impose a planning obligation on developers to require them to contribute to improvements of the infrastructure within Hartley.	No major developments in Hartley therefore no scope for Section 106 agreements.	No further action at this stage

(g) To lobby our politicians so that no development should be permitted in Hartley without the necessary infrastructure being in place first.

Land availability for development in Hartley limited so no scope for major developments within current planning policies

No further action at this stage

(2) Transport and Communications (refer to Highways Committee)

a) To lobby our politicians so that the local planning authority and the developer are compelled to consider the impact of development (both individually and collectively) on the existing road network.

b) To lobby for the provision of a suitable alternative route from Hartley

c) To improve the condition of the pavements and road surfaces in Hartley.

d) To ensure that the parking regulations are more strictly enforced specifically as regards pavement parking.

e) To investigate whether street lighting should be installed in those areas of the Parish where the survey indicated a preference and such investigations should have regard to the views of the whole village.

f) To lobby for an investigation into whether the lighting within the Bramblefield Estate and over the footbridge to Longfield could be improved and also whether the maintenance of the footbridge could be improved.

g) To lobby for appropriate further action to improve traffic calming measures throughout the village and speed control particularly on Ash Road.

h) To lobby for an increase in the number of trains stopping at Longfield Station during the rush hours and to restore a half hourly service during evenings and on Sundays.

i) To lobby for an entrance to Longfield Station on the south side with a ticket machine.

j) To lobby to improve the bus services to and from Hartley as indicated in our survey and to provide further subsidised travel for the young and disabled, as in Dartford and London. The required improvements in services are: 1) Buses and trains to be co-ordinated 2) Buses to arrive at Bluewater in time for workers starting in the morning. 3) Some buses which terminate at Longfield to call additionally at Bramblefield. 4) Cheaper and better timed service to Darent Valley.

k) To look into the feasibility of providing a local and more widely available, community bus to assist elderly and disabled residents.

(3) Hartley Library and Parish Council Services

(a) To lobby so that there is a sufficient local history resource available for public use in the village.

(b) To lobby so that there is no further reduction in the opening hours of Hartley Library and that the present standard of service is maintained.

Concerns expressed about budget cuts faced by local councils and what impact this could have on Library services

Hartley Parish Council should reconfirm its desire for Library services to be maintained in Hartley. Defer any further action until outcome of any budgets cuts become known.

(c) To highlight that litter and fly-tipping is a problem in the village and to encourage residents to combat it.	Concerns about litter and fly tipping shared by F & GP Committee	Raise awareness of litter and fly tipping in Hartley Parish Council's newsletter.
(d) To improve litter clearance in the village.	Concerns about litter shared by F & GP Committee	Hartley Parish Council to continue to litter pick on Parish Council owned land and under powers invested in Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 undertake litter picks on other land where there is a problem of littering

4) Education of Children Resident in Hartley

(a) To lobby for the restoration of subsidised school buses.	Provided by Kent County Council's Freedom Pass available for school children aged from 11 years to 16	No further action required
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(5) The Police and Fire and Rescue Services

(a) To lobby that Wellfield, Bramblefield and South Hartley should be designated policing priority areas, and that a stakeholder group is set up between relevant authorities and local residents to address the particular needs of these areas.	Policing priorities set by crime statistics. Concerns raised about crime reporting procedures which could result in crimes not being reported	Make the Police aware and ask for their views
(b) To request through the KCC that the Community Warden be tasked with visiting all victims of crimes where the police are unable to investigate.	Visiting victims of crime should be responsibility of the Police.	Raise matter at future KALC meetings

(c) To liaise with the local PC and PCSO's to improve the police response to all crimes and to reassure the public that all crime is taken seriously.	Difficulties experienced with reporting crime - goes through to answerphone where message informs callers they will be contacted with 24 hours but no response is forthcoming. Aware of situations where the Police have not followed up reports of crime with residents.	Make the Police aware and ask for their views
(d) To recommend that the relevant authorities should improve their support to youth initiatives, which should result in reductions in the levels of offending.	PCSOs have been attending Thursday night Pool project at Hartley District & Social Club	Ongoing
(e) To lobby for a review of fire station provision in this area and that a fire station be provided in the New Ash Green, Hartley and Longfield area.	Unlikely to happen in current economic climate	No further action at this stage

(6) Health Services

(a) To lobby the surgery to continue for improvements to their telephone booking system so that callers can get through to the receptionist especially early in the morning to make an appointment.	Satisfied with current telephone booking system of local doctors surgeries	No further action at this stage
(b) To lobby the surgery to extend surgery opening hours so that appointments can be made further in advance.	Surgery hours have been extended. Satisfied with current level of service in terms of opening hours and appointment system used by local doctors surgeries.	No further action at this stage
(c) To investigate means (perhaps by a community bus or volunteer drivers) of helping those without their own transport to get to the surgeries especially for those living in Bramblefield or the Wellfield area.		
(d) To lobby for improved NHS dentistry facilities.	Satisfied with NHS dentistry provision locally	No further action at this stage

(e) To lobby for cheaper parking charges at Darent Valley Hospital.	Use of other transport is available (buses). Removal of car parking charges could increase demand for parking provision at Darent Valley Hospital which is currently under provided.	No further action at this stage
(f) To investigate the possibility of running antenatal and childcare clinics in Hartley.	Satisfied with current provision of antenatal and childcare clinics at New Ash Green	No further action at this stage

(7) Local Shops and Businesses

(a) To encourage local authorities to recognise the importance of local shops and to promote their diversity within the current retail areas at Cherry Trees and Ash Road.	Support and should be promoted as far as possible	No further action at this stage
(b) To lobby our politicians to ensure that Hartley Post Office is not closed.	Support and should be promoted as far as possible	No further action at this stage
(c) To lobby for improved access for the disabled, wheelchairs and pushchairs at Hartley Post Office and Fairby Stores.	It is understood this matter is being considered by the Hartley Post Office and Fairby Stores	No further action at this stage
(d) To endeavour to find solutions to problems of litter and parking at the Cherry Trees Shops and to improve the condition of the building.	Share concerns about general untidiness and amount of litter around the Cherry Tree shops. Shopkeepers should be encouraged to do more. Investigate Budgens pledge to support its community.	(1) Car park notice provided by Hartley Parish Council. (2) Hartley Parish Council continue to pursue removal of traffic island outside to improve parking provision. (3) Contact Budgens to seek views on how the area could be improved. (4) Investigate cost of weekly litter pick.

8. Public Utilities

(a) To seek support from our Member of Parliament that further house building is unwise until adequate water supplies can be assured in this area.

Defer pending the future issue of local policies .

No further action at this stage

(b) To lobby our Member of Parliament to investigate whether the present sewerage system is adequate for the present number of houses in the village and whether it would be adversely affected by any new residential development.

Two major areas in Hartley have a history of sewage blockages; Church Road between Grange Lane and Hartley Hill, and in Hartley Wood to the north of Springcroft. It is believed the problems are due, in part, to the lack of planned maintenance undertaken by Thames Water

Write to the local Member of Parliament

(c) To discourage any further development which is likely to cause an increase in the flooding at Springcroft.

New deep bore soakaway installed at the end of Springcroft in February 2010

Complete

9. Services for the Elderly

(a) To lobby for a new Community Centre within Hartley suitable for and accessible to the elderly and others.

When Hartley W.I. Hall is transferred to Hartley Parish Council it is envisaged this community facility will be available to the elderly and others.

No further action at this stage

10. Services for the Youth of Hartley

(a) To promote the work of HAWK within the village.

Work of HAWK is supported by Hartley Parish Council through an annual contribution to the project for the employment of a full time youth worker

No further action required at this stage

(b) To identify a suitable venue for West Kent Xtra to meet.

This is the responsibility of West Kent Xtra. A suggestion by a local District Councillor to make available a house on the Wellfield estate for community use was rejected by West Kent Xtra due to pressures on the existing housing waiting list

No further action

(c) To promote within the village the work of the Scouts and Guide groups.	Hartley Parish Council supports the work of the Scouts and Guide groups	Include an article in the Council's newsletter
(d) To explore the possibility to improve lighting and to install cameras at Woodland Avenue Recreation Ground.	Any scheme to improve lighting and install cameras would be too costly and is likely to be unpopular with residents	No further action
(e) To promote more youth uses at Woodland Avenue Recreation Ground.	Hartley Parish Council supports youth uses at Woodland Avenue recreation ground. The HAWK youth worker regularly engages with young people at the recreation ground. Football courses are run during the summer and SDC's "In the Zone" visit during the school summer holidays. In the past West Kent Xtra has delivered summer schemes at the recreation although this ceased in 2010 due to lack of funding	Ongoing.
(f) To explore the possibility for a skateboard park, an adventure playground and a BMX track within the neighbourhood.	Hartley Parish Council investigated the possibility of providing a skateboard park at Woodland Avenue but this proposal was rejected by local residents. There are no other suitable venues in Hartley for the provision of a skateboard park, adventure playground or BMX track. Facilities in neighbouring authorities are available or plan to be made available. A BMX track is available at New Barn which is accessible to Hartley young people. Ash-cum-Ridley PC is investigating the possibility of providing a skateboard park.	No further action at this stage
(g) To lobby for further concessionary fares for all young people on all public transport.	Concessionary fares for young people available through KCC's Freedom Pass	Complete
(h) To improve communication between young people of the village and the existing youth organisations and with the Parish Council.	Hartley Parish Council will to continue to support the HAWK youth project and encourage, through HAWK, communication between young people and residents	No further action

(i) To identify a suitable building in Hartley for a Youth Centre and Internet Café.

The Hartley District & Social Club has made available one of its rooms for young people to meet and play pool. Discussions with West Kent Xtra to provide a house on the Wellfield estate for community use were unsuccessful. Free internet access is available at Hartley Library

No further action at this stage

11. Housing Services

a) To promote more affordable housing for the young and the elderly within the village.

b) To ensure that consideration be given to the provision of more starter homes and homes suitable for the elderly in Hartley.

12. The Countryside

a) To encourage the Parish Council and others to preserve the species diversity in any scheme management for Hartley Wood.

b) To encourage Hartley Parish Council to continue to engage all stakeholders to combat the litter and fly-tipping problem in Gorse Wood.

c) To encourage Hartley Parish Council to consider with a view to accepting the offer, if reiterated, of part of Hoselands Wood for the benefit of the community.

d) To encourage local authorities to reduce the carbon footprint and encourage local enterprises, by ensuring produce is locally sourced whenever possible.

e) To ensure that the public footpaths are well maintained and to

provide better directional information on the signposts.

f) To encourage Hartley Parish Council to publish a leaflet showing the public footpaths in Hartley.

g) To lobby our politicians so that the cost of maintenance of Longfield Hill Recreation Ground be a charge on Longfield residents or transferred to Longfield parish.

h) To identify if any formalised sports uses are suitable in Northfield and have public support.

i) To lobby so that the present allotment land is maintained as allotments.