

**Minutes of the meeting of the
FINANCE COMMITTEE
held remotely on Monday 14th December 2020 at 1:00pm
using the online Zoom meeting platform.**

Cllrs present: R Gardner, R Patient, Mrs N Shaw & Mrs M Weir

1. To elect a Chairman for the civic year 2020-21:

Cllr R Gardner nominated Cllr Mrs N Shaw as Chairman which was seconded by Cllr R Patient. There were no further nominations and Cllr Mrs N Shaw was elected Chairman by a majority vote.

2. To elect a Vice-Chairman for the civic year 2020-21:

Cllr R Patient nominated Cllr Mrs M Weir as Vice Chairman which was seconded by Cllr R Gardner. There were no further nominations and Cllr Mrs M Weir was elected Vice-Chairman by a majority vote.

3. Apologies for non-attendance at meeting:

No apologies were received.

The Clerk reported that Cllr S May wished to join the Finance Committee and that he would participate at the next meeting. Members noted there are several vacancies on the Committee and were pleased that Cllr S May wanted to join.

4. Declarations of any:

a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interest;

b) Other Pecuniary Interest; or

c) Non-Pecuniary Interest

on any matter on the agenda for 14th December 2020:

No declarations were made.

5. Public Forum:

No members of the public were present.

6. To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2020 and to approve the destruction of the notes in respect of that meeting:

The Minutes of the meeting were **approved** as a correct record and Members approved the destruction of the notes in respect of that meeting.

7. Action Update List – December 2020:

Members noted there were no items outstanding for December.

8. Financial Report – November 2020:

The Clerk informed Members that this report was the same as seen by Members at the last Full Council meeting. There were no questions and Members **accepted** the Financial Report.

9. Completion of External Audit for 2019-20 – no issues arising:

Members noted the successful completion of the External Audit for 2019-20.

10. Receive Internal Audit Report (Interim) for 2020-21: no issues arising:

Members noted the report. Cllr R Patient commended the Clerk and Assistant for another clear Internal Audit report, together with the External Audit, noting that Members could be very confident that Council's finances are being well managed. Cllr R Gardner asked whether the defibrillators were classed as Assets and the Clerk advised that they were on the Asset Register.

11. New cheque signatory required:

Members discussed whether the Chair of the Finance Committee should be a cheque signatory. Cllr Mrs N Shaw (Chair) explained that this would pose a logistical issue as she lived out of the Parish. The Clerk mentioned that Cllr S May had indicated he would be happy to become a signatory, which Members agreed. The Clerk would action this in the New Year.

12. Review of Investment Strategy and Investment Activity during 2019-20:

Members noted the report and asked the Clerk's opinion on the CCLA Fund and how it worked, etc. The Clerk confirmed no problems had occurred, the Fund is well-managed, and Council had received more interest than it would have done had its funds remained entirely with Metro Bank. The Chair asked for a show of hands in respect of the recommendation in the report 'That the Finance Committee review the attached Investment Strategy and Investment Activity for 2019/20 and update Section 8 accordingly. Confirm the PSDF account still meets Councils' requirements and to continue to reinvest the monthly yield in the PSDF'. Members **agreed** the recommendation unanimously. The Clerk would update the Investment Strategy (No. 8).

13. Consider and agree Finance Budget for 2021-22:

Members discussed the budget recommendation prepared by the Clerk. Cllr R Patient enquired about the reason behind the increase of £7k into the 'Other Professional Fees' cost centre, noting there was a recommendation to consider contracting a security firm to commence patrols in the parks and around the Parish. The Clerk advised that Council had tried to encourage and support the 'Community Specials' initiative but this had been unsuccessful for a number of reasons. She had recently found out from other Clerks that some were now using a security company (S-Type Security) to undertake patrols in their areas with positive results in terms of reducing Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). Rettendon, Rawreth and more recently Hullbridge Parish Council were using this company which offered a three-month trial with the first week free prior to any decision being taken about undertaking a year's contract and they were flexible about the number of patrols required per week. Various questions were raised as to what services they would provide, when they would patrol, and the quality of the employees. The Chair confirmed that the information provided stated that most patrols would be undertaken during the afternoon and evenings and the costings showed the suggested budget would cover 4 patrols (hours) each week. The Clerk confirmed this was the recommended number of patrols to start off with but, depending on the activity found, this could be reduced to 2 patrols a week; they offered a bespoke service to each client depending on their requirements. They could also provide a dog patrol, thermal imaging cameras, body cams and night vision equipment so they would be able to patrol in Councils' parks in the dark.

Cllr Mrs Weir had reservations about their effectiveness and that they would not have legal powers to do much and asked what the police's take would be. She doubted they would patrol at the top of the park and thought that they would only be able to cover the areas such as the parks which come under the Parish Council's responsibility.

Cllr R Gardner suggested engaging them for a three-month trial and then evaluate whether to sign a year's contract; he mentioned that if that was agreed he hoped that their performance would not drop off after the initial trial. The Clerk advised that her information was that the employees were all ex-military or ex-police and that they were passionate about their work, well trained and they were backed by the police. She suggested Members have a look at their website if they had not already. They could make citizens' arrests and then contact the police who would come and take over. In answer to a further question about points of contact, the security team would liaise directly with the police if a situation arose while they were on patrol, not the Clerk. Another question was raised about whether they would patrol just in the parks or other areas in the Parish and the amount of ASB that had occurred during this year in the parks. The Clerk advised that the parks would be a main focus, but they would also patrol other areas in the Parish, such as Golden Cross. There have been many reports of ASB in the parks during the Covid pandemic, particularly in Magnolia Park. This included drug taking, verbal abuse of park users and vandalism of equipment. The benefit of the patrols would be that they patrol on a random basis, not at a set time of day and there would be more chance of detecting those causing such problems. Cllr R Gardner suggested the Chair contact the local police to enquire what was their opinion of such a service, but to keep the money in the budget so it could be taken forward next year, after a three-month trial. The Clerk confirmed there was enough money in the present budget to undertake a three-month trial. The Chair thought that it was a good idea to keep the money in the budget, especially as there might otherwise be an overall reduction in the budget due to the General Purposes Committee requiring less budget for 2021-22. She also felt that residents would be supportive of such an initiative.

Cllr R Patient thought that any initiative that reduced ASB in Council's parks was welcomed. He moved that Council undertake a three-month trial with S-Type Security following which Members would consider whether to engage them in a year's contract. Cllr R Gardner seconded the motion, and it was carried by majority. Following a question from the Chair about reporting, the Clerk confirmed that a monthly report is provided to Council detailing the patrols undertaken and activity found.

A question was raised about the increase to the 'Grants-S137' budget and whether this was for Council's extra expenses in relation to Covid-19. The Clerk advised that such expenses came out of the Health & Safety budget and that the proposed increase in the Grants budget was to enable Council to give grants to those groups/charities who needed assistance due to problems caused by Covid-19, along with any other charitable group within Hawkwell, eligible to apply for a grant. The Clerk advised that so far this year the Grants budget was underspent.

Members unanimously agreed the proposed Finance Committee budget of **£101,100** for **2021-22** for recommendation to Full Council. Members noted this was an increase of £14.8k from £86,255 for 2020-21.

14. Subscriptions - Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) £234:

Members **agreed** unanimously the SLCC subscription.

15. Donations:

a) Consider donation to the Poppy Appeal 2020;

Members **agreed** a donation of £100 to this year's Poppy Appeal noting that donations to this Appeal, together with many other charities, would be lower this year due to the Covid-19 situation.

b) Consider donation request from Ashingdon Parish Council (APC) towards self-locking toilet doors at King George's Playing Fields (Email stream attached):

Members noted the email stream. After discussion it was agreed to put this item back on the next Finance Agenda, where hopefully the requested paperwork would be available for Members' consideration.

16. Approve Staff Christmas Lunch – Chairman's Fund:

Cllr R Patient moved that the staff Xmas lunch goes ahead whenever it was safe and convenient to do so. The Clerk thanked Members and advised it would likely take place in the New Year.

17. Summary of Decisions:

- Cllr Mrs N Shaw elected Chairman for 2020-21.
- Cllr Mrs M Weir elected Vice Chairman for 2020-21.
- Investment Strategy confirmed, Clerk to update Section 8 accordingly.
- Cllr S May to be added to cheque signatory mandate; Clerk to carry out the necessary paperwork.
- 2021-22 Finance Budget agreed for recommendation to Full Council (£101,100)
- Council to undertake a three-month trial with S-Type Security.
- SLCC Subscription agreed (£234).
- Donation to Poppy Appeal agreed (£100).
- Await paperwork from Ashingdon Parish Council regarding grant request.
- Staff Christmas lunch approved.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 1:40pm.

Chairman