

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE FINANCE GROUP

PARISH OFFICE 19.30 HRS 18TH OF SEPTEMBER 2012

MEETING NOTE

The Finance Group met to discuss the attached agenda. Present were Councillors Burnham, Butcher, Green, Kelly and Perry. Councillor Reardon sent his apologies. The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) Mrs. S. Bassett was on leave.

Agenda item 1: Precept for 2013/14 and effect of the loss of the Concurrent Functions Grant.

The latest offer from Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) was noted. However, the offer was very low and the parishes had already suffered major reductions in funding. It was felt that the KALC position should be supported and Cllr Butcher and Cllr Kelly will support the KALC line at the next KALC meeting scheduled to take place on the 26 September. However, it was also agreed that a contingency plan was needed in the unlikely event of a majority of parishes breaking away from the KALC position.

In the meantime it was agreed that in considering the precept we should continue to assume there will be no concurrent functions grant available. This would lead to an increase in the precept of just under 25% and if this were to happen we would ensure that our electors new the reason for this increase.

Action: Liaise with the Clerk and the RFO regarding the need to respond to MBC if the parishes reject KALC.

Agenda item 2: Churchyard wall. Position to date and review of current agreement with PCC.

It was noted that a crime number had been issued and we were still awaiting the response from the insurance company. It was agreed that the current agreement between the Parish Council and the Parochial Church Council (PCC) needed revising. It was considered that the new agreement should be about maintenance and should not refer to overall responsibility; the agreement should not be involved in issues such as buildings, structures or footpaths.

Action: Recommend to the Parish Council that the current agreement needed to be revised.

Agenda item 3: Localisation of Council Tax Benefits – Impact on Parishes

It was noted that this might have an impact on the Parishes' Precepts. It is a complex issue and the Chairman will be attending a briefing session on the 20th of September arranged by MBC.

Action: Report back to the Council and the Finance Group.

Agenda item 4: Lease of Bell Lane Car Park from MBC

There was a consensus that there could be advantages for Staplehurst Parish Council in acquiring either the freehold or a long lease. Therefore it was agreed that Staplehurst Parish Council should continue to explore this matter with MBC. In particular issues such as the following would need to be pursued: conditions attached to any lease, possible covenants, possibility of acquiring the freehold, the applicability of business rates and would MBC continue to have ultimate control.

Action: Contact Steve Goulette at MBC.

Agenda item 5: Skate Park – Potential Expansion

There was a general consensus that the UpRockin event had been a great success and despite MBC planning to go back to South Park for 2013 we should plan for the Staplehurst event to go ahead for next year. It was agreed that £1000 should be allowed for in the budget for this purpose. On the question of possible expansion of the Skate Park it was felt that more information was needed from the users as to what was needed and what they would like. The latest quotation produced a total cost of nearly £100k so there would be a need for some prioritisation. There was a proposal that we should start creating a financial reserve to cover possible expenditure but it was felt this would be a little premature at this stage.

Action: Start planning for next year's UpRockin event and allow £1000 in next year's budget. Contact Skate Park users to find out requirements and to prioritise regarding possible future expansion of the Skate Park.

Agenda item 6: Jubilee Field – Grass cutting contract

This was noted as it had already been approved by the Parish Council.

No action required.

Agenda item 7: Jubilee Field Management Committee – Review of Maintenance Agreement.

It was agreed that this needed to be revised.

Action: Councillor Perry to contact Councillor Silkin to review progress.

Agenda item 8: Parish Council Payments – DCLG Consultation re. Two signatures

It was agreed that Staplehurst Parish Council should continue with the practice of requiring two cheque signatures. It felt this was a useful safeguard and an important part of its internal control process.

Action: Recommend to Staplehurst Parish Council to continue with the practice of requiring two cheque signatures.

Agenda item 9: Financial Regulations – Adoption of latest NALC Model

It was agreed that the NALC Model was an improvement and in principle could be adopted. However, some modifications would be needed before these revised Financial Regulations could be adopted by Staplehurst Parish Council. Some suggestions had been made by Councillor Green and Councillor Perry. Members of the Finance Group were asked to review these as soon as possible. Councillor Perry agreed to respond to NALC on their Model by the 28TH of September.

Action: Finance Group Members are asked to comment on the draft Financial Regulations. Councillor Perry to respond to NALC by the 28TH of September.

Agenda item 10: Donations Policy – Treatment of Capital Donations

Councillor Perry had prepared a draft policy on donations. This was considered as a good starting point. Some changes were proposed regarding the definition of charities and clarification in respect of those who persons or bodies that would not be eligible. A copy of the policy agreed by Willingham Parish Council was distributed for information. It was agreed that while this was not totally applicable to Staplehurst it did contain some useful information which could be taken into consideration.

Action: Councillor Perry to revise the draft policy taking into account the proposed amendments

Agenda item 11: Insurance Renewal – Review of Asset Register

It was noted that this was an ongoing project.

Action: Discuss progress with the Clerk and the RFO.

Agenda item 12: Summation to date

This had been discussed at the last meeting of the Full Council. The Finance Group noted the position.

Action: No action required

Agenda item 13: Audit issues

There were no outstanding audit issues. Councillor Perry will be contacting RFO to arrange a review meeting with the Internal Auditor.

Action: Councillor Perry to liaise with RFO.

Agenda item 14: Any other business

The RFO was requested to look into expense claims. Council should first agree that the meeting is justified before a claim can be submitted. There was also a general discussion as to whether claims for babysitting should be allowable; this was noted.

Action: Finance Group to check with RFO that the correct procedures have been applied.

Finance Group

19th of September 2012