*Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer to the Council: Jennifer Spear*

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**Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 23rd April 2023 at 10am at The Village Hall, Plough Road Great Bentley Colchester CO7 8LG**

Present: Cllr. K. Plummer (Chair) Cllr. P. Dennitts Cllr. B. Herbert Cllr. J. Wharton

In attendance: Mrs Jennifer Spear (Clerk)

 **Minutes**

**04.01.24 To receive and approve any Apologies for Absence**

None Received

**04.02.24 To receive any Declarations of Interest.**

None Received

**04.03.24 Minutes of the10th January 2024 meeting to be approved and signed**

**Resolved –** Cllr. P. Dennitts proposed that agenda item 01.53.24, in the second to last paragraph stated proposed by Cllr. P. Dennitts and seconded by Cllr. P. Dennitts, this should have been proposed by Cllr. P. Dennitts and seconded by Cllr. K. Plummer and in the last paragraph the resolution not have a seconder, this should read seconded by Cllr. P. Dennitts. This proposal was seconded by Cllr. K. Plummer that with these amendments, the minutes of the finance committee meeting held on the 10th January 2023 are a true record and these were signed by the Chair.

**04.04.24 Public participation session with respect to items on the agenda and matters of mutual interest**

No public present

**04.05.24 To discuss and review the following grant requests. *(Budget 2024/25 £2500)***

**a) Great Bentley Bell Ringers**

The clerk advised that the NALC guidance has changed, and that parish councils can now make donations to Churches, this is still always at the parish councils discretion.

**Resolved** – Cllr. J. Wharton proposed awarding a grant of £500 to the GB Bell ringers, seconded by Cllr. P. Dennitts, all in favour.

 **Action Clerk**

**b) Great Bentley in Bloom**

**Resolved** Cllr. P. Dennitts proposed awarding a grant for £450 for the summer planting, seconded by Cllr. B. Herbert, all in favour.

 **Action Clerk**

Cllr. P. Dennitts also brought up the request about the planter from GB in bloom and to ask where they are at with this project now and how can the council support the project.

**c) Great Bentley Good Neighbours**

**Resolved** – Cllr. P. Dennitts proposed awarding a grant of £400, but that on the next grant request we need to ask for quotations for printing, seconded by Cllr. B. Herbert – all in favour.

 **Action Clerk**

**d) Friends of Great Bentley Churchyard**

The council discussed that it is important to recognise the value of the volunteers that are supporting these projects and the parish don’t want to lose this but moving forward for next year it would be good to collectively meet with the parish magazine and the Friends of Great Bentley churchyard.

**Resolved –** Cllr. P. Dennitts proposed awarding a grant of £500 for the professional help and equipment, seconded by Cllr. J. Wharton, all in favour.

 **Action Clerk**

**e) Great Bentley Carnival – funding for the portaloos *(Budget £1000)***

**Resolved** – Cllr. B. Herbert proposed that the council fund 4 toilets, including one disabled, seconded by Cllr. P. Dennitts, all in favour.

 **Action Clerk**

**04.06.24 To review year end actual expenditure versus budgeted expenditure for 2023/24**

The clerk provided a report to the council prior to the meeting.

It was noted that the income for the parish council was higher than budgeted due to the S106 money of £19,308 for the playground maintenance and bank interest at £229, rather than £6. The Parish council did also receive double the income for the Verge Cutting programme as the previous year (2022/23) was claimed back along with the current years.

Employment costs have remained under budget for this year, due to the changeover of staff, and the later enrolment into the pension scheme, which is now being paid into regularly, therefore this year that will be back up to the budgeted amount, especially with the increase in the clerks hours from 23 per week to 27 per week from May.

The PCSO budget is an underspend but the PCSO was off for a portion of last year, which meant that the parish council were only billed for three quarters of the year rather than the full year.

Office and administration costs has ended as an overspend this year, but this is due to the extra new laptop that has been purchased for the new assistant clerk, as the clerk had one the previous year and the assistant this year – that is not a spend that will be needed for a good few years.

Consultancy and legal fees last year were not used at all, but we do know this is going to be a much larger spend this year as we have already engaged a solicitor for advice and action.

The property and maintenance came in overall as an underspend although there were parts of the budget that were higher than budgeted, for example the Grass Cutting Contract on the green – it was a much faster grass growing year due to more rain and sun, which required more cuts.

Play Equipment maintenance we have gone completely over budget at a spend of £16,082 (budgeted £2000) but this money was refunded back to us with the s106 funds received (as explained earlier) we are awaiting one more invoice to complete this maintenance.

Capital projects we went completely over budget here, but the council did purchase a new tractor at £30,000.00 which came out of the earmarked reserve for the tractor – so although it looks like an overspend the council did have the money budgeted for it. The council did overspend on the litterbins/ Dog Bins / Signs by £2,211 but the council did purchase a lot of new bins as was discussed and also replaced some of the older broken ones. Cllr. K. Plummer advised that a new bin may be required at the end of the new diverted footpath route. The clerk advised around £500 for a new bin and a further £107 a year for the emptying of it.

Cllr. P. Dennitts asked about the budget for the Christmas tree as we did go over here by £94, but as explained this was not just the Christmas Tree but the hire of the platform to put up the lights, and we may need to increase the budget for this one into the new year.

Allotment fencing and access, although this hasn’t been spent this year, we do want to get a gate in the fence to access the new allotment site so this will be a spend this year.

The Annual Parish meeting, the clerk advised that she doesn’t have all the final bills in but she knows she will be over this year and that this will be a budget that will have to be increased. This year the parish council gave out multiple awards rather than one.

The clerk advised that energy for streetlighting has come in as an underspend, but she is not happy with the bills and has queried these with the new provider as they should have decreased but not by this much and possibly the parish council may receive a large bill at some point when they find out why. Although we have replaced a lot of the lights with newer LEDs this does not equate to that much of an energy drop, the money for the new installations and streetlights has come from the councils earmarked reserves so although it is over budget it was money already earmarked for those projects.

As at 31st March 2024 the parish council have an overspend on their budget of £36,239, but an increase in receipts of £52,019. The overspend on budget is made up of the extra on playground maintenance, the new tractor and new installations of streetlights, which came from earmarked reserves and S106 money. So the parish council ends the year in a strong position.

Cllr. J. Wharton asked what is the peppercorn rent, the clerk advised this is the football club rent. He also asked what is the £420 for the parish magazine payment, the clerk advised that it is the bill for the parish council advertising (providing their report) each month.

Cllr. J. Wharton asked if we lease the railway car park from Network rail, Cllr. B. Herbert advised that this was arranged many years ago with network rail, that the parish council have an agreement that we can maintain it, but we don’t pay rent.

Cllr. J. Wharton asked if there is enough budget for the Christmas lighting, Cllr. K. Plummer advised that the project is ongoing and the lights are being upgraded each year, there are more funds available from a grant that the parish council are yet to receive.

**04.07.24 To review Earmarked Reserves and any virements required as of 31st March 2024**

The council discussed the current earmarked reserves at length, including the mowers, there is a decision to be made on when / if to buy the new mowers, but this can be taken at a full council meeting. There may need to be more added into LED streetlight conversion as some more have gone blue and A&J lighting have brought to the clerks attention a further streetlight that they think belongs to the parish council, so the clerk needs to carry out this audit.

**Resolved** The council resolved not to carry out any Virements at this time.

**04.08.24 To review the general Reserves balance as of 31st March 2024**

**Resolved** As at 31st March 2024 there is £93,330.65 in the general reserves. A healthy general reserve is between 50 to 75% of the precept. GBPC precept for 2024/25 is £146,300 and this amount falls within those parameters (£69,825 to £104,737).

**04.10.24 To review the Agar Figures year end 31st March 2024**

**Resolved** these have been noted by the council.

**04.11.24 To note and discuss the internal audit report from the end of year internal audit that was carried out on 15th April 2024.**

Cllr. P. Dennitts advised that the report explaining the explanation of variances was a good and clear report. The auditor requested that the council pass on her thanks to the clerk for her very well organised presentation of the year end. The Council expressed their thanks also for making things more straightforward.

Cllr. K. Plummer asked about the recommendation from the auditor on who is the clear lead for the Christmas light switch on, the clerk advised that the parish council, as they do put money into this and she knows these events wont happen without the community, it would be a good idea to carry out due diligence and ensure risk assessments are in place going forward. The clerk suggested adding to the next full parish council agenda to meet with the members of the community who make the arrangements to get a system in place.

**04.11.23 To agree a date and a time for the next meeting**

**Resolved –** That the next Finance Committee meeting is to be held on Tuesday 09th July 10:00.

There being no further business the chair closed the meeting at 11:44

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