

Minutes of the Finance and Services Committee Meeting

**held THE BEECHES COMMUNITY CENTRE, Birch Court, Tuxford on Thursday
02 January 2025, commencing 4:30pm**

PRESENT: Cllrs G Frost (Chair), K Rutherford and R Walker

IN ATTENDANCE: Clerk/RFO (note taker) and Clerk both in attendance. Cllr J Moorhouse was in attendance via ZOOM (but did not vote). There were two members of the public present.

FS044 Inform Members and the public that the meeting was being recorded.

FS045 Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received from Cllr E Atkin or Cllr M Richards.

FS046 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Cllr GF adjourned the meeting to ask the members of the public if there were any questions. The members of the public did not have any questions other than related to item FS049 below – allotment complaint.

Cllr GF reconvened the meeting.

FS047 To review and approve Finance and Services Terms of Reference

Amendment to the terms of reference were discussed - to amend the meeting time from 4:30pm to 5:30pm start time from 03 April 2025

RESOLVED: Proposed by Cllr KR seconded by Cllr GF, all in favour to not change the current Finance and Services Terms of Reference.

FS048 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 05 December 2024 (folio reference: 2024/131-133)

RESOLVED: Proposed by Cllr KR, seconded by Cllr RW that the minutes of the meeting held above, having been circulated prior to the meeting, were taken as read, approved, and signed by the chairman as an accurate record.

FS049 3rd Stage Complaint

Following the town council complaint policy – a referral has been sent to the Finance and Services Committee to discuss.

Paperwork was sent electronically to all members prior to the meeting and paper copies were given to the Chair. The complaint summary is as follows:

- Rent setting process and discrepancies in water usage estimates
- Administrative and communication errors related to the allotment rental process
- Lack of a reliable lock for entry and exit at the allotments
- The use of ring-fencing of surplus allotment rental funds
- General dissatisfaction with responses and handling of the issues raised

The water meter is now being read monthly and readings submitted to the supplier. Historically the allotment rental income was ear-marked under the budget code of 'water charges' but the actual rental charges cover a variety of things like administrative and maintenance costs (including but not limited to quarterly site visits, grass and hedge cutting).

Clerk/RFO advised that following on from a meeting with the complainant, chairman and herself in February 2024 it became clear that there was a need to create new budget codes to breakdown the costs to cover expenditure in more detail and that she and the clerk (LD) will start to time record work relating to the allotments, commencing immediately.

The complainant asked if the allotment tenants are going to be charged for the work of the clerks and grounds maintenance team that the town council create a service level agreement. The clerk/RFO believes that the tenant allotment agreements cover this, but she will seek guidance and advise the council.

ACTION: Clerk/RFO to seek advice and create a draft SLA if necessary.

The Clerk/RFO apologised for an administrative error that occurred when 55% increase in rent was charged, instead of the approved 35% agreed at Finance and Services Committee on the 12 October 2024. This resulted in an over-charge totalling £140.70. This error will be rectified and reflected in the Y25/26 rental charge.

An explanation was given as to why previous calculations were based on 'water charges', that this was historical and a coding accounting coding issue but apologised for this being misleading.

ACTION: Clerk/RFO to create new budget codes.

The cost for 2025/26 allotment rental will be £59.73 for under 65 years old and £39.66 for over 65 years old. The invoices will be adjusted to reflect the overcharge for 2024.25 to £51.87 and £34.55 respectively. Any new tenants will be invoiced at the correct charge.

The complainant had asked the council to consider replacing the current lock system. The current system is working and there have been no other complaints from other tenants regarding access issues. Cllr RW asked the complainant to approach the other allotment tenants to ascertain whether they wish for the council to consider alternative locking systems and to advise the clerk (LD) accordingly.

Cllr RW asked the complainant to consider creating an allotment association and to undertake the running of the allotments themselves. He also advised the complainant of possible funding that may be available to them (Rural Infrastructure Fund) if they were to create an association.

It was agreed that there needs to be an allotment Health and Safety and Emergency Access Policy but clarification regarding any service level agreement be sought first.

Cllr RW asked that the Complaints Policy be amended so that all complaints are made in writing rather than offering the option for them to be verbal.

RESOLVED: Proposed by Cllr GF seconded by Cllr RW, all in favour of responding to the stage 3 complaint and of amending the complaints policy to clarify that all complaints (through the three stages) are made in writing (and remove verbal complaints).

ACTION: Clerk (LD) to write to complainant with the outcome of the 3rd stage complaint.

The other member of the public present, who is also an allotment tenant asked if the council could resume having twice yearly allotment meetings.

ACTION: Clerk (LD) to explore this option and advise the allotment tenants of the decision.

FS050 Finance

All following paperwork was sent electronically to all members prior to the meeting and paper copies were given to the Chair to authorise in the presence of members and any public present.

a) To approve invoices for payment (d)

Payments on the report attached at Appendix (d) were approved and signed.

Bank Transfers totaling: £11,230.02

Direct Debits totaling: £462.26

Debit Card payments totaling: £709.67

Cheque payments totaling: £0.00.

Income received totaling: - **£15,251.82**

RESOLVED: Cllr GF advised she had checked through the above and agreed with the totals. Proposed by Cllr GF seconded by Cllr RW, all in favour.

Bank Reconciliation/Budget Variation

Bank Account Balance at 27.12.2024 of £114,101.86 Co-op Bank Current Account, £24,475.38 Co-op Bank Saving Account, £37,347.79 Hampshire Trust Bank, and £100.00 Petty Cash float.

Clerk/RFO gave all members an up-to-date report on the expenditure, receipts, variances up to and including 27 December 2024, which was sent in advance of the meeting.

RESOLVED: Cllr GF advised she had checked through the above and agreed with the totals. Proposed by Cllr GF seconded by Cllr RW, all in favour.

2025.26 Precept – 3rd Draft

Clerk had previously prepared the 2nd draft and report to help councillors understand what to consider when setting a precept and a 7% increase was agreed – to be taken to Full Council on the 23 January 2025 as a recommendation to approve. It shows the amendment to allotment rental charges.

RESOLVED: Cllr GF advised she had checked through the above and agreed with the totals. Proposed by Cllr GF seconded by Cllr RW, all in favour.

ACTION: Recommendation of an increase in the 2025.26 precept to be 7% to be presented to Full Council for approval on 23 January 2025.

FS051 To receive items for information and future agenda items.

Clerk/RFO advised that the vehicle insurance for 2025 had been received and it is £1,355.48.

To include the grounds maintenance member of staff that is under the age of 25 years old it would be £2,053.62.

The insurance for 2024 was £1,673.00, so it would be an increase of £380.62 on the previous year but £698.14 on the current renewal quotation.

RESOLVED: Finance and Services Committee agreed that there is an operational need to include the member of staff on the insurance and with the policy due for renewal on the 10 January 2025 (having only received the renewal on the 20 December 2024) the clerk/RFO will need to action this request under their delegated powers and have the decision ratified at Full Council on the 23 January 2025.

ACTION: Clerk/RFO to confirm insurance quote and ratify decision at Full Council on the 23 January 2025.

FS052 Date of Next Meeting: 03 April 2025

The Chairman thanked Councillors for their contributions to the meeting.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 5: 30pm.

CHAIRMAN'S SIGNATURE.....

DATE.....