

Minutes of Meeting on 18th March 2024
Elmstead Parish Council – Finance Committee
Community Centre, School Road, Elmstead Market, CO7 7ET

Present: Councillors Martine Ward (Chairman), Amanda Brennan, Michael Hare and Gill Williams
Mrs Baxter (clerk)

Absent: Councillor James Chable

Also present: Cllr Gladwin

24/001 Apologies of Absence

Councillor James Chable sent his apologies

24/002 Declaration of Pecuniary Interests and Personal Interests.

None.

24/003 To agree the Minutes of the meeting of 19th October 2023.

It was resolved to accept the minutes from 19th October 2023 as true and accurate.

Proposed: Cllr Brennan, Seconded: Cllr Williams, all in favour.

24/004 2023/23 Third Quarter Review

To review the expenditure for the third quarter of 2023/24 against the set budget. Also, to consider the reserves and future potential costs to be paid from reserves.

Individual cost centres were reviewed. It was noted that the handyman hours were over 75%, due to overtime worked. There are minimal communications costs as the phone has been cancelled and the broadband is now free. It's just occasional top ups on the PC mobile phone. The increase in the cost of the Microsoft licence was noted.

The increase in the EALC subscription was also discussed and it was asked what the council gets from EALC, is it value for money? The last time Cllr Williams tried to call and e-mail them they did not respond. It was raised that the chairman of Alresford PC is now an executive member and Cllr Williams will call to ask him about their communications, what would happen if help was needed urgently?

The clerk is to ask Frating PC how they financed their VAS signage.

There was a discussion over the costs of owning and operating a mower versus using a contractor. The clerk is to look at how the handyman's hours are split between grass cutting and other duties for the next committee meeting.

The costs for cutting the grass at Dene Park were discussed. Cllr Williams is going to speak to Wivenhoe Town Council to see if they have or know of a local contractor who could do it.

The rising cost of the Christmas tree was noted. The clerk has recently been contacted by an artificial commercial Christmas tree company offering early bird discounts so will look into it.

Overall the council was not doing too badly. Not including the NDO costs and events paid by grants the actual is expenditure is at 81% of budget. A lot of the annual one off costs have already been paid.

The council reviewed the reserves, the clerk had estimated that the general reserve as we go into 2024/25 will be about £14,800 and that we need to manage expenditure carefully and try and build up the general reserve.

24/005 Tendring/Colchester Borders Garden Community Plan Examination Hearings Commencing 7th May 2024

To consider a letter received from Wivenhoe Town Council requesting assistance in preparing for the hearing, with the engagement of the services of a planning consultant.

The cost of the planning consultant will be in the region of £10,000 - £12,000. Cllr Gladwin will be meeting Wivenhoe Town Council next week and asked for a figure to enable the consultant to focus on Elmstead's issues, possibly for half a day or a day. There is £9,650 in the reserve for legal fees. It was discussed that it's the biggest thing that is going to affect the whole village and will have an enormous impact. Options of £2,000 for a half a day or £4,000

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for a whole day were discussed, and how much of the legal reserve might be needed for the New Community Centre. The New Community Centre has s106 funds that could be used, and fundraising will be possible. It was reiterated that this is the most important thing to be happening in the Parish for a long time, and it will be Elmstead that will be most affected by the Garden Community.

It was discussed that with the additional housing in Elmstead the tax base is increasing year on year, with the potential to build up reserves.

It was resolved to commit up to £4,000 for a day of the consultant's time. Proposed: Cllr Brennan, Seconded: Cllr Williams, all in favour.

24/006 Accounting software

To consider using a software package for the Parish accounts. Does the committee wish to recommend this to council?

For the first year Scribe will have an initial set up fee of £449 and then £612/year. The clerk has spoken to a Scribe representative and the reasons for using their software package include:

An increase in transactions and a reliance on excel spreadsheets increases the risk of human error. It can take the clerk a lot of time to work out where errors have occurred.

It will make the job easier for the clerk in providing year-end information, rather than having to transpose the cashbook into other worksheets and then onto the Annual or VAT Return.

It's a cloud based system so it can have multiple users using different devices to access it and if the clerk is not at work for any reason then the information is still available and Scribe support can help someone new to the system to use it.

The Scribe customer support is excellent, and they do free training on council related topics. It was agreed to recommend to the council that we use the Scribe software. Proposed: Cllr Brennan, Seconded: Cllr Williams, all in favour. As the clerk already uses Scribe at another council this is the preferred option.

24/007 Asset Register

To review.

There are 2 asset registers, one for insurance which increases every year and should cover the replacement cost of each asset, and one for the annual return which is the cost price. This does not increase. No assets are depreciated. The committee reviewed the asset register.

It was asked about the mower, which is insured separately.

It was asked about the community centre, the insurance value is not the current value of it, but the total cost to clear the site and rebuild a new community centre.

24/008 Date for next meeting.

The next meeting will be to review the fourth quarter 23/24 expenditure, so will be after the 23/24 year end.

24/009 Matters raised by Councillors for the next agenda or for information only.

None.

24/010 Verification of Bank Reconciliations

A member to verify the 3rd Quarter 23/24 bank reconciliations.

This was done after the meeting.

The meeting closed at 1.37pm. Minuted by Mrs. A Baxter

Contact: elmsteadparish@gmail.com