

Humber, Ford & Stoke Prior Group Parish Council

Standing Finance Working Group

Friday 4 October 2019, 2.00pm

at Great Marston Farmhouse, Risbury

NOTES OF MEETING

Present: Philip Brown (PB), Alan Bathurst (AB).

		Action
1.	Apologies	
	Zoe Burge (ZB). Agreed that notes would be circulated to ZB for her comments on these matters. [Done, and ZB agreed with notes]	PB
2.	Review of Financial Regulations	
2.1	<p>New model NALC regulations published July 2019. PB had reviewed identified changes, and most were covered in our adopted Regulations. Only one substantive change: amendment to our Regulation 11.1(ii) to read “for specialist services such as are provided by legal professionals acting in disputes”. Noted that this meant that the procedures for contracting for most professional services (eg surveyors or solicitors) would have to follow the procedures laid down in 11.2.</p> <p>Agreed to recommend to Council that this change should be made to the Regulations, and the amended practice followed immediately.</p>	PB
3.	Review of administrative practices	
3.1	All current procedures and practices reviewed for compliance with Financial Regulations and good practice in the Practitioner’s Guide.	
3.2	Noted that still awaiting confirmation of change of current account signatories (removal of R Thompson, addition of Cllr Burge).	
3.3	Noted that Council had previously approved setting up online banking authorisation for payments, but RFO had been baffled by Lloyd’s information and forms to do this. Agreed that PB will visit Lloyds branch to discuss setting this up so that only the RFO can request an online payment but only nominated signatories can approve it.	PB
3.4	<p>Noted that Financial Regulation 6.20 prohibits officers from using personal credit or debit cards under any circumstances. A debit card can be issued to officers under 6.18.</p> <p>Agreed to recommend to Council that in order to pay for purchases (eg on the internet) which cannot be paid by cheque), the RFO be issued with a debit card on the current account, with authorisation for any single transaction up to £250, or higher if authorised by Council in advance. Agreed that to monitor this, councillor signatories should monitor use of the card by accessing the account details on-line at least monthly, and a nominated signatory should report this monitoring to Council at each meeting.</p>	PB
4.	Budget 2020-21	
4.1	<u>The Lamb</u>	
4.1.1	<p>Implications of proposed purchase of The Lamb considered.</p> <p>Noted that upfront costs of bid already covered by ear-marked £2000 reserve. If this were spent, and a bid made, then other costs of the purchase would be covered by the borrowing proposed in the Acquisition Plan. If an unsuccessful bid were made, the budget would have to consider whether to replenish this ear-marked reserve for a possible future bid. Agreed this could only be</p>	PB

	considered in January, so a good reason to set the budget and precept at the January meeting.	
4.1.2	Discussed proposal to add a sum to the precept for a reserve to make a loan repayment for The Lamb to guard against a period without tenancy rental income. Agreed that two problems with this: (1) it is a blunt instrument in that we can only agree to do this once each year in about January, when it may not be known whether we are going to be taking out a loan or what the reserve level might need to be; (2) it would be simpler and politically more justifiable to residents that the costs of the borrowing were covered other than through the precept – i.e. through measures proposed in the 2013 borrowing plan such as borrowing more than immediately needed to provide a reserve fund, and getting a period of rental income in advance from tenants. Agreed to discuss this at The Lamb Working Group, but recommend against a precept increase to provide a loan repayment contingency fund.	PB
4.1.3	Ownership of The Lamb would, however, have some management and staff costs for the Council (running the Oversight Committee, liaising with agents re tenants, dealing with required repairs, dealing with building insurance, legalities of ownership and other correspondence not the responsibility of the tenant). Estimated at least 5 hours per month, and certainly considerably more than this in first year. Clerk does not have expertise or time available to add to current hours, so an Assistant Clerk would need to be appointed, at estimated remuneration of at least £600 p.a. and possibly £1000-£1500. Agreed that this provision should be included in the costs in the Acquisition Proposal and met by the planned rental income. However, in the short term, these costs might be incurred before any tenancy in place, so should be covered by replenishing (if necessary) the existing ear-marked Lamb reserves of £2000.	PB
4.2	<u>Pump advertising</u>	
4.2.1	Noted advertising income appears less than it should be. RFO monitoring this and checks with Editor regularly - receives assurances. Possible to handle Pump advertising separately from the rest of the Pump, and at least two residents would be willing to do this.	
4.2.2	Most advertising could be handled annually, with a colour insert printed in advance, simplifying the work of producing The Pump.	
4.2.3	Advertising rates have not changed for many years, at £36 for any annual advert. Agreed rates should increase, and vary for full-page or other. Rates for similar local publications to be checked.	
4.2.4	Agreed report above points to Council for discussion in November.	PB
4.3	<u>Lengthsman grant and budget</u> No change to overall spending proposed for 2020-21, as work meets need, but may need to re-balance spending on highways and PROWs. Noted that if grant reinstated, this would permit additional work to budgeted, or result in increased general reserves.	PB
4.4	<u>Other budget items</u> Other budget items to be adjusted in line with 3-year forecast agreed in January 2019.	PB
5.	Meeting closed at 4.10pm.	

Philip Brown
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