

BLEWBURY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting held on Thursday 17th December 2020 at 6pm via an e-conference system.

In attendance: - Cllrs C Lakeland (CL), M Penington (MP), V Humphries (VH) & Clerk Miss E Cooper (EC/Clerk)

1. Apologies for absence
None.
2. Elect a Chairman of the finance committee
Cllr C Lakeland was elected Chairman for the meeting.
3. Declarations of Interest
None declared.
4. Review the of Terms of Reference
The Terms of Reference were reviewed with minor amendments. Clerk to amend & reissue.
5. Review the estimates of receipts and payments for 2020/2021
The Committee discussed performance against budget by examining the level of receipts and payments to the 1st December 2020 and the Clerk's estimates to the year end of 2020/2021.
5.1 Receipts
Receipts were more or less in line with the budget forecast with the exception of CIL payments totalling £13,409.37 and a one-off payment of £10,000 relating to SBRR for Covid recovery. While this shows an outwardly healthy bank balance, the SBRR grant is ring-fenced with planned expenditure on the clubhouse.
5.2 Payments
Payments were in line with budget projections with the exception of the previously mentioned work on the clubhouse. Costs of tree work were within approved amounts with the exception of one tree within the old cemetery which was included in our survey unnoticed.
6. Establish estimates of income and expenditure for 2021/2022
The Committee agreed to set a proposed budget and precept for financial year 2021-22.
6.1 Receipts
Receipts over the coming year, without an increase in precept, will fall as the expected level of CIL will be less than last year, there is uncertainty about the County Councillor fund and KAP support from the BVS will likely be zero or very limited
6.2 Payments
Many regular payments such as salaries, loans and insurance are likely to remain at or near to the same level as in 20-21. The most significant impact on finances will be the taking over and running of the clubhouse. The level of funding required will become apparent through the year, but estimates are difficult with no sound accounting records and no usage for the best part of a year. The committee agreed to err on the generous side of realistic.
6.3 Grants
Grants will remain the same. The Committee agreed to continue to support the DVTG buses but acknowledged there is a small chance the grant may not be requested as the service is currently suspended.
CAB will be working harder than usual and it was proposed by the committee to pay a one-off payment of £150 on top of their annual grant.

The other village amenity that the PC has taken on this year is the Cobb Wall (Curtoys Lane). The grant was previously £300pa. In light of the bills approaching £15000 (inc. vat) over the last couple of years, £300 is inadequate. Even if no repairs are necessary over the next few years, a fund must be built up alongside grant applications by the Cobb Wall Committee. It is proposed to set aside £1000 per annum for the Cob Wall fund.

7. To review outgoing grants:
 - 7.1. Blewbury village organisation grants
The Committee agreed to continue to support the following: -
 - 7.1.1 DVTG annual grant of £400
 - 7.1.2 Village Post Office annual grant of £1200 (£300 paid quarterly)
 - 7.1.3 Cobb Wall fund annual grant of £1000 (increased from £300 pa as this is now the PC's responsibility)
 - 7.2. St Michael's Blewbury PCC
This is for grass cutting only & is covered under a contract with the grass cutter.
 - 7.3. Other regular grants agreed: -
 - 7.3.1 Didcot CAB £150 (+£150 one off payment for 2021-22)
 - 7.3.2 Home Start Oxfordshire £50
 - 7.3.3 Contingency of £200 for other requests from bodies such as Young Carers
8. To review the salaries of Clerk and Lengthman
Salaries will be raised. For the Clerk, according to NALC guidelines & including an increase for the expected successful completion of CiLCA. These are statutory rises that the Council will apply according to guidelines. The Committee proposed raising the hourly rate for the Lengthman by £1 to £12 per hour from April 2021. This is likely to be the final rise for this post and reflects the Lengthman's exemplary service to the village. The total cost of salary increases will add approximately £1500 per annum by the end of the next financial year.
9. Reserves. *To agree the level of reserves needed for the next financial year.*
It is essential, especially in times such as these, that adequate reserves are established to see us through any eventualities. Reserves were set last year at £25,000 although this amounted to more in the bank accounts at the end of the year. Advice suggests that it would be prudent to designate an amount equivalent to one year's precept so the Committee proposes reserves be set at £65,000. This will be possible due to tight monetary control over the past year and the coming year.
10. Capital projects. *To establish reserves available for capital projects and to agree the budget for capital projects.*
The Committee agreed that there are currently no capital projects proposed or under way for which reserves need to be established.
11. Precept for 2021/2022 *To agree the precept for the next financial year and make recommendation to the full Parish Council.* Clerk's note: - precept deadline extended to 22.01.21. Also see Appendix 1
Given the level of unknown expenditure or income on the Clubhouse, together with any support required by other village assets, the Committee felt obliged to make a small increase in precept for the coming year. The Committee therefore proposes an increase of 5% for 2021-22 to £68,250.
12. To review & agree any amendments to the Council's Financial Regulations
The Committee agreed that as the Financial Regulations were reviewed & agreed in September 2020, that no further review was required at this point.
13. To review physical assets and liability

The Committee agreed that as physical assets & liability were reviewed this year, that an annual review would suffice.

14. To review the adequacy of the Risk Management Policy
The Committee agreed that as the Risk Management Policy was reviewed & signed off in November 2020, that no further review was required at this point.
15. To review the adequacy of Council Insurance cover
The Committee agreed that the Council's insurance cover was adequate & now included the Clubhouse (at no extra cost).
16. Date of next meeting: - Wednesday 15th December 2021

The meeting finished at 19.08pm.

APPENDIX 1

The background to the legality of precept rises is below

The provisional local government finance settlement 2021-22

3.5 Council tax referendum principles for town and parish councils

3.5.1 In 2018-19, the Government announced that it did not intend to set referendum principles for town and parish councils for three years. This was contingent on the sector taking all available steps to mitigate the need for council tax increases and the Government seeing clear evidence of restraint in the increases set by the sector.

3.5.2 In 2020-21, the average Band D parish precept increased by 4.0%. This was the lowest percentage point increase in parish precept since 2012-13 but remains in excess of the rate of inflation.

3.5.3 In expectation that parish and town councils continue to show restraint when setting council tax precept levels, the Government proposes to continue with no referendum principles for town and parish councils in 2021-22. **The Government will take careful account of the increases set by parishes in 2021-22 when reviewing the matter ahead of next year's settlement.**