

# BLEADON PARISH COUNCIL

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**Minutes of a Meeting of Bleadon Parish Council's Finance & Personnel Committee** that was held in the **Coronation Hall Coronation Road Bleadon** on **Monday 4th January 2016** that commenced at **7.30 pm** when the following business was transacted.

**PRESENT** Councillors Rev. S Hartree (Chairman), Mr I Gibson (ex-officio), Mrs I D Clarke and Mrs C Gutsell together with the Parish Clerk Miss H Brinton

**F&P 42.1 To receive any apologies for non attendance**

None

**F&P 42.2 To receive any declarations of interest**

Cllr Gibson and Cllr Clarke declared an interest in item 42.8

**F&P 42.3 To receive and approve the Minutes of the Finance & Personnel Committee Meeting held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015.**

**Proposed by Cllr Gibson and seconded by Cllr Clarke**

**Resolved** that the Minutes of the Finance & Personnel Committee Meeting held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015 that had been duly circulated be taken as read and approved as being correct and signed as such by the Chairman

**F&P 42.4 Matters Arising from those Minutes**

None

**F&P 42.5 The Committee to resolve to enter a closed session with all except the committee members and the Clerk excluded.**

**Resolved that closed session be entered at 20.15. One member of the public left the hall.**

**F&P 42.6 Both the Clerk's contract of employment and the Village Ranger's contract of employment were considered in the closed session**

**F&P 42.7 The Committee to resolve to end the closed session.**

**Resolved to end the closed session at 20.20.**

**One member of the public re-entered the hall.**

**F&P 42.8 To consider the Coronation Hall Management Committee request for financial guarantee.**

The Chair reminded the committee that the Council had been asked to undertake a guarantee of £20,000 to support the refurbishment of the village hall. He said that the village hall is at the centre of social activities and felt that it was right and correct to give assistance to the Hall Committee. From the Council's Special Reserve he proposed a grant of £3,000 to be given to the Village Hall Management Committee and for the Council to stand guarantor for the additional £20,000.

Cllr Gutsell that the Council had not been asked for a grant of £3,000 and proposed a grant of £3,000 with the guarantee to be £17,000.

The meeting was suspended at 20.25 to allow Cllrs Gibson and Clarke who had declared an interest in the agenda item to speak.

The meeting resumed at 20.27.

It was proposed and carried that a guarantee up to £20,000 be made specifically out of reserves.

**F&P 42.9 To receive recommendations from the Council and Committees for the 2016/17 expenditure.**

The Chair stated that there had been no recommendations received from either full Council nor the Planning Committee and therefore it was only the following requests for Open Spaces Committee that needed to be considered:

- £1,200 for re-siting of the children's sand pit
- £1,500 to re-site the dog bin, noticeboard and bus shelter when the fencing to which these items are attached or located is moved by the land owner
- £5,000 for repairs to the Churchyard wall
- £600 for planters
- £1,200 for a bus shelter at the top of Celtic Way
- £200 to support the village celebration of the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday

The total for these requests is £9,700 together with the current year spend would make a proposal of £20,000 for Open Spaces.

**F&P 42.10 To consider the estimated outturn for the 2015/16 year and budget for 2016/17**

The issue of the Youth Club lease and rent needs to be visited. The clerk said that she believed from conversations that the lease was out of date and needed to be updated.

The Chair asked that the issue of allotment rents be put on the next Open Spaces Committee agenda so that they be reviewed.

The clerk was asked to follow up the £20 donation from the War Graves Commission as this had not been received.

The continuation of the use of Microshade to support the clerk in her work took place with the merits of the arrangements and the merits of other arrangements being discussed. The clerk asked that the committee consider the impact on her work of changing the arrangements at this moment in time as her workload would increase if the system was discontinued particularly in relation to the updating and applying of software patches currently done by Microshade. There would also be additional costs in purchasing a new laptop, software licences and ICT support from elsewhere as required.

Cllr Gibson proposed and Cllr Hartree seconded that the status quo should be continued with to support the clerk in her first complete financial year. Cllr Clarke abstained, Cllr Gutsell was against the proposal. Cllr Gibson's proposal was carried as the Chair used a casting vote.

Discussions took place around the sharing of the Hall Broadband costs and the clerk has been asked to contact the Coronation Hall Management Committee in reference to this.

The meeting was suspended at 21.30 to allow Cllr Gibson and Cllr Clarke as Hall Committee members to comment.

The meeting resumed at 21.32.

The discussions continued with a line by line perusal of the clerk's estimated budget outturn for 2015/16 and the proposals for next year.

**F&P 42.11 To resolve the level of the precept for 2016/17 for recommendation to the Council**

On completion of the discussion, the shortfall on the proposed budget for income purposes would be £47,000. The Chair commented that in the previous two years at least, he had advised that the precept not be increased but felt that this was the time that an increase should be considered with reserves being used to make up the shortfall.

Cllr Gutsell stated that she felt the precept should not be increased.

The Chair asked whether she was proposing covering £9,000 of the shortfall from reserves.

Cllr Gutsell suggested that the committee go back to the proposals and reduce expenditure.

Cllr Gibson commented that the precept had remained static since 2013/14 and was 1.3% of council tax. Reduced budgets will compromise services and North Somerset Council has been tasked with reducing their budget even further – more will come down to parish councils. The Council had inherited the issue of the churchyard. The Chair commented at this point that the Council needs to comply with legislation in this respect.

Cllr Gibson continued that it would poor practice not to increase the precept which would be minimal and not a great deal per household per month amounting to approximately £1.50 per month per household. With the issue of rate relief suspension on the public toilets, the council should therefore increase the precept.

The Chair commented that the North Somerset Council budget and therefore council tax will likely increase by 2% and the Fire Authority and Police have also increased their precept.

Cllr Gutsell commented that Bleadon Parish was always one of the top precept amounts – Cllr Clarke concurred and said that some of this was historical.

Cllr Gutsell commented on the level of administration costs and Cllr Clarke commented that it was wrong to think that this does not make a difference and that the Council had to justify what it was spending.

Cllr Gibson said he respected that view.

The Chair commented that a neighbouring village, Hutton had two village orderlies and a gardener to whom an honorarium was paid and they cost less. This was not intended to be any criticism of the Village Ranger and he was not saying that they did the same work.

Cllr Clarke commented that the council does not claim any grants and felt that any applicable grants should be applied for.

The Chair said that he had argued for the last two years that the precept be held but he believed it was right now to increase it as the budget for next year had increased considerably. There was a potential reserve reduction of £20,000 which was a substantial amount. If that happened and the precept was not increased next year the council could exhaust its unrestricted reserves. He felt that the precept should not be increased by the full amount but there should be a balance between precept increase and using reserves.

Cllr Gibson asked whether he had a suggestion.

The Chair replied to increase the precept by 15% which would leave £3,820 to be taken from reserves.

Cllr Gibson asked why there was a need for reserves at all.

The Chair replied that there could be a problem for Bleadon Parish Council if North Somerset Council passed down responsibility for grass cutting as per its latest consultation programme. They could do this mid-year and the council would then have to meet this cost from reserves. He added that there needed therefore to be a balance between using reserves and increasing the precept.

Cllr Clarke commented that North Somerset has said that it will be sending things down to Bleadon Parish Council and that the onus was on the council to apply for grants as the Village Hall Management Committee do. She added that lots of people do not use the village hall for example.

The Chair said that in terms of the guarantee requested by the Hall Management Committee, it was not right that the money be given without anything in hand.

Cllr Gibson asked who was proposing what?

Cllr Gutsell proposed retaining the precept at £38,000 and that any shortfall should be taken from expenditure. She proposed another meeting to make savings of £9,000.

Cllr Gibson said that the committee needed to do something positive about this.

The Chair suggested another meeting before full Council and that councillors prepare specific proposals with costs – there needed to be costed specifics and focus during the meeting.

The Chair proposed the next meeting be at 18.30 to 19.15 to allow for the Planning Committee to follow on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January. Time and date agreed.

**F&P 42.12 Other matters referred to the Clerk**

None

**F&P 42.13 Date of next meeting**

**11<sup>th</sup> January 2016 at 18.30**

**The meeting closed at 22.15.**