WESTERHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Monday 1st July 2024 at 7 pm in Russell House, Market Square, Westerham

Present: Councillors: Mrs S Sheen (SS) - Chairman
Mr E Boyle (EB)
Mr A Hussain (AJM)
Dr J Lord (JL)

In attendance: Town Clerk: Mrs A Howells (AH)
Finance/Project Officer: Mrs D Marshall (DM)
One resident

Item		Action
1.	**<u>Apologies for Absence</u>** Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Proudfoot – personal commitment.	
2.	**<u>Declarations of Interest not previously declared</u>** None.	
3.	**<u>Minutes of the Meeting held on 13th May 2024</u>** Minutes of the Meeting held on 13th May were approved at Council on 20th May.	
4.	**<u>Information items arising from the minutes of the previous meeting not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda</u>** 4. Crockham Hill Car Park – Business Rates - No further communication had been received.	
5.	**<u>Finance</u>** **5.1 Responsible Finance Officer Report (Finance Officer) –** The Report was received with thanks and the following items were noted: • The WTC Insurance Policy had been renewed with Zurich Insurance with a 5% index linked increase applied. This policy previously incorporated an element for legal expenses (underwritten by DAS Insce) of c£5,000 for just £56 for 11 years. This part of the agreement expired, and DAS Insce now offered comprehensive cover up to £200,000 for £308. The Finance Officer and Chair of F&GP concluded that whilst this was an unexpected increase, it would be unwise to exclude this cover even though this type of cover was	

no longer mandatory. The WTC insurance premium would be £7,923.35 vs a budget of £7,600 – the shortfall could be met from the contingency budget.

The Committee approved the decision regarding Insurance premiums.

- The external audit had been completed and submitted before the 30th June deadline.
- The employers' made a "full and final" offer to the NJC unions that with effect from 1 April 2024, an increase of £1,290 (pro rata for part-time employees) to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all NJC pay points 2 to 43 inclusive. Also with effect from 1 April 2024, an increase of 2.50 per cent on all pay points in grades 44 – 62. All other aspects of the unions pay claim were rejected. Thie Unions felt the offer was disappointing and were balloting their members regarding the offer.
- APFOS handover to the Deputy Clerk was now complete. The FINANCE OFFICER had been asked to continue 'caretaking' CHWMPF Trust for the time being, hence the archiving project had not yet recommenced.
- King George's Field update - The planter by the skate park had been planted with heathers. The requested re-seeding in the area surrounding the skate park had not been undertaken, meaning that the area was still muddy and unattractive, so an official opening was now unlikely to take place.
- Accounting Package - Since the company who provide the accounts package had been bought by a new owner, the Finance Officer had found that the level of service received had reduced, whilst costs seemed to have increased significantly. Meanwhile other accounting packages in the market seemed to have improved and now had an increased share of the market. The Finance Officer proposed to undertake market research over the next 6 months to ascertain whether WTC should consider replacing the Alpha package with Scribe.
- The overtime report was noted.

5.2 Payments and receipts list to 31st May 2024 – Cllr Sheen had no issues to bring to the Committee's attention, minor queries were explained.

The Payment List would be recommended to Council for approval.

5.3 Committee Accounts to 31st May 2024 – The Accounts had been circulated and there were no queries.

The Accounts would be recommended to Council for approval.

The Finance Officer had some budget concerns to raise:

- F&GP – The Insurance was £324 over budget and Business rates was £577 over budget. Both of these areas could be met by F&GP contingency, if necessary, but may be offset by an underspend on payroll, as a lower pay award than budgeted for was likely.
- APFOS – electricity was high for the KGF pavilion but this was likely to be due to estimated invoices. The Finance Officer to investigate.

Cllr Sheen offered to provide a summary of WTC utilities companies and costs. DM

5.4 Internal Auditor's report - The Internal Auditor report had been circulated.

The Committee thanked the Finance Officer for her work to ensure a clean SS

	audit. As advised by the Internal Auditor, the only issue raised was outside of WTC's control: "The External Audit Report was not published online prior to the 30th of September 2023, therefore the Town Council had not met their publication requirements. It should be noted that this was not published on time as the External Auditor had not provided the report to the Town Council until after the 30th September." **5.5 Bank signatories –** The Finance Officer reported that following the resignation of Cllr Kay it would be necessary to change bank signatories again, as he had been a signatory on each Council bank account. Following discussion, it was agreed to ask Cllr Rodges to be a signatory. **5.6 Financial Regulations –** The Finance Officer reported that NALC had issued a model set of Financial Regulations. The Finance Officer had circulated draft Regulations in which she had highlighted new clauses and changes to existing clauses. Following lengthy discussion it was agreed to approve the draft Regulations to Council. It was noted that item 4.8 needed to be highlighted at Council as this this stated that – any member with council tax unpaid for more than two months was prohibited from voting on the budget or precept by Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.	DM DM
6.	**<u>Land Issues</u>** **6.1 Doctors Surgery –** Cllr Sheen had circulated a paper for consideration. Cllr Sheen was thanked for all her hard work on the draft lease. Following lengthy discussion it was agreed the next steps would be: - • Confirm a meeting with the Surgery to discuss the draft lease Cllrs Sheen, Lord, the Clerk and Finance Officer to attend the meeting • To negotiate an agreed rent • To include in the Lease a rent review every three years • To finalise the draft lease before forwarding to the WTC Solicitor for review **6.2 Churchill School –** Cllr Sheen reported that a response had been received from KCC Cllr Chard regarding the land adjacent to Churchill School. Over the last four years the tree work had cost three times the cost of the lease. KCC Cllr Chard did not agree with any of WTC options regarding the land and suggested a fourth option whereby he would consider using his Members Fund to offset the cost. Following discussion it was agreed to ask KCC Cllr Chard if the Members Fund could be applied for by the School. If this was the case then a meeting would be sought with the Head Teacher regarding a revised lease which included tree works with a peppercorn rent. Cllr Lord to draft a lease. **6.3 Bloomfield Allotments –** Following a meeting with the Squerryes Estate, the Estate had confirmed that in the short term the Estate was willing to renew the lease again on the 1st April 2025 for a further year to 31st March 2026. There had been no response on the offer to purchase/gift/long term lease for Bloomfield Allotments and without this no further progress could be made on the Currant Hill project.	SS JL
7.	**<u>Russell House</u>** **7.1 Maintenance Plan –** The Maintenance Plan was noted. The Town Clerk reported that the lift was not working again and the	

	contractor had been called out. **7.2 Anti-social behaviour issues –** minor littering only. **7.3 Car park maintenance –** The Clerk reported that the Doctors Surgery paid for 15 car park spaces in addition to the downstairs of Russell House. However, due to larger cars it was not possible to park five cars on the wall side of the car park, so they have been paying for five spaces in this area but could only park four cars. If WTC laid heavy duty rubber grass mats at a cost of £43.99 each (the mats allowed grass to grow through holes and allowed sufficient drainage for grassed sites) at both ends of the parking area then this would increase the parking area to allow five cars to park. Following discussion, it was agreed to purchase the grass mats spending no more than £250, to be fitted by the Grounds Maintenance Operative.	AH
8.	**<u>ECO Policy Action Plan</u>** The open actions had been circulated and was reviewed.	
9.	**<u>Policies and Procedures</u>** The following Policies had been circulated: - **9.1 Scheme of Delegation –** Following discussion and minor alterations it was agreed to recommend the Scheme of Delegation for approval at Council. **9.2 Russell House Hiring Agreement –** Following discussion it was agreed to approve the Hiring Agreement. **Resolved:** To approve the Russell House Hiring Agreement. **9.3 Russell House Charging Policy -** Following discussion it was agreed to approve the Charging Policy with no rent increase. **Resolved:** To approve the Russell House Charging Policy with no rent increase.	AH AH AH
10.	**<u>Correspondence</u>** None.	
11.	**<u>Reports from Councillors</u>** None.	
12.	**<u>TN16, Crockham Hill Village newsletter and Website</u>** None.	
13.	**<u>Matters for District and County Councillors</u>** Churchill School.	
14.	**<u>Further Matters for Consideration at the next meeting</u>** None.	
15.	**<u>Date of next meeting</u>** Monday 16th September 2024	
	Part 2 Pursuant to Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (admission meetings) Act 1960. The Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the under mentioned item on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business concerned.	

16.	**<u>HR Minutes</u>** 17.1 The HR Minutes were approved.	

The meeting was concluded at 9.48 pm.

Minutes confirmed as a correct record:

Chairman