

Harrietsham Parish Council
Finance and General Purposes Committee
Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 13th July 2023 at 7:30pm

- 1. Present:** Cllrs T Sams (chairman), Luck, Roots, and M Cuerden (RFO/Amenity Manager)
Apologies: Cllr Stanley
Members of the public: None
- 2. Disclosures:** None

3. Minutes of the last meeting (20th April 2023) were approved at the subsequent Council meeting. A further copy was signed at this meeting for F&GP records.

4. Review of 2023/24 Accounts. The RFO went through the income and expenditure spreadsheets column by column, answering questions as they arose. He noted that we are currently in month 4 of the financial year, and thus far we seem to be on or below budget in most areas. The bank reconciliation was also looked at, and the RFO noted that we had – at this stage – sufficient funding for anticipated costs. He did, however, observe that although we have almost £350K in the bank, £90K of that is reserved for any major work required in Woodlands Walk, and we have now received almost all of the expected income for the year, but have yet to see most of the costs.

On the “Legal and Professional Fees” column, he reminded the committee that the previous Council meeting had addressed the possibility of the Local Plan continuing on to another phase. This would require further funding, and F&GP had been asked to consider a budget allocation. All were agreed that, at this stage in the year, we would prefer to seek to accommodate this extra provision within our existing budget, rather than calling upon reserves. After some discussion, it was agreed to vire £10,000 from “Open Spaces” and a further £2,000 from “Communications and Publicity”, putting the resulting £12,000 towards the possible legal fees. (Proposed Cllr Sams, seconded Cllr Roots, all in favour). Any subsequent budget additions would probably have to be met from reserves.

5. Confirmation of Bank Balances: Whilst looking at the bank reconciliation, the RFO passed over the latest bank statements to the Chairman so that he could check the balances, which were found to tally.

6. External Audit – update: The RFO reported that there was, as yet, nothing to report! The paperwork had all gone off to Metzgers, the appointed External Auditor, who had acknowledged receipt, but we have yet to hear back. He commented that he didn’t anticipate any problems.

7. Medical Centre - update: The RFO reported that he was delighted to be able to inform councillors that we now have a signed, sealed and delivered new 15-year lease for the Glebe Field medical centre. It has only taken 12 years.... The result might only be a slight increase in rent (about £100 per month), but it means a more secure medical provision for the village for the next 15 years, and it clarifies (and reduces) our liability for maintenance.

8. Village Hall – update: The RFO shared the latest set of 2023 hall accounts with the committee, for their information. He noted that there has been a small but steady increase in the bank balances, with a £4K increase over the last 6 months. However, he also pointed out that these figures did not include (a) the staff costs of administration, specifically the overtime paid to the Clerk and the RFO or (b) the two or three large maintenance bills paid for by the council as part of their “bail-out” strategy. If these were taken into account, then that would almost certainly wipe out the hall’s current balances or more. As to the future, various attempts to find new trustees had been made, with no success, while October will see the first anniversary of the council stepping in. This would be a good time to take stock of progress to date and to assess how the council wishes to proceed from that point on. He also noted that at some point soon, there ought to be an AGM held – he would discuss this with the Clerk on her return from leave.

8. Date of next meeting – Thursday 9th November 2023 at 7:30pm.

Meeting closed at 8:15pm.