

Harrietsham Parish Council
Finance and General Purposes Committee
Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 21st April 2022 at 7:30pm

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

2. **Disclosures:** None

3. **Minutes of the last meeting** (13th January 2022) were approved at the subsequent Council meeting. A further copy was signed at this meeting for F&GP records.

4. **Internal audit 2021/22:** Following the successful interim audit mid-year, the auditor had completed the year by doing most of the second half in late March, leaving just a few loose ends to tie up in April. As a result, the internal audit had been completed in record time, and we now have the report. The RFO was pleased to report that, once again, we have a clean bill of health. The sole recommendation related to noting that we had considered, but not implemented, an increase in the Fidelity Guarantee. The RFO had looked into this with our current insurers, and found that an increase to the next level of £500,000 was likely to generate quite a lot of work – fortunately, by chance, our brokers are withdrawing from the market, so in seeking a replacement policy, the RFO has asked for a Guarantee of £320,000 which should go a long way to solving the problem.

5. **Review of 2021/22 Accounts.** The final set of audited accounts for 2021/22 had been circulated, and the RFO offered to answer any questions arising – there were none. He also explained that the agenda doesn't have the usual item for checking the bank balances against the Bank Reconciliation because they have just been audited!

6. **Annual Governance Statement:** The RFO went through the Statement as laid out in the Annual Return. All present concurred that we can answer yes to all points. This will now go to Council for ratification.

7. **Grant Request:** The RFO explained that we had received a grant request from the Maidstone & Weald Samaritans. Although they cover our area specifically, they also provide (along with all the other branches) a nationwide service. As they don't track their callers, it is not possible to know how much of a service they provide to parishioners, but both the RFO and Cllr Sams knew of callers or volunteers who lived within our parish. It was therefore agreed to recommend a grant of £100 – proposed Cllr Sams, seconded Cllr Roots, all in favour.

8. **Impending Environmental Expenditure:** The RFO said that, ideally, these matters would have gone to Environmental first, but their next meeting isn't until next month. It therefore seemed sensible to make the financial provision now, in case that committee wished to proceed.

The first item was the Woodlands Walk fence by the side of the Shaws footpath. We had asked for two quotes – one to just remove it (£1500) and to remove then replace (£4880). This committee felt that £4880 was a lot, and, if Environmental wanted to do this, then we should seek the usual alternative quotes for comparison. The feeling was that the fence might not need replacing, in which case the more reasonable £1500 quote should be acceptable, although, strictly speaking, we should get alternative prices for this too. The RFO said he'd see if MBC, as incumbent contractor, would give a price to clear it.

Matters moved on to the New Burial Ground and Garden of Remembrance. The RFO set out the background concerning the memorial trees in this area, and that we had a tree survey done a few months ago which had identified some required work. The contractor had now given us a price to do the work, but not for replacing dead and missing trees. It was agreed that the price was reasonable and Environmental could proceed if they wished. The RFO/Amenity Manager hoped that by their meeting, he would also have prices for replanting.

Cllr Dean then explained that we still had a lot of the Teers Meadow / general village walk leaflets left over, and that we ought to do another leaflet drop. Mike Phillips had also produced another leaflet which he would also like “dropped”. To produce the new leaflet would cost about £263, whilst the drops had a minimum fee of £560 each, covering up to 7500 households. As Harrietsham only has about 2750 households, it was agreed that we should extend the reach of the drop to surrounding areas, effectively at no extra cost. As the company can’t deliver two leaflets at the same time, it would require two drops, so the total cost would be of the order of (£263 + £560 + £560 =) £1,383. Most of this is already within the Teers Meadow budgets, and any over-run could probably be covered by virement within the grant’s budget headings, (although we could cover it ourselves, if necessary). It was agreed to proceed, recommended Cllr Dean, seconded Cllr Sams, with all in favour.

Cllr Roots then raised the matter of the speedwatch battery. The current equipment is getting quite old now, and the battery is starting to fail, although it is otherwise serviceable. Shared with Lenham, the equipment is getting more use within that parish, so there may come a time when we need another set, costing around £2500. However, in the short term, a new battery would suffice, at a cost of about £150 (plus VAT). It was agreed that we should buy a battery, seeking to recover 50% of the cost from Lenham PC but bearing the whole cost if they refuse. Proposed Cllr Roots, seconded Cllr Dean, with all in favour.

9. **Insurance:** The RFO provided an update in his search for a new insurer. He had contacted three likely contenders – one of whom had failed to reply. He is therefore now talking to one insurance company and one broker, and hoped to have prices shortly, allowing him to get cover in place for the 1st June renewal deadline.

8. **Date of next meeting** –14th July 2022 at 7:30pm.

Meeting closed at 8:10pm.

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Part II - Confidential

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

The RFO explained that we had now received a lease that the NHS's CCG were prepared to let the Practice sign, and that we were now in a position to proceed.

However, he also explained that, on reading the new version, he had noted various points. Mostly, they consisted of the need to put dates in, which should sort out one area of possible confusion. This was that the period between rent reviews might be 3 years, but there might be an initial 7 year period where we don't have one.

There were also a couple of typos in the lease. One was an extra "or" on the end of a paragraph, implying something is missing, and the other an opening "(" with no closing ")", an omission that could change the sense of the paragraph. Both should be easy to resolve.

The main issue was that the minimum rent clause had been inserted into para 7, as we had requested. It was not, however, reflected in 7A, which means it could be over-ridden. Should the CCG have done this deliberately, possibly intending to reduce the rent at the first review, then the worst case was that we lose £23,000 in rent – but we could make that up by increasing the precept by £10 per Band D property per year. We hope that this is an oversight, but councillors felt that the lease was unacceptable without it.

The RFO was therefore requested to go back to the NHS and ask for these matters to be resolved, and to report back. The RFO did explain that this risked going back into the NHS Black Hole for yet more months or possibly years, but it was felt that this was a necessary risk, even if it did put the S106 extension money at risk.

Proposed Cllr Dean, seconded Cllr Sams with all in favour.

Meeting closed at 8:45.