

Batheaston Parish Council

Minutes of the Finance Committee of Batheaston Parish Council held at 7:30pm on Tuesday 18th August 2020

**Present: Councillors Catherine Gregory (Chairman),
Alexis Pavlou, Patrick Vandesteen.**

In attendance: Richard Maccabee (Clerk).

1. Public Participation.

1.1. Cllrs Catherine McCarthy and Sue Peachey attended as members of the public.

2. **Apologies were accepted** from Councillor Matt Tovey.

3. There were **no declarations of interest** from Councillors.

4. Approval of Minutes

4.1. **Council approved** minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 29th June 2020

5. Annual Audit

5.1. The Committee received an Action Plan from the Chairman and Clerk.

5.1.1. Cllr Gregory highlighted as the main finding of the Internal Auditor that the Council does have most procedures and policies in place; the issue is that they are not consistently implemented.

5.1.2. She indicated that the Action Plan is very aggressive, and that it is possible that some actions may be later than indicated.

5.1.3. In answer to a question, she indicated that developing Financial Regulations and Standing Orders are the most challenging tasks, requiring the most time and effort.

5.2. Cllr Gregory indicated that in her view the Financial Policies and Procedures included by the Auditor in her report, and addressed in the Action Plan, are the most important for the Council to address.

6. Budget update

6.1. **Cllr Gregory** introduced a review of the status of the budget for the year.

6.1.1. She indicated that in its current format, the budget has nearly 100 lines, and therefore she would concentrate on those where variances are arising.

6.1.2. She introduced the form of the document, explaining that the analysis distinguishes between mandatory and discretionary spend. The former makes up by far the larger component, with staff costs the major part of this. The discretionary spend is very limited.

6.1.3. She noted that the Council has received more than it has spent. Reductions in projected income from the Rhymes Pavilion and the Public Toilets have been estimated.

6.1.4. Some outstanding payments are to fund the repair of a house damaged by the Jubilee Oak; the possibility of additional costs arising from Employer's National Insurance relief. Provisions are made to account for these unknown costs.

6.1.5. She outlined some minor reductions in spend which can be reduced, for instance reducing the utilities bill as there has been less use of facilities.

- 6.1.6. Cllr Gregory explained the position regarding the grant to the Batheaston Youth Club. The Council has agreed to fund it for the proportion of the year that is able to operate, but the current estimate is optimistic in this respect: it may not be possible for it to open next month, and therefore the funding might be reduced.
- 6.1.7. She explained that the repayments of a potential Public Works Loan are unlikely to fall in this year, and therefore can be reduced.
- 6.2. She suggested that the Committee and Clerk have a detailed review of the budget to ensure that it is fully understood.

Clerk

6.3. The Committee discussed current ideas for the use of Rhymes Pavilion

- 6.3.1. There is a proposal from Mercy in Action for a "Food Pantry" to run a weekly food bank operation provide food to residents with genuine need. No charge would be made for the use of the Pavilion.
- 6.3.2. Cllr Gregory suggested that the Pavilion might be useful for the Surgery, especially for the flu vaccinations programme. The Clerk will discuss with representatives of the Surgery.

Clerk

7. Matters of Financial Administration for Approval

7.1. The Committee approved the following:

- 7.1.1. transactions undertaken in June 2020
- 7.1.2. transactions undertaken in July 2020
- 7.1.3. the Bank Reconciliation to July 2020
- 7.1.4. The Committee discussed the desirability of setting the monthly schedule of Finance Committee and Council meetings in such a way that Financial Information is approved by both at the earliest possibility.
- 7.1.5. It was noted that this will increase the number of Finance Committees and add to the load of members. To mitigate this issue and share the load, it was suggested that the Committee seek additional members. The Chairman will present a proposal to the next Council meeting.

Cllr Gregory

- 7.1.6. The Clerk will develop this schedule for implementation in 2021 to be presented for approval at Full Council.

Clerk

7.2. The Clerk introduced a paper outlining the pay increment and Pension contributions as identified in his contract of employment.

- 7.2.1. He noted that the increment refers to the national pay scales, to which his contract aligns, but that this needs to be more explicitly stated. The Committee will address this issue at the first opportunity.
- 7.2.2. The Pension Contributions are a legal requirement, resulting from Workplace Pension legislation.
- 7.2.3. The Committee approved these proposals.

7.3. The Clerk presented the application for a Corporate Credit Card for small transactions.

- 7.3.1. He noted that having a credit card is near-essential for him to fulfil his role, and that – particularly during the restrictions of Covid-19 – he has found it necessary to use his own personal card, which is far from ideal.
- 7.3.2. He highlighted two requirements of the application process that require Committee attention, as follows.
- 7.3.3. There is a need for a second “Programme Administrator”. He proposed that this be the Chairman of Finance Committee, which the Committee should note, and ensure that there are controls in place to approve its use.
- 7.3.4. Secondly, the card requires a transaction limit to be set. He proposed £250, which is greater than the £100 limit set in the current Financial Regulations for unauthorised spend by the Clerk. Nevertheless, the card will often be needed to conduct transactions approved by Council.
- 7.3.5. The Chairman stated that the Financial Regulations are due for review (at the October meeting of the Committee), and she intends to propose that the new regulations provide a clear framework for the card.

7.4. The Committee approved the application.

Clerk

8. Community Matters and Grants

8.1. Batheaston Leisure Association (BLA)

- 8.1.1. Cllr Gregory introduced this item. There had been no new grant applications since the last meeting
- 8.1.2. She stated that she and the Clerk had held a meeting with trustees of the BLA. She indicated that the BLA had previously had a lease for the use of the Rhymes Pavilion, the playground, and football pitch. This lease expired in 2019.
- 8.1.3. The terms were such that the funds generated from the use of the Rhymes Pavilion were to be spent on the maintenance and upgrade of the Playground. The BLA also received a bequest of funds.
- 8.1.4. She noted that the BLA had recently donated the major part of its funds to the Batheaston New Village Hall.
- 8.1.5. There continue to be links between the Council and the BLA. For instance, the Council has continued to insure the BLA (as would have been necessary under previous arrangements). The constitution of the BLA allows for the Council to nominate two Councillors to be trustees. This has not recently been the case.
- 8.1.6. The Committee discussed the options for the Council to review its relationship with the BLA, with one possible option being that the Council takes over the BLA as there are advantages to the Council to have a charity. The Clerk will investigate the details of this, prior to any item being brought forward for consideration.

8.2. A contribution to the Batheaston New Village Hall (BNVH) Trust

- 8.2.1. Cllr Gregory introduced this item. A “pledge” was made by the Council to the BNVH in November 2017 of £1,000 for the successful completion of the project.
- 8.2.2. The Clerk stated that the Council should not have made a pledge for a payment to be made in future years; it was therefore invalid.
- 8.2.3. Cllr Vandesteen expressed the view that the Council made the pledge in good faith, and should seek to honour it, notwithstanding the fact that the sum was not budgeted for this year.
- 8.2.4. He proposed that the Council seek to make the pledge, in light of current circumstances. The Chairman will propose this to the next Council meeting.

Cllr Gregory

8.3. Cllr Gregory introduced a proposal to contribute to the cost of an additional River Rescue Point at the Toll Bridge, following the sad deaths of two youths jumping off the bridge.

- 8.3.1. She indicated that BANES had put forward a proposal to add the rescue points as a response to this.
- 8.3.2. She noted that the bridge is not in the Parish. It was also noted that the bridge is privately owned, and – through the toll applied for traffic – generates a considerable profit for its owners.
- 8.3.3. **The Committee rejected** the proposal. The Chairman will inform the BANES Ward Councillors.

Cllr Gregory

8.4. Cllr Vandesteen described the recent progress in submitting a Public Works Loan (PWL) for funding of developments to Village Amenities.

- 8.4.1. He indicated that the Avon Local Council Association (who have a role in reviewing the application before it is submitted to Central Government) had declined to comment at this stage.
- 8.4.2. He commented that he is concerned about the lack of engagement from Councillors, on what is a substantial strategic development for the village, and financial commitment for the village. He will seek to address this issue with Council.
- 8.4.3. He indicated that it is unlikely that the PWL application will be submitted before the end of December.

8.5. Upgrading the Elmhurst Playground.

- 8.5.1. The Clerk indicated that he has set up a meeting with the Play Manager of BANES to review the play equipment, to which interested Councillors are invited.
- 8.5.2. It was noted that Council had indicated the need to have a Councillor take the lead on this initiative.

8.6. The Clerk indicated that conversations are continuing regarding the **maintenance of streetlights** (the Parish is responsible for 17 lights, 3 of which have failed). There is no current maintenance contract available, so clearly the urgency will increase as the nights get darker. He will continue to pursue this matter, working with Clerks of Councils in the region that are in a similar position.

8.7. The Clerk indicated that he had not been able to bring forward any proposals regarding the presentation of financial information and decisions at this point.

9. Update on Financial Processes

9.1. The Clerk indicated that the implementation of the new Finance System and associated has continued successfully. The next steps are for him and the booking clerk to receive training, and to complete the process of loading the system with the Council's data.

9.2. The Clerk said that – with the considerable help of Cllr Gregory – he had prepared the basis for the Council to reclaim VAT paid in 2017. This is now to be submitted.

Clerk

10. Chairman's report.

10.1. Cllr Gregory reiterated that the Committee should be aware that a very significant amount of work remains to be done to establish financial good practice for the Council.

Meeting close at 21:28

Upcoming Meetings

Parish Council Meeting, 7:15pm on Tuesday 6th October 2020

Council meetings are open to the public, and members of the public are welcome to join and may speak by invitation

Signed: -  Parish Clerk

Date issued: 2nd October 2020