

MINUTES of the Finance Committee of Melksham Without Parish Council held on Monday 2nd March 2020 at 1 Swift Way, Bowerhill at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors. Richard Wood (Council Chair), John Glover (Council Vice-Chair & Committee Chair), Alan Baines (Committee Vice Chair), Paul Taylor and Stuart Wood

Officers: Teresa Strange (Clerk) and Marianne Rossi (Finance & Amenities Officer).

Housekeeping & Announcements: Cllr Glover welcomed all to the meeting and explained the evacuation procedure in the event of a fire.

443/19 Apologies

Councillor Paul Carter was on holiday and Councillor Nick Holder due to another commitment. These reasons for apologies were accepted.

444/19 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Wood declared an interest as Chairman of BASRAG (Berryfield & Semington Road Action Group) and Berryfield Village Hall, Cllr S Wood declared an interest in BASRAG and Berryfield Village Hall, Councillor Glover declared an interest in Melksham Rugby Club as his son is a director

The Clerk declared an interest as a Trustee of Young Melksham and as a cheque signatory for Melksham Gardeners' Society.

445/19 Dispensation Requests for this Meeting

None.

446/19 To consider holding items in Closed Session due to confidential nature: Agenda item 5 regarding the grass cutting contracts and 6 regarding Berryfield Village Hall.

Resolved:

That members of the public and representatives of the press and broadcast media be excluded from the meeting during consideration of these items under Standing Order 3d for the following reason. b) terms of tenders and proposals and counter proposals in negotiations for contracts.

447/19 Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

448/19 Grass cutting contract

a) To note correspondence/minutes regarding consideration of this quotation

The committee noted an extract from the Full Council minutes on the 29th July 2019 where the Full Council resolved that that they do not go out to tender for their 3-year grass cutting contract after taking legal advice.

b) To consider quotation for renewal of 3-year grasscutting

Members reviewed the quotation for the 3-year grass cutting contract. Councillor Baines queried the cost for an additional pitch marking for a 9 and 11 aside pitch as it was less than marking them up each fortnight, whereas the cost for a 5 and 7 aside pitch was the same. The Clerk explained that when line marking to contract, they would also need to measure out the pitches which makes the cost higher than the cost for an additional line marking outside of the contracted, as this is to refresh the lines only. It was explained that line marking was only done outside of the contract if a football team had an additional match such as a Cup match and wished for the lines to be remarked.

It was noted that bin emptying at Berryfield Play Area was missed off the contract specification and should be added in.

The Clerk highlighted to members that the cost of the contract was more than had previously been budgeted. The Clerk had divided the overall contracted price by 3 to determine how much per year the contract would be to put this against how much was budgeted for this year. The contract value per year was £16,046 and in the budget £12,735 however it was noted that since the budget was approved the council have agreed to accommodate a local youth organisation which will bring more income in. It was also noted that there was additional expenditure at the Bowerhill Sports Field as the Council have previously resolved to swap all pitches over half way through the football season and mark out additional pitches to aid the extra bookings.

The Clerk explained that she had received a separate quote from JH Jones to inspect the sports field on a Friday before weekend matches which would be £35 per visit. It was explained that this was to see if the pitches would be playable without causing any damage.

It was queried whether this would be every week, members discussed if this was needed every week or whether this could be done on request. Councillor Wood suggested that as the office is currently sited at the Sports Field, the staff would be available to assess any obvious signs of pitches being unplayable, if they are unsure to ask JH Jones to do a pitch inspection.

Recommendation 1: The Council to approve the 3-year contract quotation from JH Jones at an overall cost of £48,139.65 but to add Berryfield Play Area bin emptying to the contract.

Recommendation 2: Officers to assess pitches and if unsure whether the pitches can be played on to ask JH Jones to do a pitch inspection at a cost of £35 per visit.

449/19 Berryfield Village Hall Cost consultants:

- a) To note report from Project Manager on tenders received and recommendation**
Members noted the report from the project manager on tenders that had been received and his recommendations. It was explained that the Finance Committee had delegated powers to appoint Cost Co-ordination consultants for the Berryfield Village Hall project however at the time of tender opening, were unable to as there was a query on one of the tenders that had been received. Following correspondence from the Project Manager it was advised that one of the tenders had withdrawn.
- b) To appoint Cost Consultant (under delegated powers)**

Following the recommendations from the Project Manager the committee to appoint Martin Pickard as the Cost Co-ordination Consultant for the Berryfield Village Hall project.

Resolved: To appoint Martin Pickard as the Cost Co-ordination Consultant for the Berryfield Village Hall project at a cost of £4,900.00.

- c) Legal Fees**

The Clerk explained that the council had previously resolved to appoint Wellers Hedley solicitors to act for the Parish Council for the Berryfield Village Hall. The Clerk explained that she had previously advised that it would be around £500 however after receiving further correspondence from the Solicitor, there is now an estimated cost of around £2,500. This includes the liaison with Bellway Homes, setting up a charitable trust to run the new Village Hall and to set up a lease between the Parish Council and the new charitable trust running hall.

Recommendation: To proceed with the appointment of Weller Hedley Solicitors at an estimated cost of £2,500 and ask them to keep a running total of costs.

450/19 Audit

- a) To note Interim Internal Audit undertaken and review recommendations**

The Committee reviewed the internal audit report from the interim visit held on 14th February which had some observations.

The Council does not have the latest model NALC Financial Regulations issued in July 2019

The Clerk explained that the Council reviewed the Financial Regulations at its Finance Committee meeting in May 2019 and had not been informed that these regulations had been updated. It was suggested that the council should look at these at their annual review in May.

Recommendation 1: The Council to review their Financial Regulations to the latest model at the Finance Committee meeting in May.

The Council has a Payment Card security policy. The policy noted under incident management that it allows other members of staff to use the card that is issued in the Clerk's name. The Financial Regulations 6.19 states 'any Debit Card issued for use will be specifically restricted to the Clerk and the RFO'.

It was highlighted that the council have a payment card that is in the Clerk and Council's name but other Officers have access to it. The council's current payment card policy states that 'any debit card issued for use would be specifically restricted to the Clerk and RFO'. The Clerk explained that although the card has the council's name on, it also has her name on and there is a level of liability to her if the card was used for any unauthorised payments. The current procedure for all staff is to put any office items into the online basket and ask the Clerk to go on and authorise the payments, however all staff members know where the card is kept. It was also noted that on occasions staff members have used the card for payments such as Land Registry searches and is available when the Clerk is on leave.

The Clerk highlighted that in the payment card policy it states that the council can deduct amounts from employees pay due to unauthorised payments which would mean that the liability would be on her if another staff member used the card without authorisation.

Members felt that there would be more risk to the council by having three members of staff having a card each as there would be three card statements every month which could make it even harder to track. It was queried why the card is in the Clerk's name and not solely in the council's name. The Clerk explained that when the card was ordered it was initially thought to only be in the council's name, but understood that business with a large number of staff would have the cards in their individual names.

The Clerk advised that the card was not a pre-paid card or a credit card but a Multi pay commercial card and each month a direct debit takes the amount accumulated on the card. The Clerk explained that the card had a limit of £1,500 and it restricts staff members from using the card for things such as hotels and restaurants etc.

The Clerk queried what staff members do if she was away from the office and staff needed to order something. Members felt that in the Clerk's absence she should sign the card over to another staff member but the rest of the time should keep the card on her so that other members cannot have access to the card.

There was a discussion about whether the council should get a credit card as there would be more cover, it was however queried whether the council would be able to get one solely in their name. The Clerk explained with items such as the out of hours mobile phone, had to be in her own name as she could not get a credit check on the council so it would be unlikely that the council would be able to do this.

Recommendation 2: To carry on with the current card regime and the Clerk to investigate getting a credit card in the council's name only.

Recommendation 3: To change the title of the card policy from Pre-paid Debit Card to Multi Pay Commercial Card but defer reviewing the full policy until it is determined whether the council can get a credit card solely in their name.

A cheque payment stub was not initialled by two authorised signatories.

It was noted by the auditor that the normal process was that two authorised signatories' do sign the cheque stub and this was evidenced in the audit. The Clerk advised that Officers will check that all documents have been signed by Councillors.

Unauthorised use of bank log in details to access on line bank account

The Clerk explained that following the departure of the Finance Assistant, she was the only one at that time who had access to the council's bank accounts, due to operational reasons another staff member needed to be able to have access to the bank account to view and set up payments. It was highlighted that the council was made fully aware of this at their Finance Committee on 20th May 2019 and the Assistant Parish Officer was subsequently set up with her own bank log on details.

The Council has not reviewed its insurance coverage during the year

The Clerk explained that she had queried this with the Auditor, as currently the Finance Committee have delegated powers to review the insurance following their annual risk review and it is set out in the council's financial regulations and terms of reference. The Clerk advised that the renewal date for insurance is the 1st June and the risk register would need to be reviewed before the insurance is reviewed. This would be after the Annual Council meeting when the new committees are set up so there would be no time for Full Council to review this before the insurance commencement date.

Recommendation 4: The Clerk to seek guidance from NALC (National Association of Local Councils).

The Council does not have an investment policy in place

The Clerk explained that the council does have an investment policy and had adopted it at their Full Council meeting on 21st January 2019, but it is not currently published on the council's website.

b) To note dates of Year End close down with Rialtas and date of 2nd Internal Audit

The Committee noted that Rialtas are coming in on the 28th April to do the year end close down. The second Internal Audit is scheduled for the 1st May.

c) To receive feedback from staff training and consider recommendations

The Finance & Amenities Officer explained that she had attended “preparing for year-end” training and gave a brief overview. She explained that there had been a suggestion at the training course that councils should undertake a quarterly spot check to tighten up internal controls. It was also suggested that this should be done by Councillors who are not members of the Finance Committee.

There had been two example checklists, one for a quarterly check and one for an annual check. It was explained that Councillor Glover as Chair of the Finance Committee already comes in annually to undertake checks and a checklist could be a way of having a more formal record of this.

Recommendation: Two non-members of the finance committee to come in once a quarter to conduct spot checks on the council’s finances.

451/19 Asset Management Software

a) To consider investigating the purchase of software for managing Assets

The Clerk explained that the council are currently using a spreadsheet for the list of council’s assets however it now has approximately 250-line entries. The Clerk queried whether now was the time to update to a software package to manage the assets. Officers had done some initial investigations and had received some information from RBS Software. The Clerk explained that this was a bolt on, which would tie in with the councils existing accountancy software package. Currently at year end she has to manually fill in the asset value on the Annual Return but with this bolt on it would automatically produce a figure.

The Clerk advised that an online map where you can locate every asset would be a useful addition so that every asset can be easily located. She explained that it can sometimes be difficult for staff who do not have historic knowledge of the area to know where some assets are.

Recommendation: Officers to investigate asset management software options.

452/19 Investment

a) To review Investment Policy

Members reviewed the investment policy and noted the objectives in the policy which are:

- The security of its reserves
- The liquidity of its investments
- The yield obtained from any investment

b) To consider investing Reserves

The Clerk explained that she had put together a document suggesting what reserves

were contingency, short term and longer-term capital replacement. She explained that contingency was for immediate use, short term was split into 3, 6 and 9 months and longer term was 1 year as this was in accordance to the current Investment Policy which states that any investment should not exceed 12 months.

Officers had looked at each Reserve line by line to see what money would be available for short term and longer-term investments and had allocated funds to the appropriate headings. They had looked at some interest rates for each of the terms to work out how much interest the council would receive, it was felt that there would be a value in investing funds for 3 months rather than 6 or 9 months due to the amount of money that was available to invest.

The Clerk advised that the current amount that is covered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) is £85,000 in each financial institution. She explained that most of the council's funds were in one organisation, after every pay run the funds that are left over are transferred into a fixed term deposit and then transferred back over on the day of the next Full Council meeting. The current interest rate that the council are receiving for this is 0.42%.

The Clerk explained that in order to meet the FSCS cover they would need to split their funds into several different banking institutions and queried what members felt was the higher risk, having more money than covered in one institution or splitting funds into several organisations. It was explained that currently, the council's bank accounts are checked on a regular basis and if there were several accounts there is a higher risk of them not being checked as regularly. The Clerk also highlighted that if the council carry on using the same institution and put some of their money into a long-term deposit for a year, they would not be able to get it out if there were rumours that the bank was about to collapse.

The Clerk explained that there was a CCLA Local Authorities Property Fund that some councils invest into but cautioned members that this would not be covered by the FSCS but could have a better return rate. It was also noted that funds can go down as well as up and would be better suited for funds that are left in there longer than a year. From the figures quoted, if funds were removed at the end of Year One, they would be less than first invested. If the council were to do this, they would need to review their Investment Policy as it states that the council should not invest any funds longer than 1 year. Cllr Glover felt that as the council was in the middle of a CGR boundary review they should leave it as it is until they receive the outcome.

Recommendation: The Council to carry on rolling money in one fixed term deposit between meetings until a decision is made on the CGR review.

453/19 Insurance

a) To consider route for obtaining 3 quotations for future cover as reached end of 3-year long term agreement

The Clerk explained that the council had reached the end of their long-term

agreement with their insurer and advised that they would need to obtain 3 quotations and queried whether they wished to ask Came & Company, the council's insurance broker to obtain these. Members felt that they should ask Came & Company to ask for a quote from the councils existing insurance company.

Recommendation: To ask Came and Company to obtain 3 insurance quotes for the Parish Council including a quote from the existing insurer.

b) To approve, or note Officer Decision, to increase Fidelity (Employee Dishonesty) cover

The Clerk explained that there is a large amount of money in the bank and there is more due to be received. The current fidelity cover is £500,000 so she has requested to increase the fidelity cover by £1 million to £1.5 million. She advised that the additional premium up until the 1st June 2020 would be approximately £350 and will increase the annual premium by £1,422.04.

Recommendation: To increase the councils Fidelity cover to £1.5million at an addition premium cost of approximately £350 until 1st June 2020.

454/19 Grant Aid

a) To note current Grant Aid policy

The Committee noted the current grant aid policy.

b) To note unable to support church buildings under current legislation and consider formally approaching MP to lobby for change

Members noted that they are currently unable to support church buildings under current legislation. Cllr Glover queried that last year the council awarded Messy Church a grant, the Clerk clarified that they cannot give any funds to the fabric of the church building such as a new toilet. It was explained that last year Messy Church requested funds for crafts which is allowed under the legislation and had been checked externally before awarding.

Recommendation: To add a clause into the grant aid policy to say that under current legislation the council are unable to fund church buildings.

c) To note Budget Provision for Grant Aid 2020/21 and s137 spend limits

The members of the Committee noted the 2020/21 Budget provision for Grant Aid. It was noted that the Parish Council have committed £3,500 in the budget to TransWilts for the Melksham Community Hub and £2,500 to Young Melksham.

Section 137 Grants	£ 8,500
Section 137 Grants Committed spend to Young Melksham and TransWilts	£ 6,000

Section 133 Village Hall grants	£ 8,250
Section 144 Tourism grants	£ 650
TOTAL	<u>£23,400</u>

It was noted that the maximum amount permitted to be spend under S137 was £47,324.16 for 2020/21.

d) To consider grant applications for 2020/21

The Committee Chairman, Cllr Glover reported that the Council had received 46 applications for Grant Aid with requests totalling £42,392.97 and gave an overview of how the Council had prioritised the grant funding previously. Priority for grant aid had been for groups and organisations that directly support residents in the parish such as Village Halls and Action Groups

The Council have £650 in the budget for Section 144 (Tourism) grants but the Council had only received 1 application for £600.

The Clerk advised the committee that there was £3,929 in their Community Projects/ Match Funding Reserve.

Recommendation 1: The Council vire £50 from Section 144 Grants to the Section 137 Grants budget heading.

Recommendation 2: The Council to transfer £480 from their Community Projects Match Funding reserve to the Section 137 Grants budget heading.

Recommendation 3: The Council award grants to the following organisations:

Application Number	TYPE	ORGANISATION	Award in 2020/21
SECTION 133 GRANTS (HALLS)			
1	Other halls	Bowerhill Village Hall Trust	£3,000
2	Owned by MWPC	Shaw Hill Playing Field and Village Hall	£3,500
3	Other halls	Berryfield Village Hall	£500
4	Other halls	Whitley Reading Rooms	£1,000
5	Other halls	The Rachel Fowler Centre	£250
SECTION 133 GRANTS (HALLS) total			£8,250
SECTION 137 GRANTS			

6	Action Groups	Bowerhill Residents Action Group (BRAG)	£400
7	Action Groups	Berryfield & Semington Rd Action Group (BASRAG)	£500
8	Action Groups	Community Action Whitley Shaw (CAWS)	£500
9	Action Groups	Community Emergency Group (CAWS)	£200
Action Groups Total			£1,600
10	Youth	Young Melksham	£2,500
11	Youth	2385 (Melksham) Squadron ATC	£250
12	Youth	King George V Junior Parkrun	£0
13	Youth	Atworth Youth Club	£200
14	Youth	Melksham Guide HQ Building Management Committee	£0
15	Youth	Girl Guiding UK	£250
16	Youth	FOF FC	£350
Youth Total			£3,550
17	Support Groups	Happy Circle Day Centre	£150
18	Support Groups	Group Five	£300
19	Support Groups	Melksham PHAB Club	£250
20	Support Groups	Relate Mid Wiltshire	£350

21	Support Groups	Melksham Community Bus	£250
22	Support Groups	Melksham Read Easy	£200
23	Support Groups	Wiltshire Mind	£250
24	Support Groups	Wiltshire Sight	£200
25	Support Groups	Wiltshire Air Ambulance	£250
26	Support Group	HELP Counselling Services	£180
27	Support Group	Life Education Centres Ltd Wiltshire	£200
28	Support Group	Splitz Support Service	£200
Support Groups Total			£2,780
29	Community	Melksham Food & River Festival	£250
30	Community	Melksham Sixty Plus Club	£250
31	Community	St Barnabas Beanacre- Sports & Field Committee	£500
32	Community	Melksham Remembers	£100
33	Community	Melksham adventure centre- King George Playing Fields	£0
Community Total			£1,100
34	Community Info	Shaw & Whitley Connect	£250
Community Info Total			£250
35	Transport	Melksham Rail Users Group	£400
36	Transport	TransWilts CIC	£3,500
Transport Total			£3,900
37	Clubs	AFC Melksham (Disabled)	£250
38	Clubs	Melksham Gardeners' Society	£200

39	Clubs	Melksham Amateur Swimming Club	£300
40	Clubs	Shaw & Whitley Friendship Club	£350
41	Clubs	Shaw & Whitley Garden Club	£150
42	Clubs	Melksham Town Short mat bowls club	£200
43	Clubs	Melksham Messy Church	£100
44	Clubs	Melksham Cricket Club	£100
45	Clubs	Melksham Rugby Club	£200
Clubs Total			£1,850
Section 137 GRANTS Total			£15,030
SECTION 144 GRANTS (TOURISM)			
46	Tourism	Melksham Tourist Information Centre	£600
Tourism Total			£600
Grand Total			£23,880

Recommendation 4: The Council do not award Grants to the following organisations for the following reasons:

12. King George V Junior Parkrun: The Council were unhappy that there were no latest audited accounts included with their grant application. They note that they had awarded Junior Park Run £1,000 last year outside of the council's grant funding process for items requested in this grant application.

14. Melksham Guide HQ Building Management Committee: The Council felt that due to the amount request they should seek grant funding from wider grant awarding organisations.

33. Melksham adventure centre- King George Playing Fields: The Council were unhappy that there were no latest audited accounts included with the grant application and wish for these to be included in any application in the future.

455/19 To consider purchasing stamps for 2020/21 ahead of increase scheduled for 23rd March

The Clerk explained that the cost of stamps was due to increase from 23rd March and queried whether the council wished to purchase some more before the increase. Officers had undergone an exercise to work out if it would be cost effective to order all of the stamps needed for the year now, the total saving were estimated to be £74 for the whole year. The Clerk queried whether the council felt that £74 was a big enough saving to justify holding a large number of stamps at the office.

Recommendation: The Council to purchase 3 months' worth of stamps before the price increase.

Meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Chairman, Monday 9th March, 2020