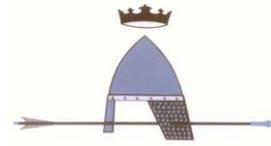


Battle Town Council



**MINUTES of a Meeting of the
FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
held on Tuesday, 5 November 2013 at
The Almonry, High Street, Battle at 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr R Bye - Chairman
Cllrs: C Bishop, P Fisher, M Kiloh, R Jessop and Mrs S Pry.

1. Apologies for Absence – None.

2. Disclosure of Interest – None.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 September 2013. Cllr Jessop proposed approval of the minutes, seconded by Cllr Bishop. This was agreed and they were duly signed.

4. Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

The Chairman reminded the Committee of the problems experienced with **Barclays Bank**. It was agreed that a strongly worded letter should be sent to the Regional Director, copied to the Chairman and Business Manager, highlighting the sequence of failures, requesting financial compensation and recording that the Council will monitor future performance before deciding whether to change banks.

5. Correspondence and Communications

The Chambers **Christmas Lights Committee** had asked the Council to acquire **equipment on their behalf** and had provided the necessary funds to cover this. The Committee was reminded that arrangements such as this, when clearly benefitting the community, had been cleared by SALC some time ago. It was therefore agreed.

An update was given on the latest position in relation to the letting of the larger **vacant office space**. This was noted though the Committee highlighted the need to ensure that offices are left in a good state of repair when vacated.

6. Budget Report 2013-14

The attached summary had been circulated updating the report made to the previous meeting. Details at the individual budget heading level had also been circulated to enable Committee Members to see where forecast figures vary from the budget. Since the previous meeting, the net deficit had grown as a result of the need for urgent tree surgery; repairs to the Almonry; the replacement of a water pipe at the cemetery and the purchase of new IT equipment. Subsequent to the circulation of these details, discussions with British Gas have indicated that the forecast expenditure on gas consumption at the Almonry may be too low. Barclays Bank have also advised that they are suspending the issue of new investment bonds so the forecast figure for investment income may be too high. Regarding street lighting, the contractor has advised that the condition of a column in Rowbarns is such that it needs urgent replacement. The Committee therefore agreed to bring forward from next year the proposed part night lighting scheme for both columns in Rowbarns at an estimated cost of £3000.

Finally a bequest of £2000 had been received to be spent on improvements to the facilities at Telham Playing Field. It was agreed that this should be spent this year, a new seat being the priority item plus the addition of a small item of play equipment.

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In noting the overall position the Committee took account of the unexpected benefit of the £11,934 payment made by Rother relating to the changes in Council Tax subsidy which can be used to offset the net deficit, and also that the need to make further contributions to the equipment replacement reserve can be reviewed at the year end.

7. Bank Reconciliation Statement

The attached statement at 30 September 2013 was noted.

8. Fees and Charges Review

Proposals had been circulated. Cllr Kiloh reported that there are ongoing discussions with the allotment holders and was therefore happy to maintain the existing rent for the time being. The Committee felt that higher increases to the fees for grave and ashes plots and the associated administration charge should be applied. **Cllr Jessop proposed that the attached fees and charges be recommended to Council. This was seconded by Cllr Bye and agreed unanimously.**

9. Budget 2014-15 and Forward Plan

A note had been circulated which set out the cost in 2014-15 of maintaining day to day activity at current levels/standards plus known commitments such as the programme of work to change the street lighting regime. Assuming annual contributions to the equipment replacement and Almonry repairs reserves continue, the basic net cost would be £193,485. In the light of discussions by each Committee additional bids costing £73,515 had been identified to which a further £6000 needed to be added relating to work at the Almonry which had been omitted in error. For illustrative purposes and a guide to discussion the note had recorded that a 3% increase in the precept would take it to about £206,000. At this level only additional bids totalling about £12,500 could be accommodated. This figure could rise to about £24,500 if an additional £2000 in anticipated cemetery fees is assumed and savings are made by deferring further contributions to the two earmarked reserves. For this sum the note suggested that the priorities should be tree surgery (£10,000); repayment of a 5 year PWLB loan to meet the cost of the Tier 2 Groundwater Audit at the cemetery plus anticipated planning fees (£2010) and the conversion of the summer seasonal groundsman post to a full time one. These were agreed. Individual Committee Members then argued the case for other items to be added - £5000 for the upgrading of the Almonry kitchen; £1000 for ongoing improvements to the allotments maintenance regime; £1000 for pavilion repairs; £5000 for Heritage style finger posts and £500 for regular updating of IT software. If all these are included, the precept would rise to £218,500 an increase of just under 9.5%. In addition to arguing the merits of each individual item Cllr Jessop reminded the Committee of the possibility that, at some future date, precepts might be capped. Setting too low a base position now might therefore leave little room for manoeuvre at a later date. Bearing in mind the unfunded additional bids and future obligations such as the cemetery extension, this would create real problems. He also wished it to be recorded that although the figures in the forward plan make no allowance for staff pay increases this should not rule out consideration of such increases, on their merits, at the appropriate time.

Bearing in mind the current economic climate some Members argued that a 9.5% increase could not be justified. However, **Cllr Jessop proposed that Council be recommended to accept this. This was seconded by Cllr Fisher and agreed by a 4:2 majority.** Irrespective of the outcome of the forthcoming Council discussion, Cllr Bishop asked that, in the coming months and as part of the further development of the forward plan, all Committees should adopt a zero based budgeting approach to all items of expenditure for

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which they are responsible. This should assess each item individually in terms of necessity and cost. A list, by Budget Heading, showing how a budget of £218,500 would be made up is attached. For ease of future reference the list also records, by Committee, the outstanding unfunded bids.

10. Grants

Two grant applications had been received, the usual one from Battle Area Community Transport and one from Battle Memorial Hall for £750 towards automatic entrance doors at a total cost of £5000. **Cllr Bye proposed that Council be recommended to make a grant of £750 to BACT and £500 to the Memorial Hall. This was seconded by Cllr Fisher and agreed unanimously.**

11. Appointment of Assistant Town Clerk as Cheque Signatory and Consequential Amendment of Financial Regulation 5.5

In order to expedite business, it had been suggested that the Assistant Town Clerk should be added as a cheque signatory in the absence of the Town Clerk. **Cllr Bye proposed that Council be recommended to amend Financial Regulation 5.5 to include the Assistant Town Clerk as an approved signatory in addition to 2 Councillors on the F&GP Committee. This was seconded by Cllr Fisher and agreed unanimously.**

12. Meeting Dates 2014

Cllr Jessop proposed that the list of meeting dates as attached be recommended to Council for approval. This was seconded by Cllr Bye and agreed unanimously.

13. Almonry Garden Report

No formal report had been provided by Beautiful Battle but it was known that recent work had concentrated on removing the summer bedding and the planting of a large number of spring bulbs.

14. Date of Next Meeting: provisionally, Tuesday, 14 January 2014

The meeting closed at 9.50pm

**CLLR R BYE
CHAIRMAN**

