



# A Meeting of the Employment, Finance & Policies Committee was held on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 7.30pm Winscombe Community Centre, Amesbury Room

## Those present at the meeting:

**Committee Members:** Cllrs Archie Forbes, Kevin Joyce, Lynne Stephens (Chair), Jack Taviner, Larry van Haaren, Paul Watkins, and John Witcher.

**Clerk:** Lynne Rampton

**Members of Public Present:** None

**Committee Members Absent:** Cllrs Zak Aravantinos, Mark Boddy, Simon Crew, Dylan Morris and Tom Nicholson,

1. **Apologies for absence.** Apologies had been received from Cllrs Boddy, Crew, Heaven, Morris, and Pincher
2. **Declarations of interest.** None declared.
3. **Public Participation.** None

## 4. **Minute Update from the previous meeting dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024.**

*Min 8e. Hard copy parish council newsletters.* It was confirmed that the post office sorting office had delivered all newsletters. It was unknown if this included Shipham and Churchill as they carried Winscombe postcode addresses? Confirmation would again be sent to the Winscombe sorting office with the next hard copy newsletter that only homes within the Winscombe & Sandford Parish should receive the newsletter.

## 5. **To carry out a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control for the Parish Council**

The Parish Council is responsible for reviewing the Annual Governance Statement, reviewing, and approving other aspects of the Council's governance framework and for approving, monitoring, and reviewing the outcome of audit activity. The Parish Council having considered the independence of the appointed internal auditor, agreed the scope of work as detailed in their quotation letter.

This review was reported to be about the effectiveness of internal control rather than the process and based on the assurance of the Parish Council internal controls and management of risk along with the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 and the requirement to review the system of internal control. The review of subject areas covered by the internal audit report and risk assessment of financial systems of internal controls along with previously reported external auditor opinion was considered and accepted by committee members. Resolved: It was recommended to the Parish Council that the review of the effectiveness of the system on internal control by this committee be accepted,

**The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**

## 6. **To consider recommending approval of the Annual Return and Accounts for the Financial Year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 to the full Parish Council, including:**

### a. **To review budget summary reports for 2023/2024 at year end**

Copies of the bank reconciliation, bank statements and a summary of budget expenditure had been made available to members in advance of the meeting. The quarterly councillor check on the accounts had been carried out by the Committee Chair and monthly reconciliations were second signed by a staff member.

A further paper detailing sub-heads for budgets and expenditure incurred along with % budgets spent for the 2023/2024 financial year had also been distributed and were explained to members at the meeting. Areas of expenditure in sub-headings breaching original budgets set or significant underspends were highlighted, but main areas of note were recreation ground changing room and drainage works, street light repairs and additional works to install a new ramp at the skatepark, along with lesser tree works on the Award Land due to Ash Die Back Disease. All had previously been reported to council through meetings.

**Resolved: Budget summary reports were recommended for approval by the Parish Council.**

**The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**

It was noted that interest being received on an investment in the Hampshire Trust bank was receiving a significantly lower rate than other savings accounts.

**Resolved: It should be recommended to the parish council that some funds in the 95-day notice account with Hampshire Trust Bank account are placed under notice and re-invested in the Redwood bank 95-day notice account taking the total amount with Redwood Bank to £80,000.**

**The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**

- b. BDO LLP has been appointed as external auditor for the Limited Assurance Regime 2023-24 – to confirm no/any conflicts of interest due to this appointment**  
*Resolved: No conflicts of interest were declared and on approval by the parish council, the auditor should be notified accordingly. The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)*
- c. To review and re-adopt the Investment Strategy and Policy, this being the manner in which the Parish Council has previously invested monies.**  
 All Town and Parish Councils with investments over £100,000 must have and publish an Investment Strategy. Guidance defines investments as all financial and non-financial investments. Cash in bank qualifies as an investment for these purposes and therefore Winscombe and Sandford Parish Council must adopt and publish such a policy as required under s15 (1) (a) para 14 of the Local Government Act 2003 for local authorities. An Investment Strategy and Policy had been prepared and previously adopted by the council.  
 It was considered the Financial Services Compensation Scheme limits may change due to currency fluctuations and minor amendment was made to the document to reflect this.  
**Resolved: It was recommended to the Parish Council, that the Investment Strategy and Policy, as amended, being the manner in which the Parish Council had previously invested monies, be re-adopted by the Parish Council. The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**
- d. To consider and re-adopt a General Reserve Policy**  
 The council is required to maintain adequate Financial Reserves to meet the needs of its operations and to ensure financial security. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will determine and review the level of reserves.  
 The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance Practitioners Guide (JPAG) (March 2023 edition) advises: “As with any financial entity, it is essential that authorities have sufficient reserves (general and earmarked) to finance both their day-to-day operations and future plans. All reserves should be reviewed and justified regularly (i.e., at least annually). It is good practice to transparently publish both the level and rationale of all reserves.” It continues “Consideration of the minimum level of reserves requires not only consideration of level of income and expenditure but also the risks to that income.”  
 The level of General Reserves should be reviewed on an annual basis during the annual budgetary review and agreed by the Parish Council. This will form part of the recommendations for the Annual Budget and Precept request by the Parish Council. The current level of General Reserves to be held by the council is recommended at between three and six months of predicted budget expenditure.  
**Resolved: It was recommended to the Parish Council, that the Reserve Policy be re-adopted by the Parish Council. The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**
- e. Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2023/2024 Part 3, p3 – Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/2024 has been completed and the end of year report/financial risk assessment is presented to the meeting for recommendation to the council for acceptance.**  
 Internal audit inspection for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 had previously been reported to council through meetings along with a report for the period to 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024. The final period to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 now been completed with the Internal Auditor having access to the Parish Council accounting package, along with meeting minutes and other reports. There were no recommendations or matters arising from the final inspection that the Internal Auditor wished to make the Council aware of.  
**Resolved: It was recommended that the council note and accept the Annual Internal Audit Report along with the financial risk assessment, The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**
- f. Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2023/2024, Box 1 - 8 of the Annual Governance Statement is recommended for completion as ‘yes’ and with box 9 completed as N/A. To be considered by the meeting and recommended to the council for acceptance.**  
*Resolved: With members acknowledging responsibility for ensuring a sound system of internal control is in place, the assertions were considered. The Annual Governance Statement is recommended to the council for completion as described. The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)*
- g. The account statements for the 2023/2024 financial year, prepared on a receipts and payments basis was considered by the meeting and recommended to the council for acceptance.**  
 The statement of accounts was considered by the meeting. The requirement to commence the transition towards compliance with relevant legislation and the transparency code for larger councils was duly noted.  
**Resolved: The account statements for the 2023/2024 financial year, prepared on a receipts and payments basis was considered by the meeting and recommended to the council for acceptance. The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**

**h. Section 2 – Accounting Statements for 2023/2024. The completed Accounting Statement is to be considered by the meeting and recommended to the council for acceptance.**

Resolved: With the accounting statement having been prepared and signed by the Clerk in advance of being presented for acceptance, the statement is recommended to the council for approval.

**The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**

It was noted that as income/expenditure levels for the 2023/24 financial year were the second consecutive year exceeding levels for smaller authorities, accounts would need to be prepared on an income/expenditure basis, rather than receipts/payments for 2024/25. This would require the re-instatement of the AGAR for 2023/24.

**i. Notification of the dates planned for the exercise of public rights to be confirmed on approval of the AGAR.**

Resolved: Following approval of the AGAR by full council, the notice of public rights and publication of unaudited AGAR for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 would be advertised in the required manner with the inspection period commencing on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024, and ending on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

**The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**

**7. Staffing matters**

**a. To allow staff orderlies to carry forward the equivalent of 2 weeks annual leave to the 2024/25 holiday year?**

Resolved: That Parish Orderlies with unused holiday entitlement should be allowed to carry forward the equivalent of two weeks leave to the 2024/25 holiday year. Future requests would be assessed on an individual basis. The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (6 in favour, 1 abstention)

**b. To consider annual pay increases for all parish council orderlies?**

Resolved: It was recommended that a 5% pay increase be awarded to all parish council orderlies with effect 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024. The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (6 in favour, 1 against)

**8. To review, and to consider an increase to fidelity insurance cover at next policy renewal in August 2024.**

As recommended in the Internal Audit report presented to the parish council at the March meeting, due to a rising precept along with an increase in general reserves to an acceptable level, consideration should be given to reviewing the level of fidelity cover at next insurance policy renewal in August 2024.

Guidance on this topic recommends an appropriate sum insured under this section will include all the local council's reserves and half of the precept income at year end.

**Resolved: That Fidelity Insurance cover should be increased in accordance with guidance**

**The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)**

**9. Meeting etiquette – the role of The Chair and rules for healthy debate**

Members were reminded of the need for 'one voice at a time only' during meetings, and to speak through the Chair of the meeting rather than a number of conversations taking place at the same time. This had been evident at recent working group meetings and led to confusion as well as making note taking difficult. The Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Orderlies were present at meetings to offer advice and guidance rather than taking part in the general meeting debate. A committee member considered that all parish councillors should re-read adopted standing orders regarding meeting rules.

**10. Local Council Award Scheme – parish council to consider registering an interest in taking part in the scheme?**

Resolved: It was recommended to the parish council that the council register for the scheme and work towards an appropriate level. The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous)

**11. Matters for Information.**

- **Cemetery Orderly** – the current Orderly had recently resigned from post and the item would be included on the April parish council meeting for discussion.
- **Public Works Board Loan** – it was advised that an ALCA response was awaited before progression of the loan/gift to the WCA.

With no further business, the meeting concluded at 8.15 pm.

Signed..... (Chair)

Date.....