

GREAT WYRLEY PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE held at Great Wyrley Community Centre, Landywood Lane, Great Wyrley which commenced at 11.00 a.m. on Tuesday 30th January, 2024 and the recommendations to be made to Full Council on Wednesday 7th February, 2024.

PRESENT:

(Chairman)
Cllr. J. C. Jones

Cllr. A. J. Kelsey Cllr. Mrs. K. M. Perry MBE	Cllr. R. J. Perry Cllr. Mrs. S. M. Wood
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Also in attendance: Ms. D. May (Parish Administrator) and Mrs. S. McGlue (Clerk).

There were no members of the public present on this occasion.

7/2024 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Cllr. M. Jackson.

8/2024 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

In accordance with the agreed procedure which dictated that a new Chairman would be elected to chair each meeting Cllr. J. C. Jones took the Chair.

9/2024 INTERIM SIGN OFF – PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS 2023/24

The Parish Administrator advised the Committee that the interim figures for the period 1st April, 2023 to 31st December, 2023 were available for scrutiny and all documents, along with the relevant working papers, were made available to Members.

Following scrutiny by Members it was proposed by Cllr. Mrs. K. M. Perry MBE and seconded by Cllr. A. J. Kelsey that the Committee **RESOLVE** to accept and approve the interim figures of the 2023/24 Parish Council Accounts. It was carried.

10/2024 CONFIRMATION OF EARMARKED FUNDS AND ALLOCATION OF DAY TO DAY BUDGET FOR 2023/24

The Committee was advised that following the meeting held on 10th January, 2024 a number of amendments now needed to be officially authorised as changes to be made to the current reserves. A copy of the agreed amendments are attached at **Appendix 1**.

Following thorough consideration of the figures presented to the Committee by the Parish Administrator the Annual Audit and Governance Committee **resolved** to increase the budget set for the day to day running of the Parish Council by 3% across the board in order to stay in line, as closely as possible, with the present rate of inflation. It was carried. This resolution was to be recommended to Full Council at its meeting on 7th February, 2024.

11/2024 CHRISTMAS LIGHTING REQUIREMENTS

The Clerk advised the meeting that the cost involved in providing the festive lighting for Christmas 2023 had cost in the region of £7,500. This figure had become inflated due to the fact that a number of repairs needed to be made to the lighting columns in Walsall Road prior to the lighting going live.

Members discussed the fact that although the Christmas decorations had been very good indeed they had been quite sparse. On this basis the Clerk was to establish the cost involved in having additional lighting decorations.

Cllr. Mrs. S. M. Wood also requested that the decorations be brighter than last years as she felt that they had looked quite dull. The Clerk advised the meeting that last year's decorations had been organised at very short notice indeed and accordingly Turnock's had only been able to let the Parish Council hire whatever decorations were remaining in their stock. This would not be the case for Christmas 2024. This was noted by Members.

Cllr. J. C. Jones suggested that a number of options could be explored, one of which was if the Parish Council decided to purchase its own decorations. The decorations could possibly be purchased via a staged process of perhaps 5 decorations per year, dependent upon the outlay involved. This was noted by Members.

The Clerk advised the meeting that she was due to attend a meeting with a representative of Turnock's on 6th February, 2024 during which these options could be discussed.

Members **resolved** to retain the £2000 already in the budget for this purpose and the Clerk was to provide additional information in time to set an amended budget before 1st April, 2024. This **resolution** was to be **recommended** to Full Council on 7th February, 2024 for ratification. This was noted by Members.

12/2024 ANNUAL FIREWORKS EVENT

The Clerk advised the meeting that this subject was quite an emotive matter, and accordingly required in depth consideration by Members prior to the making of any decision on the future of the event.

Members recognised the fact that to continue to hold this event would be going against Police advice which would place the security of the matter directly into the hands of the Parish Council.

Following discussion the Annual Audit and Governance Committee agreed that, unfortunately the event itself had now completely outgrown the Parish Council. So much so that the Parish Council would no longer be able to provide either the level of security or the necessary health and safety measures which would guarantee the safety of the public.

Members also explored other options which could perhaps save the future of the event, however, none of the ideas put forward were practicable and unfortunately, the Annual Audit and Governance Committee finally agreed that the Parish Council was left with very little choice other than to discontinue the event in the future.

On this basis the Annual Audit and Governance Committee **resolved** that regrettably it would now need to draw a line under a much loved Parish tradition and not hold an Annual Bonfire and Fireworks Event going forward. It was carried. **To be recommended to Council.**

Following discussion the Annual Audit and Governance Committee agreed that in these circumstances it regretted that the Parish Council would be disadvantaging the Carnival Committee and informally **resolved** to increase its annual donation to that organisation following the removal of the budgeted amount for the Fireworks event from its annual expenditure.

The Annual Audit and Governance Committee **resolved to recommend** the decisions set out above to the Full Council meeting to be held on 7th February, 2024.

13/2024 GREAT WYRLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE – HIRE CHARGES

The Parish Council had recently confirmed an increase of 3% across the board on hire charges for the Community Centre. However, the Annual Audit and Governance Committee had now received additional information with regard to the charging strategy which the Committee was asked to take into account so that some slight amendments may be facilitated officially.

Those amendments were as follows:-

1. Monday to Thursday hire after 4.00p.m. - the proposal was for this charge (which following the 3% increase had come to £31) to revert to £30 per hour. This was because a £31 charge would result in the constant need to keep cash/change on the premises. This is a practice that the Parish Council has consistently avoided in order to lessen the risk involved in the handling of cash money for Community Centre employees.

The Audit and Governance Committee **resolved** to revert the charge to £30 per hour as suggested. To be **recommended** to Council on 7th February, 2024.

2. Community Centre staff had confirmed that the Community Centre was mainly being used for first birthdays, children's parties, baby showers and christenings etc. Accordingly, to make the charges more user friendly it would be beneficial if the bulk hire charge of £252.50, along with the lower daytime charge of £34.00, were to be removed. This amendment would result in a far simpler system in that the hire charge for Friday evening, Saturday daytime, Saturday night and Sunday night would be a standard rate of £36.00 per hour.

The Audit and Governance Committee **resolved** to remove the charges as set out above in favour of the standard weekend charge suggested. To be **recommended** to Council on 7th February, 2024.

3. The Community Centre staff had also confirmed that for weekend hire there was a minimum set period of four hours for bookings.

The Audit and Governance Committee **resolved** to adopt the minimum set period of four hours applied to weekend bookings. To be **recommended** to Council on 7th February, 2024.

14/2024 COMMUNITY CENTRE – GENERAL INFORMATION

Cllr. Mrs. K. M. Perry MBE had explained to a previous meeting of the Parish Council that there was a real need to try to raise the level of bookings at the Community Centre.

Mrs. T. Rushton (Community Centre Assistant) had advised the Clerk that the Centre was let out mostly for Children's parties and those were let on a minimum of four hours. There was a £50 bond applied to under age 11 parties and a £100 bond for over age 11. This was noted.

The Clerk had also been advised that the remainder of bookings were mostly Baby Showers and Christenings. There were not many adult evening parties. Most of the children's parties were held on Sundays with some on Saturdays. This was also noted.

The Clerk advised the meeting that more bookings was of course, the right course of action, however, it needed to be balanced against how much it actually cost to service the Community Centre.

Cllr. Mrs. S. M. Wood advised the Committee that what the Parish Council needed to do was to make the premises available for Wedding Fairs to bring in the bookings.

The Clerk explained to the Committee that the income from the Community Centre from 1st April, 2023 to now had only amounted to £11,333.00.

The Clerk gave Members a brief summary of the costs involved in running the Community Centre in order to reflect the true picture of the situation with regard to the future.

The figures given to Members of the Committee have been set out below and represent the basic costs for the running of the Centre. Please note these figures only represent 9 months not a full year.

Utilities for the Community Centre	£5178.72
Security	£571.19
General maintenance	£2462.00
Cleaning Supplies	£615.55
Refuse removal	£1,520.00
Non Domestic Rates	£8,110.00
Licence Fee	£180.00

The Clerk explained that apart from a few incidentals like the new Union Flag these figures totalled £16,455. However, it needed to be recognised that this figure did not include salaries which amounted to £16,329 for the period from 1st April, to date.

Unfortunately, it became clear to all present that on the figures presented there was an annual deficit of in the region of £22,000. Members felt that this was not a situation which could be allowed to continue and full discussion took place on a suitable way forward.

Cllr. Mrs. K. M. Perry MBE advised the meeting that she was very concerned that the Parish Council was looking at making expensive improvements to the Community Centre as she felt that this did not make any sense when the Centre was losing revenue. Cllr. Mrs. Perry felt that this matter should be resolved as soon as possible. This was noted by Members.

Cllr. Mrs. K. M. Perry MBE advised the meeting that the suggestion she had put forward to increase bookings at The Community Centre actually entailed putting on homegrown events which would generate an income from people attending the event for example Bingo Evenings and something along the line of Flicks in the Sticks Film Show or an indoor market.

Cllr. J. C. Jones agreed with Cllr. Mrs. Perry that this may well be an excellent way of trying to balance the books but that there was quite a long way to go. Cllr. Jones suggested that an approach be made to Mrs. Rushton to carry this plan forward in terms of organising the Parish Council's own events.

Cllr. Mrs. S. M. Wood asked of the Committee whether any arrangements would be impacted by the limited parking available at the Centre. This was noted.

Following discussion it was agreed by all Members of the Committee that this was indeed a good way forward as the matter really needed to be addressed as soon as possible.

Cllr. Mrs. K. M. Perry MBE encapsulated the situation by advising all present that there was a need to balance the books. All Members agreed with this premise.

Cllr. J. C. Jones thanked the Parish Council staff for bringing this issue to the attention of the Committee and expressed his concern that this situation must have prevailed for quite some time.

The meeting was advised that the Parish Council may need to look at this situation from a number of different angles and try to address this deficit going forward.

The Clerk advised the meeting that despite the fact that the Parish Council was a not for profit organisation and any losses may well have been occurring for quite some time, they had surely been exacerbated now by the increased level of the Living Wage which was again set to increase to £11.44 per hour in April. This was noted by Members.

The Clerk explained however, that any significant increase in hiring fees would need not only to be justified to the hirer but also to the auditors. To achieve this the Parish Council needed to utilise revised and more detailed time sheets so that the staff time needed to allow for the operation of the Centre, as a bookable venue, could be relied upon for audit purposes.

This information was also now required for the migration onto the new payroll scheme so would need to be embraced as a matter of course before 1st April, 2024 in any event, so to make the changes now would be beneficial to all concerned. This practice would then give the Parish Council a sound basis for making a decision as to future tariffs.

The Chairman thanked the Members of the Annual Audit and Governance committee for their attendance and closed the meeting at 12.07 p.m.

CHAIRMAN.....DATE.....