

Godstone Parish Council

(incorporating the Villages of Godstone, South Godstone and Blindley Heath)

Clerk to the Parish Council

S Endersby

Admin Assistant

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MINUTES

of the meeting of the Finance Committee of
Godstone Parish Council held on **Wednesday 29 November 2023** at **9.30am** at the **Bounty, Godstone Green.**

Members: Cllrs C White, S Farr, Cllr I Smith, Cllr C Farr and L Case
Present: S Endersby (Clerk), Cllr K Ward and Cllr J Gardner

1. Apologies for absence

- 1.1 There were no apologies for absence.
- 1.2 Cllr L Case was not present at the start of the meeting.

RESOLVED - The meeting was deemed quorate.

2. Declaration of Interest

- 2.1 It was noted that there were no specific pecuniary interests to any items on the agenda, but that 4 of the councillors present are parishioners who pay towards the council precept.
- 2.2 Dispensations granted to each member of the committee on the grounds that the transaction of business will be impeded given the number of Councillor's who would otherwise be prohibited from participating in item 11.

3. Minutes of previous meetings held on 20 November 2023

- 3.1 The committee reviewed the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023.

RESOLVED - The committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 as an accurate record of the meeting and agreed that they be signed by the Chairperson.

4. Parish Council Procedures Audit

- a. Insurance Cover - The committee noted that 2024 is the last year of the three-year deal.

- b. Financial Risk Assessment, including Deposit Protection Limits – Annual Review

Subject	Risk Identified	H/M/L	Control	Review	Reviewed November 2023
Petty Cash	Loss through theft / dishonesty	L	N/a – no longer have petty cash	N/a	Reviewed, no change.
Expenses	Loss through fraudulent claims	L	Covered in Financial Regulations. Each Expense claim reviewed by two councillors at each meeting and agreed by the full Parish council.	Annually	Reviewed, no change. Keep same review timeframe.
Income - Cheques Received	Loss through theft / dishonesty / misplacement	L	Cheques paid into bank at the very least weekly. See Office Procedures	Annually	Reviewed. Clerk uses mobile banking and post office to pay cheques in. Keep the same review timeframe.
Income - Cash	Loss through theft / dishonesty	L	All Cash is paid into the bank at the very least monthly. See office Procedure	Annually	Reviewed, no change. Keep same review timeframe.
Financial Records / Standing Orders	Yes - adequate	L	Financial Regulations in place	Review when necessary	Committee noted the regulations were last approved May 2023. Item for review detailed below.
Bank and banking	Errors by Bank	L	See Financial Regulations. Monthly Bank reconciliations undertaken; available at Council meetings	Annually	Reviewed, no change. Keep same review timeframe.
Reporting and Auditing	Compliance	L	Council should regularly audit internally to comply with Fidelity Guarantee	Bi-Annually	Reviewed, no change. Keep same review timeframe.

Salaries	Incorrect Payments	L	Monthly meeting; calculated in accordance with HMR7C regulations. Annual Returns submitted within timescale. Councillor's review; Internal Audit Review	Annually	Noted benefit of Accounts system for checks. Reviewed, no change. Keep same review timeframe.										
Original Documentation	Loss by theft/fire	L	Stored in 30minute Fireproof Cabinet for storage of minutes, contracts and other original papers	Annually	Reviewed, no change. Keep same review timeframe.										
Computer Files	Loss	L	Computer backed up by at least weekly. One (monthly) back up stored off site and one stored in 30minute Fireproof Cabinet. Cloud location: Data location <small>As part of our transparency principles, we publish the location where Microsoft stores your customer content. For more information about Microsoft's contractual commitments, see the Online Services Privacy and Security Terms. Learn more at the Office 365 Trust Center</small> <table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th>Service</th> <th>Data at Rest</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> Exchange</td> <td>United Kingdom</td> </tr> <tr> <td> SharePoint</td> <td>United Kingdom</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Skype for Business</td> <td>European Union</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Microsoft Teams</td> <td>United Kingdom</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Service	Data at Rest	Exchange	United Kingdom	SharePoint	United Kingdom	Skype for Business	European Union	Microsoft Teams	United Kingdom	Annually	Reviewed, no change. Keep same review timeframe.
Service	Data at Rest														
Exchange	United Kingdom														
SharePoint	United Kingdom														
Skype for Business	European Union														
Microsoft Teams	United Kingdom														
Insurance Cover	As per policy	L	Reviewed by Full Parish Council.	Annually	Reviewed, no change. Keep same review timeframe.										
Precept	Reduced payment of the expected amount	L	Monitored by Parish council if contributing factors arise.	Annually	Reviewed, no change. Keep same review timeframe.										
Deposit Protection Limits	Amount of funds held in accounts and protected by <u>Deposit and savings protection</u> <u>FCA</u>	L	Consider opening a deposit account linked to current account.	Annually	Discussed bank protection scheme and complications with having a deposit account at a different bank.										

ACTION FC11/23 - 1 - Investigate a Deposit Account with parish current bank to earn interest.

Committee noted the discrepancies with HMRC are being investigated with Cllr S Farr's support.

ACTION FC11/23 - 2 – Complete review of HMRC discrepancy.

- c. Financial Regulations - To review regulations and agree any changes

The committee noted the Financial Regulations are based on the NALC model and were reviewed and readopted in the full council in May 2023.

The matter of the Clerks spend limit for emergency spend was raised as an item identified by the auditor's report and that consideration should be given to raise it from £500 to £1000.

4. Budgetary control and authority to spend

4.5. In cases of extreme risk to the delivery of council services, the clerk may authorise revenue expenditure on behalf of the council which in the clerk's judgement it is necessary to carry out. Such expenditure includes repair, replacement or other work, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for the expenditure, subject to a limit of ~~£500~~ [Consider new limit of £1000]. The Clerk shall report such action to the chairman as soon as possible and to the council as soon as practicable thereafter.

RESOLVED – Committee unanimously agreed that the emergency spend limit be raised from £500 to £1000 and that the recommendation be made to council.

ACTION FC11/23 - 3 – Recommendation to be reported to full council.

- d. Asset Register – The asset register had been provided to the committee in advance of the meeting.

ACTION FC11/23 - 4 – Review of register to be carried out when the new admin assistant starts.

- e. Business Continuity Plan – Committee noted that the document was out of date and in need of updating.

ACTION FC11/23 - 5 – Review and update of Business continuity plan to be completed as soon as practicable and when workload allows.

- f. Review of Current Direct Debits/Standing Orders – The committee noted the regular current direct debits and standing orders detailed:

- Current Direct Debits noted: British Gas, BT, NEST.
- Current Standing Orders noted: Bounty Rent to Scouts.

ACTION FC11/23 - 6 – On the purchase of the Bounty completing the standing to be cancelled.

5. AGAR - Financial Year 2022-2023

5.1 External Auditor – The committee acknowledged receipt of the report and conclusion

https://www.godstone-pc.gov.uk/images/SU0040_S3.pdf

RESOLVED – Committee unanimously agreed that the External Auditors report for the FY2022-23 AGAR be accepted, and that the recommendation be made to council to accept the report.

ACTION FC11/23 - 7 – Recommendation to report to full council, to accept External Auditors report for FY2022-23 AGAR.

5.2 Interim Internal Audit – Financial Year 2023-2024 – The committee noted that the report had already been circulated to Full council) recirculated for meeting. The committee acknowledged receipt of the report, Interim Internal Audit 2023-2024 ,and noted the recommendations in the report.

Year End 2023 – Audit points fwd

Audit Point	Audit Findings	Council comments
Books of Account	I would recommend a receipts file is created to hold documentary evidence of the receipts.	
Governance	The council is fully aware of GDPR and accessibility regulations. It was noted the council has established common email addresses for all councillors. This is recommended because it gives a natural segregation between work and personal lives, making it clear beyond doubt in what capacity a councillor is acting. In addition to this it gives control to the council, adds a degree of professionalism and in the event of a FOI request limits access to personal computers. I recommend in the spirit of transparency and accessibility that all councillor email addresses are published on the councillor's page of the website.	
Risk Assessments	The council has a risk management policy which was most recently reviewed and approved by council in November 2022. I reviewed the policy and the risk assessment record, which details the types of risk identified, who might be harmed and how, assigns a perceived risk level, records action taken and how the risk is managed. This type of approach is suitable for a council of this size and demonstrates that the council takes its risk management responsibilities seriously. I remind council that this must be reviewed and minuted before 31 st March 2024.	
Bank & Cash	Bank reconciliations are completed on a monthly basis, independently checked and presented to council meetings for review. I reviewed the reconciliations presented for the interim audit. I was able to confirm the balances to the bank statements and found no errors. I am also able to confirm that the reconciliations are signed. I remind council to sign the face of the bank statements in accordance with regulation.	
Transparency	The council does not have income and expenditure in excess of £200,000 and as such is not required to follow the "Local Government Transparency Code 2015" which is recommended practice not a statutory requirement. In addition to this, because the council's income and expenditure exceeds £25,000, it is not a statutory requirement to follow the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code, although it is recommended best practice to do so. I recommend reviewing the way the information is published on the website of West Chiltonon Parish Council as a best practice example via this link www.wcnc.org.uk/transparency	

The committee noted that the majority of recommendations had been actioned.

ACTION FC11/23 - 8 – Looking at the transparency recommendations to be completed.

6. Financial Position – General Review (year to date 2022-2023)

- a. Review of General Reserves – The committee noted that the Summary of Funds up to 31 October provided to the committee. The reserves summary is detailed below following agreed changes made in November.

- b. Review the latest Income and Expenditure report; agree any virement - The committee noted that an Income and Expenditure report was provided up to 31 October 2023 (Month 7).
- c. Review Designated Funds (DF) and Restricted Funds (RF) and current balances
- i. The committee noted that the changes agreed at the last Finance Committee meeting and accepted by full council have been actioned and reflected in information below, apart from £2,500 from BH Car Park/Barrier.

Nominal Code	Account	Opening Balance	Net Transfers	Current Balance
320	DF - Platinum Jubilee	246		246
322	DF - Children's Playground	1079.95		1079.95
324	DF - Neighbourhood Plan	7552.33	-7552.33	0
325	DF - Professional Services	1944.32	-1944.32	0
326	DF - Path on the Green	2000	-2000	0
327	DF - Bounty Purchase	3928.42		3928.42
328	DF - Horses on the Green Matte	1500	-1500	0
329	DF - Defence of Green (Maint)	1000	-1000	0
330	DF - Blindley Heath-Donated	1500		1500
331	DF - Recruitment Fees	1000	-1000	0
333	DF - Tree Work	0	14996.65	14996.65
400	RF - Fete Committee Grant	1100	-1100	0
401	RF - Christmas Lights	0	1250	1250
402	RF - Memorial Benches	1156.39	-780.37	376.02
403	RF - Pond (GG)	267.99		267.99
405	RF - Neighbourhood Plan	3500	-3500	0
406	RF - Donation Jubilee Tree	700	-685	15
407	RF - Donation Specific Works	311		311
451	CIL - Blindley Heath - Land	840		840
453	CIL - Path on the Green	2379.28		2379.28
454	CIL - BH Barrier/CP Works	4500	-2000	2500
455	CIL - Fund 22/23	12237.12	-2458.37	9778.75
		48742.8	-9273.74	39469.06

*DF = Designated Funds; RF = Restricted Funds

- ii. The £2,500 for the Blindley Heath Car Park is CIL which is a restricted fund.

ACTION FC11/23 – 8a – Clerk to investigate if CIL funds can be allocated to tree work.

- iii. The committee were provided with notes of the decisions and actions noted when the review of the reserves had been undertaken, for the purposes of the budget review and drafting.

Amount	From	To	Update	Action/Notes
£7,552.33	Neighbourhood Plan (DF)	DF Tree work.	Action complete.	Consider funds for 24-25, noting new grant application being made.
£1,944.32	Professional Services (DF)	DF Tree work.	Action complete.	Consider bringing back an allocation of funds in the FY24-25 budget plan.
£1,500	Horses on the Green matter (DF)	DF Tree work.	Action complete.	Consider if any allocation of funds required in the FY24-25 budget plan.
£1,000	Defence of the Green (DF)	DF Tree work.	Action complete.	Consider if any allocation of funds required in the FY24-25 budget plan.
£1,000	Recruitment fees (DF)	DF Tree work.	Action complete.	Candidate accepted role.
£2,000	£2,000 Path on the Green (DF)	DF Tree work.	Action complete.	CIL funds of £2379.28 allocated to project and £6k grant application being made to Your Fund Surrey
£2,500	£2,500 from Blindley Heath Barrier/Car Park works (DF) (RF)	DF Tree work.	Not completed as BH Barrier Fund is a RF not a DF. Review.	Consider if any allocation of funds required in the FY24-25 budget plan for future maintenance.

The committee noted that dependent on the outcome of the investigation as to whether CIL funds can be used for Tree Works, if necessary, there could be further adjustments made to allocate funds for tree works. The committee did not express any concerns with this issue fundamentally impacting the funds for tree works.

ACTION FC11/23 – 8b – On completion of Action 8a, if CIL funds cannot be used for tree works, complete the following action:

Amount	From	To
£1079.95	Playground (DF)	(DF) Tree work.
£1079.95	CIL funds (RF)	Playground (RF)

- d. Consider estimated carry forward for general funds at 31 March 2024 – The committee noted that noting £30k (Bounty) + £37k (estimate Precept Reserve) + £7k general reserve (estimated to be remaining

dependent on Tree works and when work takes place and addressing issue raised in 6. c above) = an estimated £74k carry forward of general reserves. This does not take into account any underspend withing the budget.

7. Grants - Continuous Grants and other Grants to date; Terms and Conditions and Awarding Policy

7.1 The committee noted that in the last few years there has not been a specific allocation for grants in the budget and any applications received are considered on a case-by-case basis.

RESOLVED – Committee unanimously agreed that no allocation for Grants be included in the draft FY2024-25 Budget and that any grants received continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

8. Review of fees and charges for 2023/24

a. Burial Grounds, Allotments, Wayleaves/Easements and Garden Plot Licenses

Burial Ground Fees

GRAVES	Parishioner		7-year Parishioner		Non-Parishioner	
	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25
			£		£	
Purchase of grave space in advance of need	£379	£402	£757	£802	Not Permitted	Not Permitted
Purchase of grave space	£379	£402	£757	£802	£3,247	£3,442
Interment in a purchased grave	£260	£276	£503	£533	£2,029	£2,151
Addition of ashes to a burial	£190	£201	£379	£402	£811	£860
Extension to EROB 5 Years	£57	£60	£113	£120	£487	£516
Extension to EROB 10 Years	£45	£48	£91	£96	£390	£413
MEMORIALS						
Right to erect or place a headstone with inscription	£254	£269	£503	£533	£1,014	£1,075
Additional Inscription	£98	£104	£195	£207	£419	£444
Admin Fee	£88	£100	£88	£100	£88	£100

RESOLVED – Committee unanimously agreed the burial fees increase to the amounts detailed.

ACTION FC11/23 - 9 – Clerk to update website and circulate fees to funeral directors.

Allotment Fees - The committee noted the current rental charge for allotments for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 is £9.35 per 25 sqm (with the minimum charge £27). The potential for water to be provided in 2024 was acknowledged.

It was noted that Cllr I Smith has an allotment.

RESOLVED – Committee unanimously agreed that a review of the allotment fees be delegated to the Greenspace committee and that the Greenspace committee make a recommendation to the finance committee as to what the rental charge should be set at.

ACTION FC11/23 - 10 – Clerk to include review of allotment rental charge on next Greenspace agenda.

Cllr L Case arrived and apologised for arriving late due to circumstances beyond her control.

Wayleaves/Easements and Garden Plot Licenses - The committee noted the Wayleave and Garden plot rent for the financial year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 increased by 5% on the FY2022-23 charge applicable to each wayleave and license.

RESOLVED – Committee unanimously agreed the Wayleaves/Easements and Garden Plot charges for FY2024-25 increase by 6%.

ACTION FC11/23 - 9 – Clerk to write to each property the increase effects to advise of the increase within the appropriate notice time.

b. Use of Godstone Green and Blindley Heath – The committee noted that the FY2023-24 charge for the use of Godstone Green or Blindley Heath for the annual visiting fair is charged as: operational day £220.50 and non-operational day £110.25. During FY2023-23 applications to use Godstone Green or Blindley Heath (the were not the annual visiting fair) were considered on application with information of the proposed use being provided, the fee to then be agreed and confirmed by council on a case by case basis.

RESOLVED – Committee unanimously agreed there be no increase to the charge for the FY2024-25 use of the Green for the Annual Fair and that any other applications for use of the Green be considered on application with information of the proposed use being provided and the fee to be agreed and confirmed by council on a case by case basis.

RESOLVED – Committee unanimously agreed that the Human Circus be charged the following: Operational day £220.50 and Non-operational day £110.25.

ACTION FC11/23 - 9 – Clerk to confirm amount to be charged to Human Circus.

9. Annual review of staff salaries, Pensions and Councillor Allowances (Confidential)

a. Salaries and Pensions

RESOLVED – The Committee unanimously agreed that pursuant to Section 1 part 2 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of item 9a. on the grounds that it is likely if the public were to remain, there would be a disclosure of exempt information.

The Clerk left the meeting.

PART TWO – Confidential

The Clerk returned to the meeting.

b. Chairperson’s Allowance - Review and set allowance for 2024-25

RESOLVED – Committee unanimously agreed there be no allowance set for the Chairperson.

10. Budget for the year 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025

a. Prepare and agree budget for the financial year 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024

- i. The committee noted that a first draft budget (v1) had been prepared and circulated in advance of the meeting. It was further noted that the Clerk had made subsequent minor changes to IT and the updated figure was provided at the meeting.
- ii. The committee were provided with Notes for each budget line to provide information as to what the figures for each accounting code included.
- iii. The committee were advised by way of the meeting notes of items not included in the first draft budget (v1) - Replacement Trees, Allotments Water (*Materials up to the cost of £400 to be paid by Parish council for water at allotments approved at July meeting*), repair to Burial Ground path, repair to Burial ground Fence, repair to Hilly Fields Fence, professional services (Local Plan/Garden Village), bus shelters, Notice boards, defenses, bench repairs (limited amount included), filling in of holes on Green, Manhole cover GG, Playground Training/ increased external inspections, RoSPA membership, Crypt repair work, New path to the playground (Grant application being made), Post replacements, Steel angled tops along the tops of swings.
This should not be relied on as a completely exhaustive list of matters the council may wish to consider.
- iv. The committee noted that the current Band D payment for the parish council precept per year is £28.94.
- v. The committee noted that the allocation of funds to cut South Godstone could be reviewed as the area is cut by another authority.
- vi. The committee reviewed the budget line by line. During the consideration of each budget line the following Actions were noted:

ACTION FC11/23 - 10:

- 1. Following item 9a. the salary budget line to be recalculated and an update provided at the next committee meeting.
- 2. Office refurbishment to be included as a separate budget line.
- 3. Printer costs to be considered in the future and an A3 printer.
- 4. A breakdown of the Audit costs to be provided to at the next committee meeting.
- 5. A breakdown of the subscription costs to be provided to at the next committee meeting.
- 6. Clerk to double check that leaf collection included in the budget an which code it is allocated against.
- 7. The potential for grass cutting costs to increase to be updated in the draft budget (estimate of 6% for this exercise).
- 8. £2k of funds to be allocated to pathways split between the villages with public footpaths across parish land.

ACTION FC11/23 – 11 – Updated draft budget to be circulated to committee in preparation for the next committee meeting.

a. Consider the preparation of a 3-year budget Plan – The committee did not consider a 3-year budget plan.

11. Agree Precept for the year 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025 - to recommend to the Parish Council at the Parish Council meeting on 4 December 2023 for approval.

RESOLVED – The Committee unanimously agreed that this item be postponed to the next Finance Committee meeting.

12 Date of next meeting – The next committee meeting was scheduled for Friday 8 December 2024 at 10.30am.

----- Meeting closed -----

Committee Chairperson

Dated