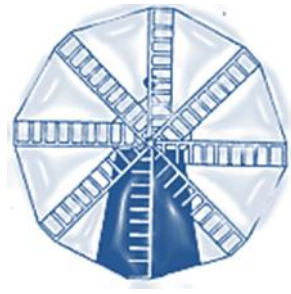


HECKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL



Minutes of the Heckington Parish Council Finance Committee meeting held on Monday 16 December 2024 at 7.30 pm in the Parish Council Chambers, St Andrews Street, Heckington

1. **Chair's Welcome**

The Finance Committee Chair, Councillor Tucker (hereafter referred to as the Chair) welcomed those present to the second meeting of the finance committee. The Chair delivered the usual health and safety notices. The Chair reminded members of the public that negative behaviours, verbal or physical, will not be tolerated towards council members or employees.

The Chair opened the public forum asking members of the public where possible to ask questions relating solely to finance unless necessary; all other topics will be address by the parish council at the meeting in January.

2. **Public Forum**

A member of the public asked a question in relation to agenda item 6. c).

He said that when he was a parish councillor, the pavilion was in a dire state, and he conducted some research by visiting other parishes. He found that many parish facilities were badly neglected and beyond repair. He had produced a report for the parish council at the time, but his understanding was that a lot of documentation had been burned by the caretaker at the request of the previous administration. The member of the public said he would try to find a copy of this report. He added that the hearing loop system was operational.

3. **Councillor Present**

Councillor Spencer, Parish Council Chair
Councillor Garlick, Parish Council Vice Chair
Councillor Davison
Councillor Tucker, Finance Committee Chair
Councillor Wright

4. **Apologies**

None.

5. Member's interest, pecuniary or otherwise in relation to the agenda and any dispensations in accordance with the Localism Act 2011

None.

6. FINANCE MATTERS

a) Grants

i) The application process for grant requests to the parish council (including Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972) to include associated requirements and criteria.

ii) The need for an application form and template for a business case.

The Chair informed the meeting that over the last three financial years, the parish council has spent over £26,116.11 on utilities and maintenance on the parish council chambers while receiving only £15,750.25 in income for the facility and, the parish council has given grants/donations to a number of organisations totalling £8329.00 (one of which received a donation year on year).

She explained that the parish council wants to continue to support local organisations by offering grants but explained that this is difficult while one of our assets is 'leaking' money, unnecessarily.

The Chair said that the Clerk and Councillor Davison have created a grant application form which will allow organisations to apply to the parish council for grant funding. The Chair said that the parish council need to think about giving back to the community and although money has been granted to worthy causes in the past, she said she cannot believe that more community organisations have not been awarded funding.

Councillor Davison added that the key is to level the playing field for organisations in the village. Organisations applying for grant funding will be expected show a degree of self-help, have they tried to fundraise? This is also a demonstration of how active a particular organisation is within the community. He explained that the parish council will also be looking at what other funding sources have been explored, explaining that the parish council should not be the first and only point of call.

Councillor Wright asked whether applications can be made throughout the year or just ahead of the precept and it was agreed that applications can be accepted at any time; there will be a budget for grant funding.

Councillor Davison went on to speak about the selection process.

Councillor Spencer said that if anyone needs any help to complete the form, this should be made available.

The Chair added that this application form standardised the application process, it is fair and transparent. Councillor Davison said that the application form is a tool which will enable the parish council to make sound decisions and as such does not need to be adopted by the parish council formally at a full meeting.

Councillor Garlick suggested that a question is added about the timescale and deadlines for receipt of funding and a requirement for phased funding.

The Chair proposed that we start using the application form with the addition further questions suggested by Councillor Garlick, as we already have a number of expressions of

interest. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Spencer and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the committee.

Action: Clerk to add questions relating to a deadline for funding and phased funding to the grant application form.

b) The current use of the Parish Council Chambers by the Library service and HAVCS and its future use as potential office and events space.

Councillor Davison said he had no views about the library which is a complicated issue. He said that HAVCS have for some time now used an upstairs room and the store for their organisation and he cannot see why that needs to continue; the room cannot be hired out to other parties and a number of volunteers have keys to the parish council building. He suggested that they are given notice to vacate the premises.

The Chair said that she had only recently found out that HAVCS covers a number of other parishes including Helpringham, Hale Magna, Little Hale, Ewerby and Kirkby La Thorpe. She acknowledged that the service has the largest customer base in Heckington. She expressed concern that the organisation has been given £3000 by the parish council over the last three years with no evidence of any fundraising from the charity. She said that it would be better to hire out the meeting rooms as the income would reduce the current gap between running costs and income. She also expressed concern that there are 11 people who have keys to the parish council building that are not associated with the parish council and as a layer of local government she said that there needs to be greater respect in terms of security for the confidential documents and parish council staff. She said she also thought that HAVCS should be asked to vacate the premises.

Councillor Garlick asked whether there had been a conversation with HAVCS. There was further discussion about how and why they came to use the parish council chambers as their base; Councillor Spencer explained that this was because they formerly had a fixed landline in the building, but they have now moved a mobile device.

There was discussion about alternative options for HAVCS including working from home and from within the library. The Chair explained that this is not a parish council initiative and how they operate is not the parish council's concern; they are a charity.

Members agreed that sufficient notice should be given to allow HAVCS and the start of the new financial year on 1 April 2025 was discussed. Councillor Davison added that the charity offers a valuable service, but their use of the parish council building is an anomaly.

The Chair proposed that this item is added to the January agenda for consideration by the parish council. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Davison and passed unanimously, by resolution of the committee.

Action: Clerk to add giving notice to HAVCS to the January agenda for the parish council meeting and delegation of powers to the Finance Committee for oversight over the parish council chambers. Clerk to liaise with the Chair of HAVCS, Mike Prior to discuss the issue.

- c) **Pavilion**
- i) **Details of the tenancy agreement for the Pavilion to present to the Parish Council in January 2025.**

The Chair announced that she has asked for this item to be discussed in part in closed session.

Councillor Davison explained to the meeting that he and Councillor Wright, after hours of research, have discovered how the pavilion has been managed over the years - from a pavilion management committee to tenants. He explained that past tenancy agreements have been based on the payment of a nominal sum in terms of rent with the expectation that the tenant will assume responsibility for the maintenance of the building and playing fields. He went on to say that there were however no inspections by the parish council which has ultimately led to years of neglect. The parish council now need to spend a significant amount of money on the fabric of the building and there is a tenant in the property without a signed tenancy agreement in place. He said it might be worth making enquiries with other parish council to find out what models they use for their facilities. He went on to say that the current tenants are clearly doing a very good job, and the parish council wants to facilitate them being able to continue to do that.

The Chair explained that when she was a parish councillor previously, she had requested that annual inspections be conducted but this was not carried forward. She went on to say that she did a walkaround with Councillor Higgs but the tenants at the time were decorating any many parts of the building were inaccessible. She added that the pavilion has been mismanaged and evidenced the allocated budget for 24/25 of £1,000.

The Chair stated that the Clerk has sat down with the tenants to discuss the terms of agreement, and the tenants are happy with the current draft (v1.3).

There was discussion about the need to increase the 'peppercorn' rent due to the need for structural repairs and maintenance and there was some discussion as to an appropriate rent figure.

Council expressed a number of concerns about the draft terms and conditions and it was agreed to review this further in closed session.

- ii) **Pavilion Building Survey**

The Pavilion Building survey is not yet available.

- d) **Update on the review of Contractors and Professional Service suppliers used by the Parish Council (preferred supplier list).**

The Chair said that the creation of a preferred supplier list seems like a pointless exercise; the parish council now has an extensive list of local suppliers who can be

called upon to provide quotes and service to the parish council. Councillor Garlick suggested the need for a small emergency contact list. The Chair proposed that the parish council scrap the concept of a preferred supplier list. The proposal was seconded by councillor Garlick and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the council.

Action: Clerk to communicate with the suppliers having already submitted applications.

e) Budgetary process and precept setting for 2025/26

The Clerk confirmed that a draft budget had been created with submissions from the events, cemetery and allotment committees. The Clerk had drafted figures for all other budget heads with the exception of the pavilion which cannot be completed until the buildings survey report has been received from Carter Jonas.

The Clerk suggested an informal meeting with the Finance Committee to go through each budget head in detail ahead of the parish council meeting scheduled to take place on 13 January 2025. The Clerk advised the parish council to consult with the public in future in relation to proposed budgets.

Action: Clerk to schedule a meeting.

f) Ring-fenced reserves

Members agreed that this will be reviewed as part of the budgetary process discussed above.

g) Telephone Provider

After some discussion about current costs and potential savings, the Chair proposed that the account with Daisy Telecommunications is closed, and the Clerk is issued with an e-sim. The Clerk consented to using her own mobile handset for this purpose. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the committee.

h) An update on enquires with land agents and solicitors in relation to Star Fen

The Chair confirmed that three quotes had been received from solicitors including Chattertons, Bird & Co and Burton and Co. Two quotes have been received to date from land agents, Mundy's and Brown & Co. The Chair reported that Brown and Co had some involvement in the sale to the parish council and as such their quote would not be considered. Two further quotes are awaited from Robert Bell & Company and Mason & Partners. The Clerk confirmed that the land agents would be asked to comply with parish council expectations for the valuations to be made available to the public.

Members discussed the next steps. Councillor Davison suggested the valuations are carried out in January for a decision regarding the sale at the February meeting of the

parish council. The Chair said that she would like the item to be on the agenda for discussion in January.

At this point in the meeting the Chair allowed members of the public to ask any questions before the committee resolved to move into closed session. A member of the public asked whether the outside toilet at the parish council chambers could be converted into a small office for HAVCS operations.

Another parishioner said that the conversation about the pavilion is concerning highlighting a duty of care to the tenants. There were further questions about insurance.

7. Date and time of the next meeting

Parish Council Meeting to be held on Monday 13 January 2025 at 7.30pm. This focus of this meeting will be finance, budget setting and precept. Location to be confirmed.

At 8.58pm, the Chair proposed that the committee move into closed session to discuss the details of the tenancy agreement for the pavilion. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the council.

**8. Closed Session
Pavilion Tenancy Agreement**

Members of the Finance Committee reviewed the tenancy agreement clause by clause and produced version 1.4. It was agreed that the committee member would meet with the tenants as soon as possible to agree terms.

At 9.30 pm, the Chair proposed that the meeting continue despite reaching the two-hour time limit to allow for the conclusion of business. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the committee.

No resolutions were passed in the closed session.

The Chair closed the meeting at 10.15pm.