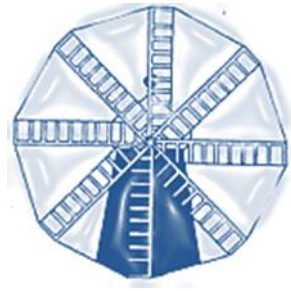


HECKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL



Minutes of the Heckington Parish Council Finance Committee meeting held on Tuesday 11 February 2025 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 members of the public and councillors to the meeting and delivered the usual health and safety announcements.

2. **Public Forum**

There were 11 members of the public present.

A member of the public representing HAVCS wanted to know how Section 26 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 relates to HAVCS per the agenda. The Clerk explained that this is the spending power that the Parish Council will apply if funding for the organisation is agreed rather than Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The member of the public said that he had read the legislation and did not feel it to be relevant. The Clerk confirmed that she had obtained advice from the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils (LALC) who advise the parish council on legislative matters, and they had confirmed it to be the correct spending power. The member of the public expressed his doubts. The Chair added that the comments had been noted.

A member of the public was concerned that the Finance Committee were going to review funding applications prior to adoption of the grants policy. The Chair said that the Finance Committee are aware of this and any discussions at this meeting will guide recommendations to the full Parish Council at the end of the month, after the grants policy has been adopted.

A member of the public asked the Chair what she meant in response to the HAVCS query. The Chair explained that the parish council do not agree with the statement, having already sought advice in relation to the spending power, but we go back to LALC for confirmation.

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

Councillor Wright declared an interest in relation to agenda item 7. a) ii) – nonpecuniary.

6. Approval of Minutes

Councillor Spencer proposed that the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting on 15 November 2024 and 16 December 2024 be accepted as a true and accurate records of those meetings. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was passed unanimously, by the committee.

7. Finance Matters

a) Review of applications for funding with a view to providing recommendations to the full Parish Council.

i) **Heckington Cricket Club - request to install an all-weather pitch (Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976). 19. 1) b).**

Councillors Davison explained that the club are waiting for approval from North Kesteven District Council for a grant of £5,000.00. The Clerk stated that her understanding is that £1,000.00 had been granted. Members discussed the shortfall and Councillor Davison proposed a meeting with the cricket club to obtain an update on their funding status. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the committee.

Action: Clerk to communicate with the cricket club.

ii) **2nd Heckington Scouts Group. Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976, Section 19. 3) a).**

Councillor Davison said that this is the sort of activity that the parish council should be supporting. The application has been completed fully, there is precise information about the costs, their bank statements have been attached and Councillor Davison said he is happy to support the application by way of proposal to full council. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Spencer and the motion was passed by resolution of the committee. Councillor Wright abstained from discussion and voting having declared an interest earlier in the meeting.

iii) **HAVCS (s26 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997).**

Councillor Davison stated that the application has been submitted without the relevant financial information and the application form itself had been changed and for these reasons, the parish council is not in a position to review the application. Councillors Wright and Spencer agreed with Councillor Davison. Councillor Garlick asked how much the organisation had applied for. Councillor Davison said, *'Whatever Heckington Parish Council consider appropriate to ensure the continuance of operating the service provided'*. Councillor Garlick said that there was no explanation justifying the reasons for the

application, and given the details in other applications, this one was lacking. Councillor Davison proposed a meeting with the Chair and Treasurer of HAVCS. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the committee.

Action: Clerk to arrange a meeting between Finance Committee representatives and HAVCS.

b) HAVCS' use of the parish council chambers and charges for use.

The Chair confirmed that Councillors Spencer and Davison had both met with representatives from HAVCS several weeks prior, to discuss a proposal to move their operation to the Chamber's upstairs foyer from one of the large meeting rooms; this move was deemed to be acceptable by HAVCS representatives.

Councillor Davison said that once the committee has formally agreed for HAVCS to occupy the foyer, the charges or a levy of those charges could be discussed. He explained, as did Councillor Spencer, that the point of the exercise is to enable the parish council to rent out the meeting room currently occupied by HAVCS to defer the costs of running the chambers.

Councillor Spencer proposed that HAVCS move their operation to the foyer. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Davison and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the committee.

Councillor Garlick queried whether there should be a charge at all. A member of the public added '*here here*'. Councillor Garlick went on to say that the charity is a great benefit to the community. He suggested that any charge should be an absolute minimum. Councillor Davison expressed his agreement.

Councillor Davison said that at the meeting (referred to above) with the HAVCS representatives, he and Councillor Spencer in the presence of the Clerk, had been told that for the car service to continue to operate in Heckington, they must have a donation from the parish council. A HAVCS representative present confirmed this to be accurate account of what was said.

Councillor Davison said he has no issues providing funding to local organisations, but he explained that there must be a level playing field. He said that the parish council is giving away taxpayer's money but because there had not been full disclosure from HAVCS, the committee cannot make a determination about their funding application.

The Chair asked how this relates to the current conversation about charges for use of the Chambers.

Councillor Davison went on to say that one of the suggestions is that use of the Chambers is given in lieu of funding. He said that he is not comfortable supporting any application if that organisation will not disclose their finances and he said that there has been a significant amount of resistance from HAVCS relating to the disclosure of their finances, for whatever reason. Councillor Garlick agreed with these comments but thought inventing a charge for use of the chambers and offering to levy that fee instead of providing funding seems unfair.

Councillor Davison explained that the committee is only having this conversation because of a lack of transparency from HAVCS and because of the mandate in their constitution requiring funding from the parish council.

The Chair asked the HAVCS representatives present why they had not provided the information. One of the representatives said that the forms they had received were for a grant. He said that they are not asking for grant, they are asking for a donation. He said they are two different things. A grant is used for a specific purpose; the reason they are asking for a donation is to cover the revenue costs. The Chair went on to say that regardless of this, they had been asked to provide further information relating to their bank accounts but had failed to provide it. The representative argued his case. Councillor Spencer said that consideration will be given to the application from HAVCS once they have fulfilled the application criteria.

The Clerk added that she had explained to the Treasurer of HAVCS that the application form is the generic form that the parish council is using for all funding applications.

Councillor Davison said that if we are going to give any funds to any organisation, the Parish Council needs to understand why that organisation wants that money. There has been no explanation as to what operating costs are, no explanation as to where the money paid by the users goes. The financial information provided is inadequate.

The Chair redirected conversation to charges for the Chambers. Councillor Spencer said until the application has been completed correctly, the application cannot be considered and this was his proposal. Councillor Wright added her agreement by seconding the proposal which was passed by unanimous resolution of the committee.

The Chair of HAVCS asked to speak. He said that HAVCS' constitution did stipulate that they must receive funding from the parish council for their service to continue to operate in Heckington, but he indicated that the constitution has since changed and there is now no absolute requirement.

c) **Budget Review (2025/26) – Eclipse PC Repair annual contract.**

The Chair proposed an amendment to the 2025/26 budget which must be ratified by the full Parish Council. The proposal is to move £265.00 from the printer ink budget head to the computer maintenance budget head as the service provided by Eclipse PC repair is an annual service charged monthly. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Wright and the motion was passed unanimously by resolution of the committee.

Action: Clerk to add to the February Parish Council meeting agenda for ratification.

d) **To review of ring-fenced reserves with a view to providing recommendations to the full parish council.**

After considerable discussion, members agreed that ring-fenced reserves need further consideration. Councillor Spencer proposed that item is deferred pending further consideration. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Garlick and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the committee.

Action: Clerk to add to the February Parish Council meeting agenda.

e) **Third quarter budget review**

The Chair stated that at the end of the third quarter, the annual budget for 2024-25 is 90% spent against the budget.

The budget heads that are overspent include:

Section 137 by 4%. She suggested that £200 is moved from the insurances budget head to Section 137 which is currently 4% overspent.

She suggested that £600.00 is moved from the Chambers budget head to the Other Land budget head to cover the unexpected costs incurred because of the purchase of Star Fen. A budget was not set for this area of spending.

She suggested that £800.00 is moved from the Chambers budget head to the Playground budget head which is currently overspent by 63%.

She suggested that £14,000 is moved from the Chambers budget head to the Pavilion budget head which is currently overspent by 143%.

The Clerk explained that after these amendments, all budget heads will be underspent against the budget. She went on to say that any variances above a certain percentage must be explained to the External Auditors. The Clerk said that there is a good explanation and the EAs would take this into consideration, but this process eliminates a need for that. Councillor Davison added that this process also shows that the parish council are actively reviewing the budget and expenditure. The budget heads will need to be monitored through to the year end.

The Chair proposed the following changes to the 2024/2025 budget. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Spencer and the motion was passed unanimously, by resolution of the committee.

Action: Clerk to add to the February Parish Council meeting agenda for ratification.

8. Date and time of the next meeting

Thursday 13 March 2025 at 7.30pm in the Parish Council Chambers, St Andrews Street, Heckington.

9. Questions from the public (time permitting at the discretion of the Chair).

A member of the public wanted to provide an explanation of his understanding of the terms grant and donation. He said a grant is applied for; it is a request for a sum of money for a specific purpose. A donation is given without a request.

A member of the public wanted to refer to what Councillor Garlick had said about HAVCS; that the two issues, the funding and the charge for use of the chambers, should be looked at separately. She added that they provide an invaluable service.

Councillor Wright asked the HAVCS representatives whether the voluntary car service will cease operation in Heckington if funding is denied. HAVCS representatives said that the service will continue to operate regardless.

Councillors Davison and Spencer explained to the meeting that they had been explicitly told, during a meeting with representatives from HAVCS, that the service would in fact be removed from Heckington if the Parish Council failed to give a donation. The representative confirmed that they did indeed say this at that meeting. A member of the public added that this is *'blackmail'*.

Councillor Davison went on to say that the reason the Parish Council has been dancing on a pin is because of the statement you made in that meeting. The parish council wants to make sure the car service stays in Heckington. He reiterated that the parish council is spending taxpayers' money, and the grant process must be more democratic than it has in previous years. He said the parish council must be given full disclosure and until such time, the parish council cannot make a determination in relation to the funding application.

The Chair closed the meeting at 8.28pm