

# Gerrards Cross Town Council

South Lodge, East Common, Gerrards Cross SL9 7AD 01753 888018

Clerk to the Council - Mrs S Moffat clerk@gerrardscross.gov.uk

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## Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held 7 pm on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2021 at Gerrards Cross Memorial Hall

**Present:** Cllr J Chhokar (Chairman), Cllr M Bracken, Cllr C Da Costa, Cllr S Davey, Cllr T Greenfield, Cllr J O’Keeffe, Cllr P Roberts and Cllr A Wood

**In Attendance:** Sue Moffat (Town Clerk).

1. *Declaration of interests are requested at the beginning of each item.*
2. **To accept apologies for absence – Cllr N Barnett, Cllr B Holborn, Cllr B Peck and Cllr C Stuart-Lee.**
3. **To Review Expenditure and Balances in 2021/22 Accounts.** Financial Report April to September. It was noted that although some budget items are underspent the money is committed for the allocated task. However there are some items which will be underspent, such as the Elections due to only one ward being contested, and Cllr Bracken asked to reallocate funds towards professional advice in reviewing the Financial Regulations.
4. **To discuss the 2021-22 grant application** from Gerrards Cross Community Association under Item 9.
5. **Accepted that the Deputy Clerk has completed her 3 month probation.** It was agreed the Deputy Clerk to undertake the training course, ‘Introduction to Local Council Administration’ which is an induction qualification in preparation for the CILCA. Cost £120. Also to become trained on the Software Pears Technology in order to map all the Town Council’s assets. Cost £350.
6. **To note the completion of the External Audit.** Cllr Bracken wished to point out that the external audit only covers the statutory minimum and there is no review by the External Auditor of compliance with policies and procedures.
7. **To agree to renew the services of the Internal Auditor, Beverly Simpson & Co Ltd and to agree the formal letter of engagement outlining roles, responsibilities and independence of the internal auditor.** The Town Clerk reported that she has been informed by the Internal Auditor today that he will be retiring as soon as a replacement has been found and at the latest by the end of this financial year. It was agreed to continue with the services of Beverly Simpson & Co Ltd until a new internal auditor has been agreed. The Town Clerk will seek an internal auditor who specialises in town and parish council audits with the scope of the new auditor to also be considered.
8. **To consider applications for Grants in 2022/23 as listed on the proposed budget for 2022-23 –** The 2021-22 and 2022- 2023 grant applications from GXCA was first discussed. Cllr Chhokar pointed out that the Memorial Centre is an important community asset and has high visibility. GXCA have highlighted specific projects:- (i) Fire Escape £25k; (ii) Car park £30k and (iii) Garden Room £130k. After much discussion regards outside bodies providing grants, reserves and fund raising (i.e. the annual jumble sale), the grant application for 2021-22 was not agreed. However, a £25k grant was agreed for 2022-23 for a specific project , the Fire Escape, and if that project is less than £25k, the surplus will then have to be agreed by GXTC to be used elsewhere. It was agreed that we may restate our wish that a

member of GXTC is invited as an observer to the Executive Board meetings which had previously been declined.

The remaining grant applications were agreed as follows:-

- (i) Guides - £600 – agreed.
- (ii) Padstones - £600 – agreed.
- (iii) Gerrards Cross Cricket Club - £3500. At this point Cllr Chhokar declared an interest and took no part in the discussion. This grant application was not agreed.
- (iv) GX Fun run - £400. This grant application was not agreed.

- 9. To consider the budget for 2022/23.** Cllr Bracken raised the issue as to whether the budget should be based on aggregate and historical costs and was an increase in budget appropriate. In particular Cllr Bracken asked the members to consider that we should be sensitive to the overall limit to our expenditure which comes from Council tax. However Cllr Wood responded that monies in the budget were the prudent management of previous councils and with imminent inflationary costs such as gas, fuel and materials it would not be sensible to not increase the budget next year. Cllr O’Keeffe added that any budget not spent by a committee would then be released to be committed to other projects. It would be negligent not to commit to those projects in earmarked reserves.

The following changes to the proposed budget circulated with the agenda were proposed:-

**Commons budget**

- (i) New play equipment - £30k and ask for match funding from the Community Board of £30k.
- (ii) Upgrade paths - £5k
- (iii) Playground Repairs - £3k
- (iv) The Camp Baling - £3k,
- (v) Commons ditch clearing - £2k

**Highways Budget**

- (i) Amendment -contract Lighting to £4500.
- (ii) Gully cleaning - £5k
- (iii) Check work required after the On-Street parking Review. Estimate £10k
- (iv) High Street decoration- £5k
- (v) CCTV – Cllr O’Keeffe reported that costs have gone up but as yet do not have an exact quote. Cllr Bracken raised concern about getting value for money from this project and there cannot be a limitless amount made available. The £20k provisional additional budget was agreed.

**Communications**

- (i) Upgrade computers and Ipads - £1K (Noted that only Cllr Stuart-Lee requires a new Ipad).

**Administration**

- (i) Councillors Training - £1.5k
- (ii) Check telephone and photocopier contract for best value.

It was agreed the proposals for all existing projects would be included at the discussed levels for specific budgets and the total budget would then be presented to see whether the Town Council wished to make reductions before agreeing the final precept for 2022-23.

- 10. To Review Asset Register** - Noted.

- 11. Annual Review of Risk Assessment** – Noted.

- 12. To review Standing Orders as agreed at the Council** - Agreed to amend Item 7A ‘All councillors shall observe the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council on the 16th July 2012’ to ‘All councillors shall observe the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council on the 20th September 2021’.

- 13. To Review the Financial Regulations** – Cllr Bracken requested that professional advice is sought to review the Financial Regulations so they are updated to reflect the actual practices we wish to follow in line with legal recommendations and professional best practices. This was agreed. Cllr Chhokar raised the issue regards councillors reviewing invoices and if this could be done by the invoices circulated electronically to all councillors. The Town Clerk will need to check if this is possible under GDPR and report back. Pending that, it was agreed that the process would be adjusted whereby the list of payments would be made available prior to the Council meeting to enable councillors the opportunity to inspect a specific invoice if requested.

**14. Resolved** that in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted it is advisable in the public interest, that the press and public be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw (Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 s1).

**15. To Review Staffing remuneration** – Resolved the Review of Staffing Remuneration.

**16. Date of next meeting - TBD**

Chairman .....

Date.....