



HELSEBY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held at 7.00pm in the Parish Office at Helsby Community Sports Club on Monday 7th April 2025

Present:

Cllr. Terry O'Neill (Chair)

Cllr. Sarah Temple

Cllr. Graham Stothard (substitute for Cllr. Nicklin)

Also present:

Claire Jones (Parish Clerk)

1. Public Participation – No matters were brought to the Committee's attention.
2. Apologies for absence were noted from Cllrs. Ellams and Nicklin.
3. Declarations of Members' Interests. None were received/reported.
4. Confirmation of Previous Minutes. It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 13th January 2025 were accepted as accurate (subject to one correction under Item 12 - the total cost for the Jubilee litter bin should have been £395 and not £790) and were duly signed by the Chair – **F11/25**.
5. Clerk's report. The following points were noted:
 - Item 5 (investment funds) – the Co-op savings account had now been closed;
 - Item 5 (insurance valuation) – a rebuild valuation had been received for the war memorial and this would be covered under Item 11;
 - Item 5 (bank reconciliation checks) – the Clerk would arrange with Cllr. Stothard shortly; and
 - Item 13 (path edging project) – quotes would be considered at next week's Full Council meeting and expenditure for this work would be in 2025/26.
6. Review of grants/earmarked reserves. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the earmarked reserves balance of £131,642.33 at 31st March 2025 – F12/25**. It was noted that the general reserves figure of £50,229.22 was within the advisory level of between 3- and 12-month's Net Revenue Expenditure but below the 6-month limit set out in the council's Reserves Policy, largely due to an unclaimed VAT balance of £12,316.19. It was agreed to monitor levels of general reserves during 2025/26 and to consider reclaiming VAT more regularly than once per year.

7. 2024/25 Bank Reconciliation, Budget Report and Financial Report for 31st March 2025. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to accept the Bank Reconciliation Report detailing a final balance for 2024/25 of £181,871.85 and the Net Payment and Receipts Budget Reports – F13/25**. The Clerk presented the Financial Report to 31st March 2025. It was agreed to remove the gross expenditure column on page 1 and the debt outstanding section on page 4. It was also agreed to insert a footnote in Appendix A to show the actual expenditure of earmarked reserves against the transfer of funds to other reserves. The Clerk agreed to reword the summary on page 2 in relation to any surplus/deficit of funds. Subject to the above amendments, it was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to accept the Financial Report for the Year Ending 31st March 2025 – F14/25**.
8. Amendment to Financial Regulations – NALC's latest Model Financial Regulations for England and Wales dated 5th March 2025 were considered. It was outlined that Sections 5.4, 5.7 and 5.11 (thresholds for contracts for the supply of goods, services and the provision of works) had been amended. It was noted that this was due to changes introduced through The Procurement Act 2023 and The Procurement Regulations 2024, which came into force on 24th February 2025, replacing previous legislation, including the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The following amendments were agreed:
- To replace the legislation references in Section 5.4;
 - To amend Section 5.7 to: For contracts estimated to be over £30,000 including VAT, the council must comply with any requirements of the Legislation regarding the publication of invitations and notices (previously stated: ...regarding the advertising of contract opportunities and the publication of notices about the award of contracts); and
 - To amend Section 5.10 to Contracts must not be split to avoid compliance with these rules (previously 'Contracts must not be split into smaller lots to avoid compliance with these rules').

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to amend the Financial Regulations with the amendments proposed above – F15/25**. It was also acknowledged that a further amendment would be proposed at Full Council in relation to a new document history section (as agreed at the last Policy and Procedures Committee). It was noted that the Standing Orders would also need to be amended in relation to this new procurement legislation.

9. Review of the Internal Control Policy – The following amendments were proposed:
- Page 1: To move the version number and revision date to the appendices in a new document history section;
 - Page 2: To amend 3(m) to say 'some' rather than 'many' policies;
 - Page 2: To amend from Finance Committee to Policy and Procedures Committee in 3(n); and
 - Page 3: To remove the information from 'for 6 years...' in (f) and replace with the following text: 'for the periods specified in the Retention and Disposal Policy'.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to amend the Internal Control Policy with the amendments proposed above – F16/25.**

Members also considered and agreed the proposed amendments made by the Policy and Procedures Committee in relation to the policy table and the Finance Committee section of the Standing Orders, subject to changing ‘minimum review period’ to ‘maximum review period’.

10. Review of Asset Register – The latest asset register was reviewed. The following amendments were proposed: to amend a typo in the year at the end of the table and to change the estimated end of life for the illuminated reindeer and HP laptop from medium to high. The Clerk also agreed to check the value of the cemetery garage following upgrades to the door and roof. Subject to these amendments, it was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to accept the Asset Register detailing £231,674.54 being the total value of assets held at 31st March 2025 – F17/25.** It was agreed not to increase any insurance valuations in 2025/26 as they had only been set in May 2024, but to ensure that a 3% increase (or other appropriate figure) would be applied to next year’s valuations.
11. Review of Insurance Schedule – It was noted that the council had taken out a 3-year long term undertaking (LTU) agreement with Zurich for the Parish Council insurance which would expire on 1st June 2027. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to accept the current insurance schedule but to increase the sums insured for the war memorial to £75,000 (based on a recent valuation) and office equipment to £9,706.14, Christmas equipment to £42,529.73 and outdoor equipment to £105,866.88 (as based on 2024/25 acquisitions) – F18/25.** It was also agreed to continue with the contract disputes and debt recovery cover add on options in 2025/26.
12. Review of Section 106 money available – the latest list was noted although it was outlined that information was still being sought from the arts team at CW&C in relation to remaining arts monies. It was agreed that the allocations for ‘play’ and ‘open space’ remaining at Lower Robin Hood Lane could be used for projects identified in the park masterplan.
13. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to renew the Council’s annual insurance policy with Community First for Helsby Community Centre at a cost of £570.46 (payment made in accordance with Financial Regulation 5.14) – F19/25.** The Clerk agreed to explore whether this policy could be tied in with the council’s own insurance policy.
14. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to continue with the Council’s current investment programme as below – F20/25:**
 - Unity Instant Access - £18,556.45 at 31st March 2025. Interest at a variable rate of 2.27% gross AER, paid quarterly in March, June, September and December.
 - Nationwide Business Instant Saver Account - £80,000 at 31st March 2025. Interest at a variable rate of 2.00% AER/gross, paid annually in March.
 - CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund - £80,000 at 31st March 2025. Interest at a variable rate of 4.57% AEY/gross, paid monthly.

15. Annual Audit and Annual Return of the Council's accounts for Financial Year ending 31st March 2025.

- 15.1. Internal Audit – the scope of the work of the internal auditor was reviewed. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the re-appointment of JDH Business Services to carry out the council's 2024/25 internal audit – F21/25.** It was also **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to add the following line to the Powers and Responsibilities of the Finance Committee in the Standing Orders: 'To annually review the scope of the work of the internal auditor and to minute the review and appointment' – F22/25.**
- 15.2. External Audit – it was noted that this would be carried out by PKF Littlejohn. The Clerk outlined that the default submission deadline was 1st July.

16. Review of Bank Direct Debits.

The payments as below were noted:

- Scottish Power (monthly DD for electricity charge Helsby Community Centre)
- Water Plus (monthly DD for wastewater charge Helsby Community Centre)
- BT (monthly DD for rental, phone and broadband)
- NEST (monthly DD employee/employer pension contribution)
- Information Commissioner's Officer (annual DD for registration fee)
- Grenke Leasing (quarterly DD for office photocopier)
- Lloyds Bank (monthly DD: Unity Corporate Multipay Card)

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to continue paying regular payments and utilities by Direct Debit as an efficient and acceptable method of payment – F23/25.**

17. Date of next meeting – Monday 16th June 2025.

The meeting closed at 8.24pm

Chair's signature Dated.....