

FOUR MARKS PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
Held on Wednesday 26th January 2022 commencing at 6.30pm
This meeting was held at the Benians Pavilion, Uplands Lane, Four Marks**

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Cllr Janet Foster (Chairman), Cllrs John Davis, Reg Pullen, Mike Sanders, and Anne Tomlinson
IN ATTENDANCE:	Sarah Goudie (Executive Officer - EO) 1 member of the public
APOLOGIES:	None

22.01 FGP APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

22.02 FGP OPEN SESSION/PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chairman welcomed Evan Parry from Scribe, who had been invited to give the Committee members a presentation on the Scribe financial software via Zoom. There were several questions, which are detailed as Appendix 1, for reference.

The Chairman advised, following the recent HCC liaison meeting, that HCC were proposing to spend £202,000 from the £1,450m allocated area s106 monies, to install 3 super gullies and 2 soakaways by the school and establish new ditches along Alton Lane and Kitwood Lane, taking away the silt, to address the flooding issue at Five Lanes end. It was agreed that the Committee would recommend to Full Council the approval for the release of these funds.

There were no further issues raised and the meeting commenced at 7.00pm. **Standing Orders were applied.**

22.03 FGP DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

22.04 FGP MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on Wednesday 27th October 2021 were proposed as accurate by Cllr Davis, which was seconded by Cllr Tomlinson and were duly signed by the Chairman.

The EO reported on the following ongoing matters arising:

- A response was now awaited with reference to training sessions from EHDC. A training schedule will be drawn up and added to the March meeting Agenda in preparation for the new Council year.
- Still awaiting notification from EHDC on the re-opening of applications for S106 Developers Contributions, it was suggested contacting a District Councillor for an update.
- The Benians Committee meeting was taking place the following evening, where the Licence to Occupy would be discussed for 2022/2023, and hopefully the 2021/2022 Licence would be returned to the Council.
- Operation London Bridge:
 - Instructions for compiling a shadow page now received, but not actioned.
 - Chairman to check condolence book for suitability
 - The Chairman was liaising with the vicar at COGS and suggested that the Church steps would be the most suitable place to announce the proclamation of the King, and that the Church lobby area be the best location for the condolence book.
 - Black ribbons, black ties and portrait all now purchased.
- Nothing further had been heard with reference to UAS club.

22.05 FGP FINANCIAL SOFTWARE

Following the presentation earlier in the open session the Councillors discussed the proposals and considered the options moving forward.

Cllr Tomlinson, having noted that the main reason for looking for a different software provider, to provide a 'month on month' comparison, could see no benefit in changing provider, or justification of the increased cost to change. However, Cllr Davis noting the number of Councils already using Scribe with 40 additional Councils from April, that they appear to be responsive to Council's requests and are already looking at changes to provide a similar report from quarter 3, thought the move would be prudent. Cllr Pullen remained concerned over the Council's accounting procedure, however both Cllrs Tomlinson and Davis reassured that the accounting system is correct and fully compliant with legislation within the sector, and that it does take two or three years to understand the Council finances and budgeting procedure. Cllr Pullen acknowledged this but offered to produce an Excel spreadsheet during the next financial year using the downloaded reports, however it was suggested that, as no other Councils had previously requested this type of report, was there a need to produce one.

The EO, although more than happy with the existing software, did raise concerns that the software was only on the desktop, as the subscription only covers one user, and could not be accessed or used remotely, which is a hindrance if having to work from home with only the laptop. There is the option of increasing the subscription to include up to 5 users, however, the EO expressed concern over how the information, when updated, would be transferred to the additional devices. Other advantages of the new software noted were that the information is in real time. As the accounts software is in the 'cloud' it is updated as the information is changed. This also means that Councillors can have restricted access to the accounts at any time. The software also offers additional bolt on software, such as Cemetery management, and can easily be adapted if the Council's turnover increases or the usage changes.

The meeting was closed briefly at 7.35pm, to allow the member of public to speak and confirm that the current software even with additional users would be hub not cloud based, and therefore would need to be manually updated on each device.

The Committee then gave due consideration to the above benefits and agreed that there was less risk, better access, with good support and willingness to work with their clients. Whilst additional functionality was not yet available, this reduction in risk of moving to a 'cloud based' software with associated support was considered good mitigation at an additional cost of c.£250 per year, and therefore would be recommending to Full Council to change to the Scribe software from the new financial year in April.

22.06 FGP TO AGREE ANY ACTION REQUIRED ON THE YEAR TO DATE AGAINST BUDGET

22.06.1 Movement from General Reserve

The EO circulated the latest financial report, as at 31st January 2022, showing the net receipts over payments balance as £21,256, with two months expenditure left in the financial year, the EO was confident that the year end would be on budget. It was therefore agreed that there was no need to transfer funds from the general reserves.

22.06.2 Transfer of Funds from Deposit to Current Account

The EO advised the Council that the current account balance as at 26th January 2022 is £37,640.79 with £4,122.05 leaving the account on 31st January, anticipating the end of month balance would be £33,518.74. Therefore, it was agreed that there would be no need to transfer any funds from the deposit account in this financial year.

The EO confirmed that the reconciliation check would be taking place next week.

22.07 FGP PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

The first draft of the proposed newsletter had been circulated prior to the meeting, and there had been several initial comments, which had been noted and implemented. There were several additional suggestions which would be incorporated where appropriate and an updated draft would be circulated for further comment.

Printing quotations are being sought in conjunction with the Queens Platinum Jubilee leaflet with the plan to distribute both at the same time. The distribution area was discussed, and it was agreed that the leaflet would only go houses in the Four Marks parish, but it was suggested that the houses in the Shrave should be included, despite being in Chawton parish and the EO was asked to contact the Chawton clerk for numbers. A member of the public offered to distribute the newsletter which would save the Council distribution costs, which was acknowledged.

22.08 POLICY DOCUMENTS

22.08.1 Data Protection Policy

There were some standardisation changes suggested and agreed, and the amended document would be presented to Full Council for adoption at the next meeting.

22.08.2 Business Continuity Plan

There were some suggested amendments, and some that needed further information and consideration, an amended document would be presented for approval at the next Finance & General Purposes meeting for further consideration.

In addition, the EO advised that the Risk Assessment and Fixed Asset Schedule which was on the policy management schedule to have been considered at the March meeting, would be too late for approval under this financial year, this being an audit requirement. The EO suggested that these documents were added to the July policy approval meeting in future, which was agreed. To ensure the Council are compliant this year, the EO would circulate both documents for comments prior to circulation for approval at the next Full Council meeting.

22.09 ADDITIONAL CHEQUE SIGNATORY

The Chairman asked the Committee to consider an additional cheque signatory, although currently there are four in place, there had already been an occasion when three signatories were unavoidably away at the same time.

It was agreed to add Cllr Pullen to the list of signatories and the EO would process the application.

22.10 FGP NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 30th March 2022, 6.30pm, Benians Pavilion.

22.11 FGP The Chairman closed the meeting at 20.30pm.

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Chairman

APPENDIX 1 Scribe Presentation

Questions and Answers

- Q. Cllr Tomlinson asked why software for parish and town councils needed to be different to usual accounting?
A. Parish and Town Councils have to complete an Annual Return (AGAR), and the software is tailored to summarise the information required for the return.
- Q. Is it possible to download the reports in any format?
A. Yes, PDF, Word and Excel
- Q. How many Town/Parish Council clients do you have?
A. 800 with another 40 joining in April?
- Q. How long have you been in existence?
A. 30 Years
- Q. How often do your fees increase, are the fees quoted likely to increase?
A. The fees quoted are the fees to be introduced from April 2022, there are likely to be future small incremental increases every two years or so.
- Q. Is there a way of producing a 'month on month' actual v budget report?
A. Not yet, but they are working on a new report with some of the larger town councils which should provide a report in this format. This should be available in Quarter 3 of the next financial year.

Further information following the presentation:

- The software will have the ability to make tax digital
- The software removes any human error completing the AGAR and includes bank reconciliation and explanation of variances forms
- No charge for additional users
- Unlimited support

Scribe are a private entity, with insured data security. The Council will own their own data, Scribe just host it. The Council will have access at any time. They have a legal obligation to have insurance in place. If anything happens with the company, there is one year's storage held which can be downloaded and exported.

- Q. Are the subscriptions banded by size of Council?
A. Yes, we are in the 25-250k band
- Q. What happens if the server crashes?
A. The server is hosted by Amazon Web Service UK. Scribe pay for the hard storage of all the data, which is backed up daily, so the worst case scenario would be the loss of one day's work.