



Helsby Parish Council

Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held at 7.00pm in the Parish Office at Helsby Community Sports Club on Monday 8th January 2024

Present:

Cllr. Terry O'Neill (Chair)
Cllr. Sarah Temple
Cllr. Rob Nicklin
Cllr. Chris Ellams

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 Cllr. Branigan.
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 25th September 2023 were accepted as accurate and were duly signed by the Chair – F1/24.**
5. Clerk's Report. The following points were noted:
 - Item 6 (CIL monies) – members noted an e-mail from CW&C which defined the types of infrastructure that CIL monies could be spent on;
 - Item 7 (investment funds) – the Clerk outlined that several councils had invested funds with CCLA. It was agreed that a report on CCLA would be presented at a future meeting along with a draft investment policy for consideration;
 - Item 8 (new bank account) - Natwest to confirm change of mandate approval before clerk could arrange to open new account with Unity; and
 - Item 14 (devolution of services) – the Clerk outlined that some county and borough councils offered grants to town and parish councils to devolve services relating mainly to weed killing, verge cutting and sign maintenance. However, concerns had been expressed by clerks nationally that taking on such services without financial support from a principal authority could be classed as double taxation.
6. The Council's investment programme as at 2nd January 2024 was noted as follows:
 - Co-Operative Bank – Business Select Account - £77,477.89 as at 2nd January 2024;
 - Monmouthshire Building Society – Corporate Bonus 90 (Annual) £79,228.69 as at 2nd January 2024;

- Nat West Business Reserve £76,088.25 as at 2nd January 2024;
- Nat West Current Account £26,042.67 as at 2nd January 2024; and
- Nationwide Business Savings Instant Access Account £40,000.00 as at 2nd January 2024.

7. Budget calculations for the ensuing fiscal year 2024/25 totalling £76,237 were noted from the following committees:

	<u>2023/24</u>	<u>2024/25</u>
Environment	£33,100	£30,797^a
Parks, Cemetery & Allotments	£40,405	£45,440^b

The following was also noted:

^a Small decrease in budget – no funds allocated to Village Awards (Code 224), £2,000 reduction in Street Furniture (Code 230) and Average Speed Camera funds moved into Earmarked Reserves (Code 226). £4,500 increase in Christmas Illuminations (Code 228) to cover some new displays in 2024/25.

^b Slight increase in budget mainly due to anticipated costs in inflation across most cost codes (5%) and an increase in budget for future burial provision (Code 502) as now saving 100% rather than 50% of cemetery income.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the proposed Environment and PCA Committee budgets for 2024/25 totalling £76,237 – F2/24.**

8. The proposed Finance Committee budget calculations for 2024/25 were noted (as shown in Appendix 1) as follows:

	<u>2023/24</u>	<u>2024/25</u>
Finance	£71,788	£74,883

The footnotes in Appendix 1 were also noted.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the proposed Finance Committee budget for 2024/25 totalling £74,883 as set out in Appendix 1 – F3/24.**

9. Review of grants/earmarked reserves. It was noted that the Environment Committee were seeking to add £45,000 to earmarked reserves for the average speed camera pilot project (£5,000 from Code 226 and £40,000 from general reserves). It was also noted that the PCA Committee were seeking to create a new £20,000 earmarked reserve fund for a park masterplan project consisting of remaining reserves from the cemetery garage roof project (£5,791.67) along with £14,208.33 taken from general reserves. Should these amounts be approved, the clerk outlined that the level of earmarked reserves and grants would stand at £171,615 by the end of March 2024 with around £69,000 remaining in general reserves. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the ‘Grants and Earmarked Reserves for Identified Projects’ table as set out in Appendix 2 to include a new £20,000 fund for a park masterplan project and an additional £45,000 for average speed cameras (with a correction to the Queens Jubilee usage in 2022/23 from £9,384 to £9,393) – F4/24.**

10. Precept for 2024/25. Members worked through the 'Budget Report: Justification of Precept Request 2024/25'. Various scenarios were considered in relation to the precept amount, including the two examples as set out by CW&C. The clerk outlined that there would be a shortfall of around £8,000 should the precept amount stay the same as in 2023/24 (£104,844). It was noted that increasing the Band D precept charge from £49.32 to £52.00 and setting a precept amount of £109,040 would reduce this shortfall to £3,865. It was outlined that this would be a 4% increase on the actual precept amount. Members agreed that the shortfall could be covered using general reserves.

It was therefore **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the receipts budget totalling £147,255 for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 3, and to recommend to Full Council to issue a precept request to Cheshire West and Chester Council for £109,040 based on the above budget calculations for 2024-25 along with the 'Budget Report: Justification of Precept Request 2024/25' – F5/24.**

11. Members noted a report on the clerk's incorrect pension deductions since 2020/21 and details in relation to the repayment of tax to HMRC. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council for the Council rather than the Clerk to cover the interest for late payments to HMRC totalling £47.35 – F6/24.** If agreed, the Clerk agreed to contact the Council's payroll company to make any necessary adjustments.

12. It was **RESOLVED to approve the adjustments to the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 asset registers showing a deduction in any incorrect VAT inclusions (amended total amounts of £196,646.59, £196,052.09 and £222,942.64 respectively) – F7/24.** It was noted that any relevant adjustments would be recorded on the AGAR papers for 2023/24.

13. Members considered the following new policies:

Credit Management - It was RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the Credit Management Policy with one amendment: to include reference to debt recovery under paragraph 1.1 – F8/24.

Reserves - It was RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the Reserves Policy with several amendments: under paragraph 3.3 to add 'and/or standing committees with delegated powers' to the final sentence; under paragraph 4.2 to amend the minimum level of general reserves from 3 to 6 months of predicted expenditure and to include an actual figure; and to include a table with details of both general and earmarked reserves as an appendix – F9/24. The Clerk agreed to specify whether a specific committee or Full Council had control of each earmarked reserve within the reserves table.

Internal Control – it was agreed to postpone adopting this policy until the new Unity account had been opened as the policy had been drafted to reflect the Council's new banking procedures. In the meantime, the following amendments were proposed:

- **Section 3 (The Council) – delete 'and do' from (i); and add the need for periodic checks to the Council's internal financial and accounting procedures by councillors. Cllr. O'Neill agreed to provide a checklist template;**

- Appendix 1 (Online Banking Procedure) – add ‘if not already classed as a Class B user’ after ‘Members of the Council’s Finance Committee shall be Class C users’; and add the internal auditor as a Class C user; and
- Appendix 1 (Payments by Debit Card) – delete second paragraph in relation to pre-paid debit cards.

Community Grants – It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the Community Grant Policy with the following amendments: reword paragraph 1.5 and Section 4 in relation to making grants in exceptional circumstances including the deletion of the scoring methodology – F10/24.**

Anti-Fraud and Corruption - It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to approve the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy with the following amendments: change Criminal Records Bureau to Disclosure and Barring Service in paragraph 3.2; change ‘management’ to ‘the Council’ in paragraph 3.4; delete reference to the whistleblowing procedure in paragraph 5.2; and delete ‘arrangements are in place to enable...’ in paragraph 5.3 – F11/24.**

14. Urgent matters – no matters were raised.

15. Date of next meeting – Monday 8th April 2024 (to be confirmed).

The meeting closed at 8.59pm

Chair’s signature Dated.....

APPENDIX 1

Finance Committee budget for the year 2023/24 and for the forthcoming fiscal year 2024/25 (expenditure)

Budget Code	Description	Budget 2023/24 £	Spend to Date £	Predicted To 31/03/24 £	Business Plan Budget 2024/25 £	Recom. Budget 2024/25 £
232	CC – Light and heat	5000	2459.02	3967.02	0	5000
233	CC – Repairs and renewals	3000	0	0	3000	3000
234	CC – Water charges	400	287.68	431.52	0	450
235	CC – Insurances	500	527.70	527.70	510	510
237	CC – Sundries	100	44.38	44.38	100	100
239	Hire charges (Meetings)	250	160.00	240	250	250
241	Salaries	31419	25265.21	36865.21	34153	38000
238	Clerk's pension	2247	1804.51	2692.71	2660	2800
242	Council office	700	1662.86	1662.86	735	735
243	Admin subscriptions	3000	3663.38	3783.38	3150	3800
244	Admin car allowance	360	169.60	263.20	378	378
245	Admin stationery	100	62.81	102.81	100	100
246	Postage and phone	1000	608.88	908.88	1000	1000
247	Councillors' expenses	100	12.60	27.60	100	100
249	Admin sundries	250	118.80	198.80	250	250
250	Remembrance Day	250	318.54	318.54	250	300
251	External audit fees	420	420.00	420.00	420	420
248	Internal audit fees	350	337.50	337.50	365	365
252	Insurance premium	1300	1468.65	1468.65	1365	1500
253	Legal and professional	1000	905.00	905.00	1000	1000
254	Donations – s.137	200	0	0	0	0
256	Equipment	1000	515.77	675.77	1000	1000
258	Sundries	3000	1025.00	1025.00	3000	3000
261	Community Projects	8000	0	8049.92	5000	5000
262	Chairman's allowance	225	225.00	225.00	250	225
267	Newsletter	3000	3022.00	4027.00	3150	4500
270	Neighbourhood Plan	0	0	0	0	0
275	Parish Election Expenses	3517	591.00	591.00	0	0
240	Cllr/Employee training	600	695.00	755.00	600	600
265	H&S/PPE	500	0	0	500	500
TOTAL		71,788	46370.89	70514.45	63,286	74,883

Footnotes:

- i) Code 232 – shared area electricity bills remain under query with CW&C. No invoicing from CW&C so far this year. Unable to transfer electricity/water accounts directly to HCA due to wording in lease agreement. HPC to continue

- paying bills in 2024/25 and reclaiming back from HCA (see also Receipts Code 106). Includes £1,000 for any shared area payments.
- ii) Code 233 - CW&C has carried out maintenance work over several years (asbestos and fire remediation, roller shutter door, fire doors) but HPC has yet to be billed. Costs therefore unknown. £3,000 retained in budget but could be substantially more.
 - iii) Code 234 – see Code 232 above.
 - iv) Code 237 - Costs are for webhosting fee which was reclaimed.
 - v) Code 238 – Clerk’s hours increased from 30 to 33 from 1st March 2023 and Council increased pension contribution from 3% to 10% in December 2022. Maximum contribution may increase if Clerk’s hours increase to 37 hours.
 - vi) Code 239 - Full Council meetings held at Methodist Church at a cost of £10 per hour. Parish office can be used for all other meetings. Possibility that Full Council meetings may move to parish office in 2024/25.
 - vii) Code 240 – one off payment in 2023/24 for Microsoft 365 training for both Clerk and councillors.
 - viii) Code 241 – Clerk’s hours increased from 30 to 33 from 1st March 2023. Includes NJC inflationary pay increase of £1,925 for 2023/24 (backdated to April 2023). Clerk currently on SCP29 (£37,336 FTE). Performance increase of 1 increment in 2024/25 (SCP30 £38,223 FTE) plus NJC inflationary pay increase. Clerk currently works 33 hours but may increase further to 37 hours in 2024/25.
 - ix) Code 242 – Invoice for 2023/24 covers 2 years. Annual utility costs for HCSC office set as £635 per annum (index linked) but may be higher due to rising energy costs.
 - x) Code 252 – 3-year long term undertaking taken out for PC insurance which expires in May 2024. Will need to seek quotes early in 2024.
 - xi) Code 253 – Some lease/land registry issues need to be resolved.
 - xii) Code 261 – Fund covers annual Grant Shows.
 - xiii) Code 267 – Newsletter costs in 2024/25 – printing x 4 editions (around £3,060), design x 4 editions (£960) and chair’s report x 1 edition (£487). May need to consider a replacement editor during the year (could be covered through general reserves if necessary)
 - xiv) Code 275 – Elections unlikely to be held until May 2027.

Budget for 2023/24	=	£71,788
Predicted Spend	=	£70,514
Business Plan Budget 2024/25	=	£63,286
 Recommended Budget	 =	 £74,883

APPENDIX 2: Grants and Earmarked Reserves for Identified Projects (responsibility for expenditure shown in brackets)

EARMARKED RESERVES	c/f 2021-22 £	Provided 2022-23 £	Usage 2022-23 £	Balance 31.3.23 £	Provided 2023-24 £	Planned Usage 2023-24 (£)	Expected Balance 31.3.24 (£)
Future burial provision (PCA)	27,514	3,633	0	31,147	4,105	0	35,252
Play area improvements/upgrades (PCA)	24,000	8,000	0	32,000	9,000	0	41,000
Public consultation (Full)	2,000	0	770	1,230	0	1,230 ^d	0
Sherwood Court projects (Env)	10,000	0	0	10,000	0	10,000	0
Queens Platinum Jubilee (Env)	10,000	0	9,393	607	0	607 ^d	0
Cemetery extension area design project (PCA)	0	5,000	0	5,000	0	0	5,000
Cemetery garage roof (PCA)	0	7,500	0	7,500	0	7,500 ^a	0
Wheelchair accessible roundabout (PCA)	0	5,000	0	5,000	0	0	5,000
Helsby Community Centre maintenance (Full)	0	0	0	0	10,000	0	10,000
Average speed cameras (Full)	0	0	0	0	50,000 ^b	0	50,000
Parks masterplan (PCA)	0	0	0	0	20,000	0	20,000
Total	73,514	29,133	10,163	92,484	93,105	19,337	166,252

GRANTS	c/f 2021-22 £	Provided 2022-23 £	Usage 2022-23 £	Balance 31.3.23 £	Provided 2023-24 £	Planned Usage 2023-24 (£)	Expected Balance 31.3.24 (£)
CIL payments (Full)	0	5,363	0	5,363 ^c	0	0	5,363
CW&C Neighbourhood Pride Grant	0	3,925	0	3,925	0	3,925	0
CW&C Covid HPC	888	0	775	113	0	113 ^d	0
Arts Council - Helsby Art of Here	1,582	1,100	2,682	0	0	0	0
CW&C Members Budget table tennis table	500	0	500	0	0	0	0
S106 reclaim – Helsby Art of Here	0	5,331	5,331	0	0	0	0
S106 reclaim – parish field lighting	0	11,590	11,590	0	2,318	2,318	0
Protos grant for CCTV	0	4,000	4,000	0	0	0	0
CW&C Members Budget defibrillator	0	1,500	1,500	0	0	0	0
Total	2,970	32,809	26,378	9,401	2,318	6,356	5,363

^a £1,708 spent on garage roof. £5,792 remaining reserves from cemetery garage roof project to be moved to new parks masterplan project along with £14,208 from general reserves.

^b Average speed cameras - £40,000 to be taken from general reserves, £5000 already in reserves and £5,000 moved from Budget Code 226

^c CIL payments balance incorrectly recorded on earmarked reserves balance as at 31.3.23. Should have been £5,363 and not £2,682

^d The following 'leftover' funds will be used to supplement the 2024 Grant Show - Public consultation (£1,230), Queens Jubilee (£607), CW&C Covid HPC (£113)

APPENDIX 3

Finance Committee budget for the year 2023/24 and for the forthcoming fiscal year 2024/25 (receipts)

Budget Code	Description	Budget 2023/24 £	Receipts to Date £	Predicted To 31/03/24 £	Business Plan Budget 2024/25 £	Recom. Budget 2024/25 £
101	Precept	104,844	104,844	104,844	104,844	109,040
102	Interest on accounts	1,000	1,696.47	2,866.47	1,000	3,000
103	Rent on 'Eccies' etc	13,054	15,090.33	19,485	13,315	13,315
104	Grants	0	2,318	2,318	0	0
105	Insurance claims	0	0	0	0	0
106	Helsby Community Centre	4,000	2,435.71	4,043.71	3,000	5,000
107	Cemetery fees	7,000	6,790	9,190	7,000	7,000
108	Allotment rents	1,800	1,629	1,659	1,800	1,800
109	Sundries	100	0	0	100	100
110	VAT recovery	9,000	11,602.61	11,602.61	9,000	8,000
TOTAL		140,798	146,406.12	156,008.79	140,059	147,255

Footnotes:

- i) Code 102 – interest received in 2022/23 was £1,055.41, expected to be higher this year as interest rates have continued to increase. For example, interest rates on savings with the Natwest Bank are currently at 1.46%. Last year the rate was considerably lower at 0.80%.
- ii) Code 103 – Late payment of invoice for 2022/23.
- iii) Code 104 - received S106 reclaim payments for parish field lighting project (£2,318). This should have been included in last year's code. No planned grant income as yet for 2024/25.
- iv) Code 107 - actual cemetery income in 2021/22 was £4,105 and in 2022/23 £7,900. Income for this year is currently at £6,790.
- v) Code 110 - VAT recovery in 2023/24 includes parish field lighting and CCTV projects. Likely to be lower in 2024/25 (VAT total is currently at £4,656).
- vi) Codes 111 (CW&C Council Tax Grant) and 112 (Ho Ho Helsby) – removed.

Budget for Receipts for 2023/24 = **£140,798**
 Predicted Receipts = **£156,009**
 Recommended Budget for 2024/25 = **£147,255**