



Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

**Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held at
Mortimer Methodist Church Hall on Thursday the 7th of December
at 8.15pm.**

Present:

Councillors:

Cllr. D. Morsley (Chairman), Cllr. H. Geary, Cllr. S. Hill, Cllr. A. Noonan, Cllr. A. Marsden, Cllr. A. Richardson.

Officers:

Mrs. L. Hannawin.

Public/Press:

There were no members of the public and no members of the press in attendance.

Part I

23/051 Public Questions (for agenda items only)

None.

23/052 To receive any apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs. G. Bridgman and D. Butler.

23/053 To receive any declarations of interest

To receive from Members at this point or at any point during the meeting, in respect of any items included on the agenda, disclosure of any interests in line with the Parish Council's Code of Conduct and gifts and hospitality in line with Government legislation.

None.

23/054 Minutes of Last Meeting

To resolve to approve the Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee Meeting of the 2nd of November 2023.

RESOLVED unanimously that these minutes be approved for signature by the Chairman as a true and correct record of the meeting.

23/055 Clerk's Report

To receive a report from the Parish Clerk outlining actions taken following the meeting held on the 2nd of November and other updates.

1. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
West Berkshire Council (WBC) have provided an estimate for the outstanding CIL payments due from MOR006. The information has been used to inform the 2024/25 budget.
2. Pillbox Lease.
As discussed at November's meeting, the declaration in relation to the new lease was signed and returned. A copy of the lease has now been received and further clarification is being sought regarding some queries prior to it being signed.

It was noted that the estimate for the outstanding CIL Payments due from MOR006 does not include increased amounts due for the properties amended to resolve the issues with the high wall.

The report was received.

23/056 Items to be taken into private session

To determine which items, if any, of the agenda should be taken with the public excluded.

Cllr. Morsley proposed that agenda items 23/058 2. Budget 2024/25 be taken in Part II.
Seconded by Cllr. Hill.

Resolved unanimously.

23/057 Working Party Reports

1. Communications

Cllr. Morley confirmed the notes from the latest Working Party meeting have been circulated and article/authors have been identified for the next newsletter.

2. Mortimer to Burghfield Cycleway and Footpath

Cllr Morsley gave an update and confirmed the amended planning application has been submitted. No official confirmation has been received from Highways regarding the design and installation of the crossing, but Highways have informed the planning officer of their intention to undertake this aspect of the cycleway. It appears permission will be required from the Secretary of State for commons work but this will only be for small sections where tarmac is needed for Highways work. The application is straightforward but can only be submitted once the detailed plans are known.

3. The Street Footway

Nothing to report.

23/058 Items for Consideration and Resolution

1. Personnel

To receive an update on:

a. The revised staff contracts.

The Clerks and Custodian's contracts have been signed. The contract for the new Assistant to the Clerk will be amended to include a probationary period.

b. The recruitment of the Assistant to the Clerk.

Nine applications have been received to date. The closing date is the 8th of December and, following shortlisting, interviews will be held. An additional Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting may be held on the 21st of December to agree the recommended candidate.

2. Budget 2024/25

To receive, consider and approve the draft budget for circulation to Council members for comment.

Minuted at Part II.

3. Emergency Plan

To consider the requirements for an emergency plan and agree further actions.

Further to a discussion it was agreed for Cllrs. Richardson (Co-ordinator), Geary, Morsley, and potentially Noonan and Wells to consider this further and report to February's Council meeting.

4. West Berkshire Council's (WBC) "Balancing the Council's Budget - Consultation 2024/25"

To receive details of the consultation and agree further actions.

The ten parts of the consultation were considered. Whilst the Committee were not in favour of any cuts the responses were agreed as follows:

- Willows Edge Care Home: No comment.
- Contributions to Community Transport: Unless parish and town councils can pick up the difference, these cuts will increase social isolation.
- Parks, open spaces, and verge maintenance: It is unknown what the terms used mean as they do not appear on the WBC interactive map. It is not possible, therefore, to make an informed comment as to whether they affect Stratfield Mortimer.
- Gully emptying and bridge maintenance: Back in August, WBC informed SMPC that routine gully maintenance along The Street and additional work needed, from Mortimer Hall driveway to Pitfield Lane, would be being done. None of this work has happened to date so further cuts in such work will have very severe effects and negative impact on the road surfaces.
- Litter bins and dog waste bins: The Committee fundamentally disagrees with reducing the emptying of 18 bins in the village down to 5 as planned.
- Household waste recycling centres: Instead of reducing opening times by 2 hours a day, the Committee agreed it would have a greater financial impact if the centres were closed for one weekday every week and do not think it would be a significant problem for residents.
- Weed spraying: The Committee were in favour of this change.

- Adult Social Care care-homes: The Committee do not know the impact this will have.
- Adult Social Care transport: No comment.
- Parking fees and charges: No comment.

5. Policies

a. To receive the amended Investment Strategy for 2024/25.

It was noted that Investment Strategy had been amended to incorporate the changes previously agreed.

b. To receive the updated Financial Regulations for recommendation to full Council.

The Financial Regulations were received.

c. To receive the draft Procurement Terms for recommendation to full Council.

The Procurement Terms were received.

d. To receive the updated Data Protection Privacy Notice for recommendation to full Council.

It was noted the Data Protection Privacy Notice had been moved into the new template and updated to include the use of photographs and CCTV and other minor changes.

e. To approve the following policies which have been updated with the removal of the introductory text of:

“Adopted by the Finance and General Purposes Committee of Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council on 5 September 2023.

Note: This Policy should be used in conjunction with the Council’s Dignity at Work, Grievance, and Performance Management Policies, and the Councillors’ Code of Conduct.”

- I. Dignity at Work
- II. Disciplinary
- III. Equal Opportunities
- IV. Grievance
- V. Performance Management
- VI. Sickness and Absence.

It was noted that the agenda item for e. was incorrect in that the introductory wording is not the same as stated for all the policies listed. However, the premise i.e. removing the relevant introductory text is the same for all.

Cllr. Morsley proposed the Financial Regulations, Procurement Terms and Data Protection Privacy Notice be recommended to full Council and that the staff policies be approved accordingly.

Seconded by Cllr. Marsden.

Approved unanimously.

23/059 Finance

1. Accounts to the 31st of October 2023

To receive and approve the Income and Expenditure Report to the 31st of October and the Balance Sheet as at that date.

Proposed by Cllr. Morsley.

Seconded by Cllr. Marsden.

The reports were received and **approved** unanimously.

2. The Public Sector Deposit Fund

To note the credit rating of TPSDF is AAmmf as per Fitch Ratings Ltd.

The credit rating was noted as being AAmmf as at 6th of February 2023.

23/060 Items for information only

Minor Matters

- Garth Hall: Cllr. Hill confirmed two applications had been submitted to the Royal British Legion.
- Cemetery Bridge: Cllr. Noonan reported that TGMS Ltd have submitted information ready for the next Fairground and Cemetery meeting. Details regarding the cremation memorial wall are being refined.
- Christmas Tree: Cllr. Hill reported that Father Paul had thanked the Council for organising the tree.

23/061 Communications

To identify items for communicating

None.

23/062 Future Agenda Items

To identify future agenda items

Emergency Plan.

23/063 Exclusion of Press and Public

To pass a resolution under Section 1, Paragraph 2 of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting at Part II, items identified at 23/056 on the agenda due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

Proposed by Cllr. Morsley.

Seconded by Cllr. Bridgman.

Resolved unanimously.

Part II

23/058 Items for Consideration and Resolution

2. Budget 2024/25

To receive, consider and approve the draft budget for circulation to Council members for comment.

The draft budget and report were received and discussed.

Cllr. Morsley proposed the draft budget be circulated to Council members for comment.
Seconded by Cllr. Hill.
Approved unanimously.

23/064 Items for information only

Minor Matters

- Cllr. Morsley raised a query regarding a Community Grant application. This will be further discussed at January's Council meeting when all applications will be considered.

The meeting closed at 21:44.

Date of next meeting: 2nd of January 2024.