

Elsenham Parish Council

Finance Committee Meeting held on Wednesday 28 August 2024 at 1.00pm in The Memorial Hall, Elsenham

MINUTES

Present:

Mr B Burlton (Chair, BB), Mrs F Lambert (FL), Dr G Mott (GM), Mrs S Waite (SW)
and Mrs L Johnson (Parish Clerk LJ).

Members of the public: 0

1. Apologies for absence.

None.

2. Declarations of Interest.

None

3. Approval of minutes from the meeting held on 24 June 2024

The minutes were signed by BB as a true and accurate record.

4. Internal Auditor's Report 2023/2024.

The bold print is taken from the report.

4) Risk Management

Recommendation: whilst the Council has considered specific control procedures for payments by bank transfer or other electronic means and a process and mitigating action to protect the Council against payment of invoices which may show fraudulent bank account details, Council, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, needs to undertake a formal review of its internal controls and provide formal evidence that it has taken steps to identify, assess and record the control mechanisms in place to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to safeguard and protect public finances. Proper practices states that this should be done annually. Council might wish to adopt an Internal Control Policy to cover these areas.

Financial Regulations ref 4.8, 5.2, 5.6, 5.7, 6.3 to 6.10. Section 7.

It was agreed that the requirements were very demanding and in some places are self-contradictory. The Finance Committee have no concerns on the current control procedures.

5) Budgetary controls

Recommendation: Council should note guidance as issued under the Practitioners Guide March 2024 which states that an authority needs to adopt, as a general reserve policy, the level of reserves that are appropriate to their size, situation, risks and plan their budget so as to ensure that the adopted level is maintained. Council should have in place a General Reserve Policy and have

reviewed the level and purpose of any set earmarked reserves with an explanation provided to address departure from an adopted level.

The recommendation level is 3 to 12 months net general revenue.
GM proposed EPC keep 3 months net general revenue.
FL seconded; the vote was carried unanimously.

6) Payroll controls

Comment: Council might wish to be aware that every three years an employer must put certain staff back into a pension scheme. This is known as ‘re-enrolment’. This is an employer’s legal duty, and Councils must let the Pension Regulator know when they have completed the task by completing and submitting a re-declaration of compliance.

LJ last submitted a re-declaration of compliance in June 2020. LJ to update.

9) Bank reconciliation

Recommendation: council should note that the year-end bank balance of the sums held by the parish council should equal the balance of all sums held by the council as of 31st March.

The only element not full reconciled was the NS&I account, with a relatively minor amount of £18,000.

LJ to obtain an up-to-date statement by sending a letter with all authorised signatures on asking for a statement. Another letter will be required in March 2025 asking for a statement up to the 31 March 2025.

10) Asset control

Council should ensure that its investment as held within the NS&I portfolio does not fall under the long term investment category.

LJ to find out what the withdrawal notice period is.

12) External Audit

Comment: council might wish to ensure that there is an accurate description within the minutes clarifying that in accordance with Regulation 20 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, full council considered the annual audit letter and/or certificate.

LJ to ensure the external audit letter is minuted for the year ending 31 March 2024 and future years.

13) Year-end procedures

Comment: Council should note that, to positively demonstrate that it has provided for the exercise of elector’s rights and that the dates set are in accordance with the period specified within the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, it is advised to not only publish the dates set but to also record in the minutes the agreed dates. Evidence of the proper provision for the exercise of the public rights is usually by means of publication of the supplied form on the Council’s website and a minute reference at the meeting at which the RFO

confirms the dates set. Council is advised to ensure that the Notice detailing the period for the exercise of public rights remains on the website until the next internal audit to allow for verification of the dates set.

LJ had complied with this for the year ending 31 March 2024. LJ to ensure that it is complied for the year ending 31 March 2025.

14) Transparency Code

Comment: councils that fall between both thresholds are expected to follow the Local Transparency Code 2015 and the council might wish, as a commitment to openness and transparency, to consider maintaining and monitoring the council's website so that it is updated regularly with the above information.

LJ to check on EPC's website.

15) General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

Recommendation: under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, public authorities must provide access to information held which must be published proactively. The Freedom of Information Act requires every public authority to have a publication scheme and to publish information covered by the scheme. Council is advised to adopt such a scheme. Further information can be found here: [ICO Model Publication Scheme](#).

EPC has a document 'What information is available from the Council' which covers The Freedom of Information Act, request for information, fees and contact details. EPC also has a 'Data Protection Policy' and a 'Data Privacy Notice'.
LJ to check that this information is on EPC's website.

17) Additional comments

Whilst the minutes show apologies given, there is no formal record to show that the council has approved the apologies submitted.

LJ to add 'approval of apologies' to the minutes.

Evidence was seen on the District Council's website of the Register of Interests for all current serving councillors. There is currently no link from the council's own website to that of the districts.

LJ to ask Sharon Jones to create a link.

The Council might wish to consider adoption of a formal Health and Safety Policy and a Complaints Policy.

LJ to compile a Health and Safety Policy and a Complaints Policy.

Use of secure email

Comment: Council should be aware of the importance of ensuring that it uses a secure e-mail system thereby identifying that it has local government status and demonstrating authenticity when building trust and credibility with the public. It might wish to note guidance as contained within proper practices which

recommends that a secure email system with a GOV.UK domain name be used to support council's official email accounts for officers and councillors.

BB said NALC had recommended that all councils use a gov.uk email address. Therefore, the Finance Committee would need a good reason not to recommend it to Full Council.

FL proposed that the Finance Committee recommend to Full Council that all councillors plus the clerk change to a gov.uk email address.

BB seconded the vote was carried unanimously.

6. The new Financial Regulations.

The new model Financial Regulation for all Local Councils template was produced by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in April 2024. Bold text indicates legal requirements, which a council cannot change.

The new model is to replace the existing financial regulation policy.

BB had completed the new model. Members went through the document, discussing the entries that BB had inserted, all were agreed up to number 7, Electronic Payments.

Number 7 differs from EPC's current practice. As number 7 was not in bold print, it can be suspended. It was agreed to continue with EPC's system. Most payments are, regular payments, under £500 or have been authorized by the corresponding committee. If an invoice is received that is not in one of these categories LJ will seek authorization by Full Council. BB is to write some instruction to insert into the new Financial Regulations.

It was hoped to agree the rest of the document at the next Finance Committee meeting, ready to recommend to Full Council on 7 October that it is adopted.

7. AOB.

None.

The next meeting is to be held on Monday 30 September 2024 .

The meeting finished at 3.15pm.