CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council Finance Committee held on Tuesday 18th June 2024 via Zoom

Present: Councillors A Doig, V Ashfield, J Ashby, D Freeman and R Hanson.
Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Councillor A Doig was **elected** as Chair of the Parish Council Finance Committee. Proposed by Councillor V Ashfield and seconded by Councillor D Freeman.

There were no other nominations.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Councillor V Ashfield was **elected** as Vice-Chair of the Parish Council Finance Committee. Proposed by Councillor D Freeman and seconded by Councillor J Ashby.

There were no other nominations.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillor L Brown and H Weston. The Committee accepted Councillor R Hanson as a substitute for Councillor H Weston for the purposes of this meeting.

4. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillor A Doig declared an interest in the grant applications from Durham Agency Against Crime and the Merryoaks Community Hall and took no part in the discussion or vote on these applications.

5. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 17TH JANUARY 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th January 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

7. REPORT ON THE CURRENT FINANCIAL POSITION OF THE COUNCIL FOLLOWING FINANCIAL YEAR 2023/24

The Clerk provided the following report on the current financial position of the Council:

After a total expenditure of £283,545 during the financial year 2023-24, the Parish Council ended the financial year with just over £65,000 remaining in its account. This includes the Parish Council's reserves which now stand at £45,000 – an appropriate level of reserves based on national guidance.

In addition to which, our VAT rebate from expenditure from financial year 2023-24 totals £9,526.48. This will be repaid to us this financial year and effectively means that we ended FY 23-24 with approximately £74,000 remaining in the account.

We based our budgeting process for this current financial year on an assumption that we would be left with £45,000 in reserves only. Effectively leaving a £29,274 surplus. Bear in mind that the contingency fund which sits alongside our reserves is also replenished from our precept this current year.

This surplus was in part because of a number of budgets not being fully allocated and the success the Parish Council had in securing outside finance for things such as events, landlord appeal, community emergency plan, etc.

I refer Members to the Detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading circulated with the Agenda, you'll see that only 44.9% of the training budget was allocated in 2023-24 leaving £1,792. 46% of the budget for the licensed economy report was allocated and this left £2,700. £2,383 was also left over in our contingencies fund. I do not propose that the Council carries these budgets over to this financial year.

Significantly £5,036 was remaining in the Greening of the Parish budget as the Market Place project has yet to come to fruition and there is a desire by the Environment Committee to carry this budget over for delivery this financial year.

The remaining fund achieved through the Green Move Out appeal of £4,363 is also expected to carry over to this financial year, with additional waste collections booked for Sundays as part of the Green Move Out operation.

In addition, £5,000 has been drawn from underspends from FY 2023-24 to fund the allocation of funds to the Fringe, as agreed at the Full Council meeting in May 2024.

Furthermore, Members will note that – as usual – there is a greater demand on our grants budget this year than the allocation of £10,000.

We have just completed a successful Internal Audit with our auditor Gordon Fletcher once again commending the Parish Council for its excellent governance and sound financial management.

In January 2024, Full Council agreed an ambitious programme of work for this financial year, with expenditure thereof totalling £262,400 with a contingency fund – in addition to reserves - of £15,000 for unforeseen expenditure during the year as well as an election reserve of £5,000. We have agreed to build up this election reserve over time in the event of a by-election.

Our total income to date is £282,780. That figure includes:

- £282,429.66 from the precept.
- £6 refund for groceries from ASDA for an event.
- £345 from this year's landlord appeal launched last week.

The Parish Council's expenditure to date (excluding VAT) totals £62,169.46 and spends are all within allocated budget headings.

One budget which is giving me some cause for concern is the allocation for additional policing. We estimated that we would finish the previous financial year with approximately £15,000 remaining in this budget which we proposed to add to the reduced allocation (down from £50,000) of £30,000 for FY 2024-25.

As Members will have seen, that remaining balance was not achieved and in fact the spend from 2023-24 went over by £674. This occurred because – in mid-February – towards the end of the financial year a significant bill of £16,917 was received from the police.

To date, we have incurred £10,303.59 in expenditure from the Operation Lentil budget allocated for FY 24-25, leaving just £19,696. I am engaging with Dave Clarke on this to ensure that this allocation is kept within budget and we map where there will be need for provision at peak times over the course of this year.

We clearly have a decision to make on the allocation of underspends from FY 2023-24 today.

End of report

In light of the report provided by the Clerk and the underspends from 2023/24, the Committee unanimously **agreed** to propose to Full Council the following reallocation of underspend funds:

Total remaining fund from 23-24 (post VAT rebate).	**£29,274**
Allocations for FY 24-25	
Greening the parish area - carried over	£5,036
Green Move Out – carried over	£4,363
Durham Fringe	£5,000
Grants	£2,400
Operation Lentil (ringfenced contingency)	£12,475

8. REPORT ON GRANT APPLICATIONS 2024-25

The Clerk reminded Members that, at the January meeting of the Full Parish Council 2024, Councillors formally agreed to allocate £10,000 of the budget for 2024/25 towards grants for local and voluntary organisations.

The Clerk advised that the grant funding window opened on 1st April 2024 and this has been advertised on social media, the Parish Council's website, through the local press and through direct e-mails. The Clerk reminded Members that organisations were asked to apply by 2nd June 2024 in order that the Finance Committee may consider this at its meeting in June and make a recommendation to Full Council in June.

Once approved, all grant payments will be made at the end of June 2024. The Clerk advised that Members have been provided with the full details of all applications.

Members considered the merits of each application and unanimously **agreed** to allocate funding as follows:

Organisation	Project	Amount requested
Call Yourself An Artist CIC	Collecting stories and holding public consultations on mural artwork for Durham City based on the heritage of the ice rink. This funding will enable us to gather vital evidence so we can seek further funding from larger pots. We will also do some small scale public mural works to gather interest. Our work is to gather communities together and help them represent their histories, tackling isolation and documenting our shared culture.	£2,000
Alington House	Alington House exists to serve the community of Durham City and surrounding areas with activities which enhance confidence and combats loneliness. We promote this through volunteering and we act as a hub for organisations which deals with rape counselling, victims of abuse, homelessness and rehabilitation of offenders. Seeking funding for Chair Exercise for the over 50's (Tutor Fees)	£3,000
Durham Hospital Radio	Whilst the radio station is manned by a team of dedicated unpaid volunteers it still incurs operating costs of over £3000 pa in order to provide the service. The grant would be used towards those running costs.	£1,000
Friends of St. Margarets	Purchase of equipment to allow us to run 'bioblitz' sessions, i.e. public participation in surveying and identifying plants and animals of the churchyard throughout summer months, to help us make a record of the wildlife of the churchyard as a baseline from which to make habitat improvements, and to provide a fun way to raise public awareness of the importance of this green city space.	£200

Merryoaks Community Hall	To enhance the privacy of our function rooms, which feature windows and glass doors overlooking a public park, we seek funding to install window coverings on as many of these windows and doors as possible. This enhancement is crucial to ensure that health and mental health consultations, support groups focusing on delicate topics, exercise classes addressing specific health concerns (such as pelvic floor classes), and other activities requiring confidentiality can take place without the risk of being observed by passersby. By ensuring a private and secure environment, participants will feel more comfortable and safer, thereby encouraging greater engagement and attendance. Furthermore, the ability to exclude light will significantly improve the visibility of presentations shown on our audio-visual equipment, thereby enhancing the learning and participation experience for all attendees. These improvements will not only meet the immediate needs of our community but also allow us to expand the range of activities we can offer at the centre in alignment with our charitable objectives, ultimately fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment.	£2,000

St. Leonards Boat club	The club faces significant challenges that make its continued success and improvement difficult. Not least of these is the fact that the club's boathouse is not fit for purpose. We have no changing or basic hygiene facilities at the boathouse and that limits its use to no more than a boat storage facility. We have none of the necessary utilities with no running water or power supply. This restricts our ability to maximise the use of the boathouse and means that the club is significantly disadvantaged in terms of how we can develop this asset and attract new members. We have negotiated with a neighbouring building to link into their water and electricity supplies. This will involve considerable work by approved contractors to install the necessary connections and dig the lengthy trench to allow the cables and pipes to be laid underground. All approvals have been sought and estimated costs are in place. Once connected to mains services we will be able to provide a safer and healthier working environment for our rowers and volunteers. The project should take two or three weeks to complete and cost approximately £7000. This is a chance to make a real difference allowing the boathouse to be used to its full potential.	£2,000

St Oswalds Brownies	In the last two years we have successfully ran two Unit away days from our usual meeting place, so that our girls get to experience Guiding but in a less familiar environment. Our first was a camp in a day, which saw us complete camp-based activities with a camp themed menu which girls enjoyed thoroughly. This year we ran Around the World in a day, where girls hopped around continents completing activities and crafts from around the world and had a global feast. We hope to run a similar event in Feb 2025. Whilst we are unsure of the theme this will take our girls have suggested animals, safari, and magic. It has become a popular and somewhat requested activity by our older girls and the feedback from parents after we run the events has always been positive and girls are always exhausted and happy when they leave at the end of the day. Due to the rising cost of living and the fact that our national subscriptions in Feb 2024 were over £1044 and we already know the individual rate will be increasing we are unlikely to have funds available to run it as we want to minimise the cost imposed on the families involved and whilst we have remaining funds from this year's Unit day we have ear-marked them for a Christmas Cinema Treat to minimise the cost for families ahead of Christmas.	£200

Durham City Street Friends (DAAC)	Street Friends are a group of volunteers based in Durham City Centre working collaboratively with Durham Constabulary, Durham County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Durham. In conjunction with the SWAN Hub and Op Lentil Officers a group of volunteers patrol the city on a Wednesday (during university term time), Friday and Saturday evenings offering practical support such as directing them to the SWAN Hub, basic first aid, handing out water to calling loved ones and helping report a crime. The volunteers have radios connecting them to the CCTV control room, as well as security staff at other town centre venues. It aims to increase safety and the feeling of safety, particularly among women and girls in the town centre. The purpose of the grant is to support the ongoing service in the city centre which requires the purchase of more equipment which is used out on patrol to help those in need along with more uniform as the volunteer cohort increases. The vision is for Street Friends to be the main project in the city for those members of the public who wish to donate to help those in need in Durham City Centre rather than giving out cash. The purpose of this is so to prevent giving cash directly to rough sleepers for example who have been witnessed to purchase alcohol and illegal substances which has had a negative impact on anti-social behaviour within the local parish area.	£5,000

Durham Sixth Form Centre	There are limited opportunities in Durham city for local people to access subsidised and accessible creative art classes, local people need a place to go that is welcoming, warm and open to people with a range of experience. Building on the successes of our 2022 and 2023 programmes, we have class planned up until the summer holidays but are seeking funding for the Autumn/Winter programme 2024. We have now successfully delivered a series of over 40 community classes to local people largely recruited through local charities and organisations. Our community classes are open to all and deliberately promoted these via charities in the first instance. This includes local art and mental health charity RT Projects, local branches of national organisations such as Age UK and Mind UK. We also have established a list of wider organisations and charities. Our classes were promoted to local community groups and church groups with flyers delivered to key locations or organisations. Our local community needs places and activities like this to meet new people, support their wellbeing and spend time with artists and creatives in a safe accessible space. The class is open to all and is hosted in an accessible space. We have found that many of our participants have disabilities such as hearing impairments, heart conditions and limited mobility. The people we work with face several increased challenges post pandemic and in a cost-of-living crisis. The most significant of which is being isolated. We find that many of your participants come not solely for the art activities, but to meet people and talk to others. Many of our participants live alone and have made friends already through our classes.	£2,000

	Total	**£17,400**

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 11th September 2024 at 11am
Wednesday 15th January 2025 at 11am

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting.

Signed,

Chair of the Parish Council Finance Committee
(11th September 2024)