



Clerk – Mrs Pauline Bowdery
Assistant Clerk – Mrs Melanie Fooks
Tel – 01634 861237

E-mail – Clerk@boxleyparishcouncil.org.uk

Beechen Hall
Wildfell Close
Walderslade
Chatham
Kent ME5 9RU

To all members of the Council, public and press

3 November 2014

There will be a meeting of the **Finance and General Purposes Committee** on **Tuesday 11 November 2014** at the Parish Office, Beechen Hall, Wildfell Close, Walderslade commencing at 7.30 p.m.

1. Apologies and non-attendance.

To receive apologies from members unable to attend.

2. Declaration of Interests, Dispensations, Predetermination or Lobbying.

Members are required to declare any interests, dispensations, predetermination or lobbying on items on this agenda. Members are reminded that changes to the Register of Interests should be notified to the Clerk.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 15 July 2014.

To consider the minutes of the meeting (previously circulated) and if in order to sign as a true record.

4. Matters Arising From the Minutes.

4.1 Minute 2669/5.2 overspend on code 132. Clerk's report: The wrong code had been entered on a payment and this has been rectified. There is now £5.68 underspend.

4.2 Minute 2670/6.7 complaints form available to complete on website. This work is still outstanding.

Adjournment to enable members of the public to address the meeting.

5. Financial report.

5.1 Reconciliation of accounts report as at 3 November 2014. Details will follow.

5.2 Income/Expenditure report as at 3 November 2014. Details will follow.

5.3 Investment Bonds, see item 5.1, more details will follow (page 3).

5.4 Cooperative Bank see report (pages 3)

6. 2015/2016 Draft Budget.

To consider the draft budget. Details will follow.

7. Repeal of s150(5) of the Local Government Act 1972.

To consider the impact of the repeal of the two signatory rule for payments by parish councils see report (pages 3-4).

8. Policies and procedures reviews.

8.1 Parish Councillor Audit form see report (pages 5-8).

8.2 Open and Accountable Local Government see report (pages 9-13).

8.3 Media Management see report (page 13).

8.4 Decisions by Officers (pages 13-15)

8.5 Grants policy & procedure (review) see report (page 15-16).

8.6 Reserves policy see report (page 16).

8.7 Review subscription list (review) (with budget).

9. Personnel matters.

TOIL, leave and leave/sickness cover.

10. **KALC Finance Conference 17 October.**

To receive the Clerk's report (page 16-17)

11 **Grant Requests.**

Heart of Kent Hospice – Minibus Appeal (pages 17-19).

12 **Matters for Information.**

None.

13 **Date of Next Meeting.**

Tuesday 13 January 2015 at Beechen Hall, Wildfell Close, Walderslade commencing at 7.30 p.m. Items for the agenda must be with the parish office no later than 5 January.

Pauline Bowdery

Pauline Bowdery
Clerk to the Council.

Issues to be returned to agenda as they develop.

Note to all councillors: you are welcome to attend meetings of committees of which you are not a member but only committee members may vote.

Legislation allows for meetings to be recorded by anyone attending. Persons intending to record or who have concerns about being recorded should please speak to the Clerk.

Supporting agenda papers for the Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee on Tuesday 11 November 2014.

The Chairman will assume that these have been read prior to the meeting.

Councillors wishing to suggest changes to any policy document or procedure in this agenda should notify the office, in writing, at least three working days in advance of the meeting. This will allow details to be circulated at the meeting (or in advance if particularly contentious).

Item 5.3 Investment Bonds. *Purpose of item: information and action.*

Maturity dates and amounts for the investment bonds are identified under item 5.1. To ratify the Clerk's decision, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice chair that the 3 month Lloyds Bank deposit be reinvested for a further 3 3 months. (See item 5.1 for the amounts and maturity dates of all the investment bonds).

Item 5.4 Cooperative Bank. *Purpose of item: information and action.*

The amount in the Cooperative Bank, funded from the Barclays account, is deliberately kept below £20,000, enough to meet short-term needs. The Clerk is asking that this ceiling be raised for the following reasons:

- As Barclays do not allow funds to be moved by BACS a cheque has to be signed by 2 councillors and then paid into the Cooperative Bank. It takes 5 working days for funds to reach the parish council's account. A missed week in identifying the need to transfer a sum will cause the parish council to have insufficient funds available.
- The parish council's finances are not simple and keeping track of expected needs as against available funds is time consuming. If we keep to the £20,000 ceiling and to be sure of having sufficient funds available the Clerk fears she will have to undertake more monitoring work which will result in other work not being completed.

Two options are available to members:

1. Raise the ceiling to £30,000 to give some leeway;
2. Invoke 6.5 (a) of the Financial Regulations

"The RFO shall have delegated authority to authorise the payment of items only in the following circumstances:

- (a) Fund transfers within the council's own bank accounts banking arrangements up to the sum of £15,000, provided that a list of such transfers shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of the council or F&GP Committee".

Item 7 Repeal of s150(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and review of current financial procedures. *Purpose of report: Information and guidance on what the F&GP Committee wishes to do.*

7. Repeal of s150(5) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Clerks briefing note.

Parish Councils are no longer legally required to have two signatories for cheques or payment authorisations. **However** parish councils dropping this requirement must, **prior to so doing**, put in place "*proper arrangements to ensure the proper conduct of their financial affairs, and to monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of those arrangements in practice*" and "*they must maintain an adequate system of internal audit of their accounting records and control systems*"¹. Parish Councils have to prove, by an End of Year Return and by meeting the requirements outlined in "The Governance and Accountability for Local Councils: A Practitioners' Guide

¹ Taken from The Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice - Local Government (2010)

(England) March 2014² that they have these systems and are operating in a way to limit financial risk.

The repeal of the two signatory rule allows parish councils to take up internet banking as long as they have a robust system in place to monitor and approve expenditure.

Any changes to the current banking arrangements have to be agreed by the full Parish Council. If the F&GP Committee were to decide to recommend changes to the current procedure of obtaining two signatories for each payment, it needs to have a clear audit trail including risk assessments to show that it has replaced the current system with a similarly robust system.

It is not suggested that the whole two signatures procedure be cancelled. What, as RFO, I am suggesting is that there is a review of all the procedures, risks and opportunities that this repeal offers and other financial procedures concerning income and expenditure (see list below). The current system of two councillors sitting and wading, often just before a meeting or being called into the office to do so, through two cheque books, two sets of paperwork and signing in 3 or 4 places is not only time consuming but open to councillors getting tired or pressurised and making mistakes.

It is recognised that this is a complicated issue and it is suggested that a small working party could undertake the first stages of reviewing and considering risks and opportunities and then make a presentation to the F&GP Committee which will then deal with the principles.

I am aware that a radical change to the way the parish council operates may be unsettling for some councillors so I thought the following example of an opportunity would be helpful.

Internet Banking.

Increasingly the parish council's creditors prefer to operate their bank accounts via the internet, which the parish council allows. BPC itself makes payments by Standing Orders, Direct Debits and BACS (but not the internet). The parish council has systems set up to allow and monitor this and has been happily operating this way for some time now.

A presentation was given at a recent KALC Finance Conference on Internet Banking and I spoke to East Farleigh PC, Speldhurst PC and another Clerk (I forgot to write her council down). They all use Unity Trust Bank as its internet banking system allows the Clerk/RFO to manage the account but it takes two councillors logging in (from their homes at a time convenient to them) to authorise the payments. Various issues would have to be resolved: how many councillors would be authorised to access the account to approve payment; how would invoices be checked against payments etc. A small working group can take time to consider such a system, investigate possible banks, talk to the chairman at East Farleigh if they want and then make a pros and cons report to the F&GP Committee.

Other financial issues related to income and expenditure which I would like investigated are:

- Pre-loaded debit card so that the Clerk or Assistant Clerk don't have to use their personal credit cards.
- Investigate the possibility of credit or debit cards being accepted for payment for Beechen Hall hire.
- Need for two signatories for cheque or authorisation letters.

The F&GP Committee could have sight of all the background working papers so that they can see the risk assessments etc. but they would rely on their colleagues in the working party to do the investigations.

Note – changes would have to be made to the Financial Regulations but this is purely an administrative issue.

² Available in electronic format from the parish office or KALC website.

Item 8.1 BOXLEY PARISH COUNCIL PARISH COUNCILLOR AUDIT. *Purpose of item: decision.*

8.1 Parish Councillor Audit form

Clerk’s note: At the last F&GP Committee it was agreed that the Clerk would try to simplify the current form to make it easier for a councillor to undertake a check but without compromising the requirement for a robust internal check on the parish council’s accounts and procedures. A parish councillor undertakes an audit so that they can report back to their colleagues that a random check has or has not identified issues which need addressing. The RFO has to guide members but must not lead them so it is important that members are reminded that they can undertake a spot check at any time.

The following is a redraft of the old form and a couple of checks have been amalgamated as it was suggested that very similar checks were being undertaken in different parts of the old form. For example check number 15 was previously two checks with similar aims (to check that income was banked and the paying in books were up to date and contained an audit trail).

BOXLEY PARISH COUNCIL PARISH COUNCILLOR AUDIT.

CONDUCTED BY on

The purpose of this audit is not only to check that the necessary authorisation and reporting takes place but also to check that the procedures are such that there is a clear link between all the pieces of paper and authorisations, an audit trail.

12 month checklist

The following only require 1 check in the past 12 months. The previous Parish Councillor Audit document will show what has been previously checked and if you are satisfied the date is within 12 months you can mark the section as NA (not applicable).

	12 MONTH CHECK REQUIRED	EVIDENCE SEEN AND/OR COMMENT	Initials
1.	Are annual estimates of revenue and expenditure produced?	Minute No.	
2.	Is insurance annually reviewed by full council or Finance Committee and adjusted as appropriate? <i>(Office note: generally in May)</i>	Minute No	
3.	Are the end of year accounts formally adopted by the Parish Council? <i>(Office note: generally in June)</i>	Minute No	
4.	Is the external audit report on the End of Year accounts seen by all members of the Council?	Minute No	
5.	Are salaries and wages reviewed at least annually?	Minute No	
6.	Are the policies and procedures of Parish Council readily accessible and easily	Checked	

	consulted?		
7.	Is interest rate on long-term deposits/bank accounts reviewed at least annually? (<i>Office note: generally in March</i>)	Minute No	
8.	Are the Parish Council and its committees actively involved in setting the annual budget?	Checked	
9.	Are Beechen Hall hire fees reviewed at least annually? (<i>Office note: generally at Estates in April</i>)	Minute No	

General

	CHECK REQUIRED	EVIDENCE SEEN AND/OR COMMENT	Initials
10	Is income and expenditure, including salaries, against estimates reported regularly to F&GP Committee?	Minute No	
11	Is VAT being reclaimed on a regular basis? (<i>Office note: generally quarterly</i>)	Latest claim dated	
12	Is the tendering system for the purchase of goods and services conducted in accordance with Standing Orders?	Tenders for the purchase of seen and procedure checked against requirements of Standing Orders.	
13	Are Councillors regularly reminded that they must not sign blank cheques? (<i>generally every 4 months on Parish Council agenda</i>)	Minute No	
14	Are all bank accounts regularly reconciled? (<i>Finance Committee meetings</i>)	Minute No	
15	Are bank paying-in books kept up to date, do they contain an audit trail to identify the source of funds and is income banked as expeditiously as possible?	HSBC checked Coop checked Barclay checked	
16	Is income and expenditure promptly recorded and are the accounts generally well-maintained so for example someone can link a payment to an invoice and also see that the payment has been reported to the parish council.	Checked	

17	Are requests to cash personal cheques, contrary to Standing Orders, refused?	<i>No evidence of the cashing of personal cheques found</i>	
18	Have the minimum standards checks (for insurance purposes) been carried out?	Checked	
19	Are all cash and cheques books kept secure at all times? (Ask for an explanation of how this requirement is met. Any recommendations for improvement should be made below).	<i>Checked</i>	

Petty cash

20	Does total of cash in hand plus disbursements made equal the amount received into the account? *should equal £150	Petty cash is set at £150.	
		<i>Cash in box: £</i> <i>Disbursements made since start of month:</i> <i> £ _____</i> <i>* Total: £ _____</i>	

Cheques/Direct Debits, Income etc.

The following table is to check that the system works effectively and is generally well maintained. Random checks are to be made and the councillor chooses how many, but a minimum of three from the general and three from the hall account are requested. A councillor should be able to enter the system at any point within the table below and then move forward and backward along the audit trail, for example a councillor may decide to pick a date in the hall diary and then follow a particular booking. Please note that:

- The hall has casual and regular hires and you may wish to ensure that at least one of each is checked.
- Some hall hires do not go ahead but there is still an audit trail of a provisional booking. This means that not all of the table can be completed but it is important to be able to trace the original document.
- N/A – not applicable may be entered in the table as some columns will not always be applicable to what you are checking.
- **As long as the first column is completed a tick in the relevant box is sufficient to show the relevant checks have been undertaken.**

Identifying ref e.g.	Cheque counterfoil are the following present?	Invoice	Other	Hall hire are the following present, completed or undertaken?
----------------------	--	----------------	--------------	--

cheque number, DD number, hire form number	2 Cllr initials	Date	Amount	Audit trail to invoice or order?	Can you connect the invoice to the payment etc.?	Scribe report signed by 2 Cllrs	PC minute Number records the income or payment	Unique security ticket number	Raffle book	Prompt issue of invoice.

Details of any Additional Checks Conducted and/or Further Comments

Possible areas for checks include over-ordering of stationary or other supplies.

I confirm that, having been offered the opportunity to conduct any further checks that I wished, I have completed an internal audit of the accounts and accounting systems of Boxley Parish Council as summarised above. I am satisfied that, in my opinion, all procedures are properly being followed (except, if applicable, as noted above).

Signed:

Date:

Item 8.2 Open and Accountable Local Government. *Purpose of report: Information and consideration.*

8.2 Open and Accountable Local Government

Clerk's note. This was report was first submitted to the September meeting but minor changes have since been made to improve it. Where changes or additions to council procedure/policy are made any current leaflets produced by the parish council will be updated.

Legislation. Open and Accountable Local Government A guide for the press and public on attending and reporting meetings of local government.

Clerks note: As previously reported to the parish council there have been changes to legislation which requires amongst other things that the recording of meetings by members of the public be allowed. Guidance is also given on access to decisions by officers of the council. A copy can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/press-freedom-boosted-by-new-right-to-report>.

Summary of relevant parts of guide.

The Guide is structured as follows:

- **Part 1** focuses on the use of various communication tools for reporting the proceedings of any meeting of a local government body which is open to the public. *Clerk's note: this section is dealt with below.*
- Parts 2, 4 & 5 have been investigated by the Clerk and notes on why no action is required is recorded beside the relevant points.*
- **Part 2** explains how the public can access meetings of a council's executive, its committees and sub-committees, and records of executive decisions taken by individual members or officers. *Note. No action as the parish council does not have an executive layer of decision making.*
 - **Part 3** explains how the public can access all other meetings of a local government body, other than parish and town councils, and records of certain other decisions taken by officers. *Note: Not applicable.*
 - **Part 4** explains how the public can access meetings of parish and town councils, parish meetings and the Council of the Isles of Scilly, and records of certain decisions taken by those councils' officers. *Note: No action as the parish council already complies (and produces an information leaflet about the public's right to attend meetings) or in the case of decision making it does not now need to produce a report on any expenditure undertaken by the Clerk outside of a meeting, which has now also been identified as any expenditure above £500 per single item.*
 - **Part 5** focuses on other rights that the public has to access information. *Note. No action as the parish council already complies by for example publishing minutes on the website. It also produces an information leaflet about Freedom of Information.*

Clerk's note: The legislation requires an amendment to Standing Orders to allow recording and this has already been completed by the parish council. It also strongly suggests that councils have a policy on recording meetings and also be proactive in getting the public to meetings and aware of decisions etc.

The following are drafts for members' consideration:

DRAFT Policy

Recording of Meetings of the Parish Council and its Committees.

All meetings are open to the public except in a few circumstances where, due to the sensitive nature of the issue³, the meeting or part of the meeting is closed to the press or public. The reason for excluding the public and press from such a private meeting will be included in the agenda or explained at the meeting.

In the interests of being open and accountable and to confirm to Government legislation filming, audio-recording, tweeting and blogging⁴ of the meeting is allowed as long as it does not disrupt the meeting⁵.

While no prior permission is required to carry out this activity, it is advisable and a matter of courtesy that any person wishing to film/video or audio-record a public meeting should let the Clerk know prior to the start of the meeting. To protect children, the vulnerable and other members of the public who actively object to being filmed, the Chairman will at the start of the meeting ask members of the public whether anyone present intends to film any part of the meeting and, if so, whether anyone objects to being filmed. Should objections be raised, arrangements will be made for the person recording to sit at the front and they will be asked to respect peoples' wishes not to be filmed.

No recording equipment or valuables will be allowed to remain in the room where a private meeting is being held.

The Parish Council will attempt to provide "reasonable facilities" to facilitate reporting. This should include space to view and hear the meeting, seats, and ideally a desk⁶.

Reporting of meetings via social media of any kind, including blogging, tweeting, Facebook and YouTube, is permitted but doing so during a discussion before a decision is reached is to be discouraged. Verbal commentary is not allowed during a meeting as this would be disruptive to the good order of the meeting.

Persons recording proceedings shall be asked not to edit the film or recording in any way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings, or infringe on the core values of the Council. They should also be reminded that the law of the land applies – including the law of defamation and the law on public order offences. Freedom of speech within the law should also be exercised with personal and social responsibility – showing respect and tolerance towards the views of others.

Any person engaging in disruptive behaviour may be asked to leave the meeting or be otherwise excluded. Disruptive behaviour can be any action or activity which disrupts the conduct of a meeting or impedes other members of the public being able to see, hear or film etc. the proceedings. Examples include:

- moving to areas outside the areas designated for the public without the consent of the Chairman,
- excessive noise in recording or setting up or re-siting equipment during the debate/discussion,

³ For example discussions on tenders or staff issues.

⁴ Recording of meetings is allowed by anyone present including councillors.

⁵ Standing Orders will be used to exclude any person disrupting the meeting.

⁶ The parish council uses venues that are outside of its control but will endeavour where and when possible, to provide wifi access.

- intrusive lighting and use of flash photography; and
- asking for people to repeat statements for the purposes of recording.

A copy of the advisory leaflet on recording meetings summarising the above shall be made available to anyone planning to record a meeting.

Draft Advisory Leaflet.

The following is a draft explanation to go on the website and in a leaflet etc based on the Government's document:

Recording of Parish Council Meetings

All meetings are open to the public except in limited defined circumstances where the national rules require or allow the meeting or part of the meeting to be closed to the public. The reason for excluding the public and press, usually because of discussions on tenders or staff issues, will be included in the agenda or explained at the meeting.

Can I film or audio-record the meeting?

Yes, councils and other local government bodies are required to allow any member of the public to take photographs, film/video or audio-record the proceedings, and report on all public meetings. Whilst no prior permission is required to carry out this activity if you are going to do so then please let the Clerk know prior to the start of the meeting so that any necessary arrangements can be made for example you may need to place a laptop on a table. As a matter of courtesy, to protect children, the vulnerable and other members of the public who actively object to being filmed, the Chairman would like to advise members of the public that recording is taking place and should they raise objections arrangements will be made for you to sit in front of them and you will be asked to respect their wishes not to be filmed.

Can I film or audio-record a private meeting?

The rules on the use of communication methods, such as filming and audio-recording, only require local government bodies to allow the reporting of meetings open to the public not private meetings. You will not be allowed to leave recording equipment in the room where a private meeting is being held, nor when the parish council goes into closed session.

Can I tweet or blog a council or local government body meeting?

Yes, the new rules allow for reporting of meetings via social media of any kind. Therefore bloggers, tweeters, and for example, Facebook, YouTube users and individuals with their own website, may report meetings.

The Council asks that those recording proceedings do not edit the film or recording in any way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings, or infringe on the core values of the Council.

What sort of facilities will the parish council provide?

Clerk's note: the government are putting pressure on councils to go electronic and this issue needs further investigation and the actual document from the Government states "You should ask your council for details of the facilities they are providing for reporting."

Councils or local government bodies are required to provide "reasonable facilities" to facilitate reporting. This should include space to view and hear the meeting, seats, and ideally a desk. Councils and local government bodies should use their common sense to

determine the range of reasonable facilities they can actively provide to support the free press in all its forms.

To facilitate public scrutiny and public reporting, local authorities should not conduct their meetings in foreign languages.

The council is required to provide “reasonable facilities” to facilitate reporting. This should include space to view and hear the meeting, seats, and ideally a desk.

If I am a councillor, can I tweet or blog during council meetings?

The national rules do not prevent councillors from tweeting and blogging at meetings, so they should be able to do so provided it is not disruptive and does not detract from the proper conduct of the meeting. Whilst councillors are expected to comply with their body’s code of conduct, this should not prevent councillors from tweeting or blogging when appropriate.

Are there any limits to what I can say in a tweet or video I publish?

The law of the land applies – including the law of defamation and the law on public order offences. Freedom of speech within the law should also be exercised with personal and social responsibility – showing respect and tolerance towards the views of others.

Will I be able to provide commentary during the meeting?

Any person can provide written commentary during a meeting, as well as verbal commentary outside or after the meeting. The new rules do not permit verbal commentary to be provided during a meeting as this would be disruptive to the good order of the meeting. You are also asked not to tweet or blog a discussion while it is in progress, that is before a decision is reached.

Can I be asked to leave a meeting because I’m taking photographs, filming or audio-recording the meeting or using social media?

Generally, people attending public meetings must be readily able to film, audio-record, take photographs or use social media. Councils and other local government bodies must take steps to ensure this is the case. However, those undertaking these activities must not act in a disruptive manner, which could result in being excluded from the meeting.

No. You are entitled to film, audio-record, take photographs or use social media as set out above but must not act in a disruptive manner. If you do so it could result in you being excluded from the meeting.

What is disruptive behaviour?

Essentially, this could be any action or activity which disrupts the conduct of a meeting or impedes other members of the public being able to see, hear or record the proceedings. Examples can include:

- moving to areas outside the areas designated for the public without the consent of the Chairman,
- excessive noise in recording or setting up or re-siting equipment during the debate/discussion,
- intrusive lighting and use of flash photography; and
- asking for people to repeat statements for the purposes of recording.

You may be excluded from a meeting if you act in a disruptive manner.

Can I leave recording equipment in a public meeting room and record without being present?

There is no legal prohibition but in the interests of security of your equipment the parish council asks that if you leave the room at any point you take your valuables with you. Also under the national rules, you may be required to stop any such recording if at any stage the meeting becomes a private meeting.

Item 8.3 Media management strategy. *Purpose of report: Information and consideration.*

8.3 Media management strategy.

Media management strategy.

Information supplied to people wishing to record a meeting includes the following statement "The Council asks that those recording proceedings do not edit the film or recording in any way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings, or infringe on the core values of the Council. You are asked not to tweet or blog a discussion until the decision is made".

It Is not the policy of the council to stifle legitimate and relevant discussions or personal views however in the event of abusive, false or vicious statements being posted on-line or published the Chairman of the Parish Council or Clerk may ,where they considered it necessary, take the following action:

- Issue a press release (see separate policy regarding this).
- Contact the social media provider (google, facebook, yahoo, twitter etc.) via their report abuse facility to ask for deletion of relevant material.
- Delete any such comments from the parish council's own facebook page.

Representatives of the parish council are advised against entering into any debate or arguments on social media on issues that are directly related to parish council decisions or policy. If they consider that a post is abusive etc. then they should report the matter to the parish office.

If action has been taken parish councillors will be notified as soon as possible.

Item 8.4 PART 4 Decisions by officer. *Purpose of report: Information and consideration.*

8.4 PART 4 Decisions by officers.

*Clerk's note: The Government launched the **Open and Accountable Local Government** legislation with a guide to the new requirements. However on 15 October new advice came from NALC/KALC stating that the guide was inaccurate and that a review of the actual legislation (which had not been circulated with the Government guide) had identified that the changes would now only affect parishes with an income or expenditure of over £6.5 million rather than a £200,000 threshold. The Government has now changed its advice to a Best Practice recommendation that the guidelines be followed for any parish council having income or expenditure over the £25,000 or £200,000 per annum thresholds.*

The following report had already been prepared by the Clerk as Boxley Parish Council had expenditure of over £200,000. The report is presented to members so that they are informed and can discuss whether they may wish to consider changes to current policy and procedure.

The legislation also covers decisions taken by officers and the following is an extract from the Government information.

Summary of Government Guidelines,

Decisions by officers

Can an officer take decisions on matters that are the parish or town council's responsibility?

Yes, where the parish or town council's rules allow this.

Are there means of knowing about decisions made by individuals?

Yes. The rules require the recording of certain decisions taken by officers acting under powers delegated to them by a parish or town council, its committees or sub-committees or a joint committee. The written record should include:

- The decision taken and the date the decision was taken;
- the reason/s for the decision;
- any alternative options considered and rejected; and
- any other background documents.

You can see these records of decisions made by officers along with any other background papers because they have to be available for inspection at the council's offices and on its website as soon as is reasonably practicable after the decisions are made.

The relevant parish or town council must retain and make the written record of their officers' decisions available for inspection for six years beginning from the date of the meeting. The background papers should also be available for inspection for four years beginning from the date of the meeting. These may be kept in electronic format.

Can I see all decisions made by my parish or town council's officers?

No. The requirement to record applies to all decisions taken by officers whilst acting under a specific express authorisation, and only to three categories of decision taken whilst acting under a general authorisation. These categories cover decisions to "grant a permission or licence"; that "affect the rights of an individual" (i.e. to change an individual's legal rights); or to "award a contract or incur expenditure which, in either case, materially affects that relevant local government body's financial position".

Officers take many administrative and operational decisions on how they go about their day to day work within the council's rules. These decisions will not need to be recorded. You will not be able inspect some recorded decisions if the whole or part of the records contain confidential information or any other information, which its publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.

Examples of decisions that should be recorded could include:

- Decisions about awarding contracts above specified individual/total values (the values will vary according to the relevant parish or town council); and
- decision to renew a lease to an Allotment Association.

Where decisions are already required to be published by other legislation, they do not need to be recorded again provided the record published has the date the decision was taken and the reasons for the decision.

*****Decisions that do not need to be recorded might include the following examples:

- Routine administrative and organisational decisions such as the purchase of office supplies or repairs;
- a decision to sign an allotment tenancy agreement;

- decisions to allocate burial plots; and
- decisions to book rooms or sports grounds; and decisions to approve works undertaken by a contractor.

These are a few selected examples and not an exhaustive list. It is for the council to decide what information should be recorded on the basis of the national rules.

Clerk's note: an approved list of other already delegated powers such as the 10% off hall hire rates to encourage bookings in a slack period can be drawn up and approved by F&GP Committee.

Can I ask for a copy of any records of decisions taken by an officer of my parish or town council? Yes. You can ask for a copy of any documents relating to decisions taken by an officer acting under specific or general delegated powers once you have paid for the postage, copying or any other necessary charge for transmission which will be determined by your parish or town council.

There are also additional legal rights to access information, outlined in Part 5 of this Guide.

What happens if documents relating to decisions are not made public?

It is a criminal offence if, without reasonable excuse, a person with custody of a document which is required by the national rules to be made available to the public, refuses to supply the whole or part of the document, or intentionally obstructs any other person/s from disclosing such a document.

Item 8.5 Grants Policy and Procedure Policy *Purpose of report: Information and consideration.*

If a person is found guilty of such a criminal offence, he/she may be fined up to £200.

8.5 Grants policy & procedure (Review)

Current policy.

A grant is any payment or gift made by the Council to an organisation for a specific purpose. The law requires that Section 137 grants must be "in the interests of or will directly benefit the area or its inhabitants, or of part of it, or of some of it" and "the direct benefit should be commensurate with expenditure." Similar considerations will apply when considering applications for other grants.

At the Finance Committee meeting in January an amount will be set from which grants will be allocated during the following financial year. Once the Grants budget is exhausted, the parish council will only consider emergency requests for assistance, and generally only from organisations with which it has close links.

Application Procedure

Organisations requesting financial assistance will be requested to submit:

- A completed application form.
- Copies of their last year end accounts.
- If possible, the number, or percentage, of members that belong to the organisation and live within Boxley Parish.
- Details of any restrictions placed on who can use/access their services.
- Confirmation (on the application form) that it agrees with the PC's Equal Opportunities Policy or give details of their own policy.

Organisations will normally be expected to have clear written aims and objectives, a written constitution and a separate bank account.

For grant requests for projects costing over £3,000 the Parish Council will require that the organisation has robust tendering regulations, e.g. obtaining a minimum of three tenders. The Parish Council reserves the right to request proof of the tender process. Projects notified to the Parish Council in advance and included in the Parish Council's budget documents will only have the funds released on completion of the work. Whilst Boxley Parish Council would not normally consider applications for Capital Projects, any such applications will require a more substantial case with supporting evidence of the community benefit.

Applications will not be considered from:

- Individuals.
- A political party.
- Private organisations operated as a business.
- "Upward funders" i.e. local groups where fund-raising is sent to a central HQ for redistribution.

Assessment Procedure

A grant request, once received in writing, will be considered at the next meeting of the Finance Committee.

Each application will be assessed on its own merits. However, to ensure as fair a distribution as possible of available funds, the Council will take into account the amount and frequency of any previous awards. Due account may also be taken of the extent to which funding has been sought or secured from other sources or fund raising activities. (The Clerk can advise on alternative funding sources). Proposals for match funding will also be considered.

Successful Applications

Organisations receiving grants are required to advise their users/members that the grant or equipment had been received from Boxley Parish Council. Where possible, the Council will affix an appropriate label.

Where equipment is gifted to an organisation, the parish council requires that it be insured and maintained at the expense of the user.

Item 8.6. Investment Strategy. *Purpose of report: Information and consideration.*

8.6 Reserves policy (Review)

Current policy.

In order to work effectively and to be able to fund projects, achieve goals and manage grants and supply services, the parish council must keep some money in reserve.

These reserves are managed in the following ways:

- Earmarked reserves. Contains money that is identified for long-term projects or which can only be spent on a specific project because it is a grant.
- Unallocated cash reserve will be maintained at about 33% of the 'normal' annual expenditure of the Parish Council and if necessary extra money will be added.

Reserves benefit the parish as: the interest attracted can be used to keep the precept down; the parish council can act quickly to a sudden community need.

The parish council annually reviews its need for and the size of its reserves.

Item 10 KALC Finance Conference 17 October. *Purpose of report: information*

10. KALC Finance Conference 17 October: report by the Clerk.

The KALC Finance Conference on 17 October once again provided an excellent lunch with good networking opportunities.

There were presentations on:

- External Audit which refreshed my understanding on the legislation but also covered some of the changes in The Governance and Accountability for Local Councils A Practitioners' Guide (England) March 2014 which I am currently wading my way through. The Government's wrongful advice on Open and Accountable Local Government was also explained.
- A workshop on recording of meetings.
- The Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 was being introduced on 20 October and so this was an early briefing. Details of this was supplied to Cllr Wendy Hinder as it may be a good weapon to deal with the Old Chatham Road issue.
- Making Local Council Finance Work. A good refresher.
- Internet Banking, given by the Clerk of East Farleigh. Excellent presentation and discussion with Clerks already doing this.

I picked up various bits of paper to read including an interesting one on double-taxation. An adjustment to the NALC model financial regulations have been made and I will arrange to identify the amendments and bring them to the January F&GP Committee meeting.

Item 11 Grant Request. *Clerk's note; the application was completed on the parish council's form but submitted as a pdf so it had been cut and pasted here.*

Heart of Kent Hospice – Minibus Appeal

Accounts are available on request (email 2/10/14 from enquiry@boxleyparishcouncil.org.uk)

I am writing to the Boxley Parish Council Members to introduce the work of Heart of Kent Hospice, an independent registered charity, established 23 years ago. Over the past three years we have helped 67 patients, as well as their families and carers, within Boxley. As a locally based charity, I am writing to ask whether the Members would kindly consider supporting Heart of Kent Hospice's latest community project.

Heart of Kent Hospice is dedicated to providing the best skilled, expert and above all compassionate care to adults reaching the end of life, as well as support to their families. Our aim is to bring hope and understanding alongside knowledge with our multi-disciplinary specialist expertise in the management of pain and other difficult symptoms. Our unique care brings confidence and reassurance to patients and those closest to them; helping them to spend precious time together in comfort and dignity. Each year, we support and care for over 800 patients within the community as well as in the Hospice itself. Our clear aim is to make every day precious for each patient, as well as their families, at this most difficult and challenging time.



The Need

Rural and social isolation makes it difficult for people to self-manage their medical care. It can have a detrimental impact on a patient's health and wellbeing.

Currently:

- We are heavily reliant on the local ambulance service to transport patients who have disabilities or specialist equipment needs such as breathing apparatus or wheelchairs. Due to pre-existing ambulance demands, patients have to "fit in" with ambulance availability which means that sometimes our patients wait a long time for their transportation

- With the recent ambulance service takeover and changes in NHS contractual arrangements, the current ambulance service provided will soon be fee-based which will have considerable repercussions on more of our patients who already face financial constraints
- Patients in many of our rural catchment areas face infrequent public transport timetables
- Medical professionals have voiced concerns that patients are missing important outpatient appointments due to infrequent public transport services or expensive private services
- The lack of public transport available means that many rural-based patients are unable to fully maximise the Hospice services available to them such drop-in clinic, outpatient visits and day therapies such as complementary therapy, art and garden therapy
- The nearest bus stop to the Hospice is 0.4 kilometres away, on the main A20. Anyone with accessibility issues has a tough job walking the distance from the bus stop to the Hospice Reception
- We do have existing volunteer drivers, but they can only transport one patient at a time, and cannot accommodate any specialist equipment due to the driver's own ability or space within their vehicles

Our Response

Access to community transportation allows people requiring palliative care to remain independent and stay connected with community. A minibus service for patients can play a crucial role helping people access essential healthcare amenities by providing services where public transport cannot or does not, can provide a vital lifeline for those most vulnerable to isolation loneliness.



the
in
and
and

We aim to provide an active free of charge minibus service for all Hospice patients, regardless of physical ability, within the community five days a week.

Benefits of the minibus service to patients in the community:

- Patients, especially those who live on their own, or who are rurally isolated, can fully maximise and benefit from the full Hospice services available to them and enjoy the social and therapeutic aspects that the Hospice has to offer
- Continuation of patient care plans without the stresses and anxiety that patients may face when no transport is available to them
- Patients are comforted knowing that they can attend their scheduled medical appointments in a safe and timely manner
- Patients with disabilities can travel safely to the Hospice with their specialised equipment such as wheelchairs or breathing apparatus, which is often not possible in a car/bus

“A minibus service would be wonderful. I enjoy attending Day Therapy but I am restricted to how many times I can come as I live alone and have transport issues”

Day Therapy Patient

Project Budget

We need to raise £25,000 to buy the minibus.

Donation Request

We would be very grateful if the Boxley Parish Council Members would kindly support Heart of Kent Hospice with a donation of £2,000 towards this exciting project.

In 2014/15, it is expected that the Hospice will care for nearly 1,000 patients and with your generous support we aim to enable many more patients to regularly access all the wonderful services, support and advice we offer at the Hospice making every day precious for each patient at this very difficult time for them.