

FINANCE, GOVERNANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2017–18

The Finance, Governance and Policy Committee (FG&P) comprises the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Parish Council together with the Chairman of the Planning Committee and two other parish councillors. Other councillors with a specific interest in items being considered by the FG&P Committee are encouraged to attend its meetings to make their views known.

The committee normally meets six times a year - all meetings being open to the public.

Once again an additional meeting was held during the year to finalise budgets for the parish and to recommend a precept for the year 2018–2019. The recommendation was subsequently accepted by the Parish Council. It was to increase King's Sutton Parish Council's share of council tax due to be collected in 2018-2019 to £64,650. This is the equivalent of an additional £4.68 a year (6.5%) for a Band D property, from £72.05 to £76.73.

Of the required 6.5% increase approximately 2.3% was occasioned by the fact that during the year the Parochial Church Council had decided to pass responsibility for the maintenance of the churchyard to the Parish Council as from the spring of 2018. Legally the Parish Council has no option but to accept this obligation or pass it on to the District Council who would then charge the cost of carrying out the work back to the Parish Council. This would result in the Parish Council losing control of both the quality and cost of the work done. Therefore, a preliminary amount of £1,500 was added to the budget for this work in 2018/19. At the time of setting the budget the Committee was concerned that there may have been various other outstanding costs regarding trees and walls at the Churchyard, that would also have to be absorbed. Since then however, the Parochial Church Council has confirmed that it will bear the cost of bringing the Churchyard up to a reasonable condition before the handover takes place.

As its title suggests, the committee's main responsibilities are to consider and make recommendations to the full parish council on financial, governance and policy matters.

During the past year this work has included: -

- the preparation of the draft budget and precept
- the regular examination of all council payments and receipts
- the review of the effectiveness of internal control arrangements which is informed by the quarterly internal control checks now carried out by Councillor Roger Burne, to whom the committee is most grateful
- the review and monitoring of recommendations relating to the allocation of Section 106 and other grant monies
- the review of various contracts for services such as grass cutting and litter services
- the consideration of applications for financial assistance from village individuals/groups

- the examination, preparation and confirmation of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
- the consideration of financial and contractual arrangements for the carrying out of various amenity projects

As a result of a survey of 'Thursday Bus' users carried out last year, the service had been reduced from weekly to fortnightly as from January 1st 2017, and the fare had been increased from £2 to £3. Since then financial support for the revised service has been regularly reviewed on a six-monthly basis. The net annual cost to the Council is currently circa £2,000 and the average number of passengers is only around 8. Despite this, and in view of the reliance placed on the facility by some residents of the village who would otherwise have serious problems in getting to Banbury, the Parish Council has decided to continue the subsidy but keep the matter strictly under review.

During the year improvements to and refurbishment of the paths at the King's Sutton Cemetery were carried out, as was the installation of a water supply to the Cemetery. These were paid for out of General Reserves. Moves are now also underway to pursue the acquisition of land to extend the Cemetery. By April 2019 a sum of £25,000 will have been set aside for this acquisition and its associated legal and other costs including fencing, paths and turfing. A detailed budget is currently being finalised for this exercise.

The Committee's proposal that consideration should be given to seeking approval for the number of King's Sutton councillors to be reduced to a number more in line with the size of councils found in other equivalent parishes in South Northamptonshire, was accepted by the Parish Council last year. South Northants Council has now confirmed that the number of parish councillors will be reduced statutorily to eleven as from the elections in May 2019.

As well as monitoring the disbursement of previously agreed Section 106 monies the Committee recommended that the Council should match-fund the School's fundraising appeal for computing equipment (iPads and keyboards and associated equipment) to replace its outdated technology. This recommendation was accepted and a resulting £7,500 was contributed for this purpose.

In carrying out the various tasks allotted to it, the committee has relied very heavily on the expertise, advice and work of the Parish Clerk who is also the council's Responsible Finance Officer. The Committee and I wish to thank her for her excellent and efficient support in dealing with all of these issues.

Ronnie Irving

Chairman Finance Governance and Policy Committee 2017/18