**Minutes of the Saddleworth Parish Council Finance Committee held on Thursday 26th September 2024 at 7pm at the Civic Hall, Uppermill.**

**Present**: Cllr S Al-Hamdani (Chairman)

Cllr G Sheldon (Vice Chairman)

Cllr K Barton, Cllr H Bishop

Cllr R Blackmore, Cllr L Thompson

 Cllr P Walsh

Cllr B Beeley attended in her capacity as Chairman of the Parish Council

 RFO: Mr J Price, Clerk: Mrs K Allott

**656. Apologies for Absence:** Cllr L Dawson, Cllr K. Phillips

**657. Declarations of Interest:** None declared.

**658. Minutes from the meeting held on Thursday 25th July 2024**

Cllr Beeley asked for clarification on point 654 and the minutes were then accepted as correct and signed at the meeting by the Chairman.

Proposed Cllr Al-Hamdani, seconded Cllr Blackmore.

**659. Audit recommendations**

* External Audit update

The RFO advised that the external audit conducted by PKF Littlejohn was now complete. The RFO explained the two “Except For” matters; the internal and external audit must be consistent; these referred to VAT claims and the fact that the financial risk assessment was last completed 16 months ago and it should be annually. After some discussion, it was agreed that a narrative statement would be published on the website with an explanation.

* Internal Audit Action Plan

The RFO shared the action plan, following the internal audit and each point was examined and discussed.

Reclaiming of VAT – covered under point 660.

Any incorrect reconciliations had now been corrected.

The issue of any medium/long term contracts currently not in writing with a clear end date would be addressed and any coming up for renewal over the next few months would also be examined.

All contracts over £5000 will be listed and published on the website.

The outstanding risk assessment, which must be completed annually, would be updated and reviewed by full council.

Quarterly variance to budget figures are now being shared with the committee.

Any dispensations in hall hire charges are being reviewed and agreed by the Assets Management Committee.

The recommendation for an Investment and Treasury Management policy was discussed. The RFO advised that once we had changed over to Unity Bank, there was an option to invest funds in a high interest account.

Petty cash was now back to the £100 maximum float.

Annual cost of living pay rises, recommended by NALC, would be approved and minuted at Staffing Committee, with a report to Full Council.

Although all approved payments are reported and published monthly, a separate report for payments over £500 would also be published annually.

**660. VAT Advice Quotes**

The RFO shared the two quotes he had received for specialist VAT advice.

Parkinson Partnership £1300 plus vat (£1560 gross), these are NALC recommended.

DTE Group, via Seftons, £2500 plus vat (£3000 gross).

These were discussed and it was resolved to accept the Parkinson Partnership quote, proposed Cllr Sheldon, seconded Cllr Blackmore, carried.

**661. Bank Account Progress**

The RFO advised this was ongoing, there had been a issue with the online application form that needed resolving, but his priority had been the external audit.

**662. Report on Councillor Expenses when deputising for Chairman**

None to report.

**663. Updated Financial Regulations**

Due to audit and VAT priorities this will be deferred to the next meeting.

**664. Budget Setting 2025-26 (first discussion)**

The timescales were discussed and agreed. The budget and precept request to be presented at the full council January meeting. Finance Committee sign off December meeting. It was agreed the format used last year worked well and would be adopted this year as well.

The next Finance committee meeting 14th November would concentrate on budget, and other items on the agenda may need to be deferred.

It was agreed that the RFO would present an “in principle” budget to the next finance committee meeting showing current costs with inflation, and an index showing what amount different increases in the precept would deliver.

Cllr Sheldon advised the committee regarding the issue with the rebuild of the car park retaining wall, which is collapsing and a health & safety risk. After discussion it was agreed the clerk would write formally to the Chairman of the Finance Committee requesting the shortfall of £22,128.62 between the agreed tender of £62128.62 and the agreed insurance settlement figure of £40,000 be taken from reserves.

This is covered under Financial regulation 3.4 The Clerk may incur expenditure on behalf of the Council which is necessary to carry out any repair replacement or other work which is of such extreme urgency that it must be done at once, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for the expenditure, after consulting the Chairman of the Finance Committee.

The Clerk shall report this action to the next meeting of the Finance Committee and to the Full Council at the soonest opportunity.

**665. Support to Lydgate Community Group regarding land on Stockport Rd**

Cllr Bishop advised she was waiting for further information on this but would report back.

**666. Items for the next agenda**

* Budget 2025-26

These agenda items may need to be deferred:-

* VAT consultancy written report
* Report on car park wall
* Bank account progress
* Updated Financial Regulations
* Report on Councillor Expenses when deputising for Chairman

**Date of next meeting: Thursday 14th November @ 19.00hrs**