

UPPER MEDWAY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD



MINUTES OF A MEETING of the **Finance Committee** held via
Zoom Conference Call
on Tuesday 8 December 2020 at 10am.

Members of the Committee Present

D Goff - Chairman

P Harper (most of the meeting)
H Rogers
C Wheeler

In attendance

O Pantrey - Clerk
L Carey – Finance Officer
L Rowland – Officer Manager

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies received, full attendance.

2. ITEMS OF INTEREST DECLARATION

None of the Members present declared a pecuniary and/or non-pecuniary interest in any of the items to be discussed on the Agenda.

3. MINUTES

RECEIVED a copy of the Minutes of Finance Committee on 26 May, 13 October and 20 October 2020.

(As attached to these Minutes – Appendix 1)

AGREED by all Members present that all three sets of Minutes are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman when this was possible.

4. ACTION LIST & MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no action items outstanding from the previous minutes.

Bockingfold Sluice

The Clerk confirmed that he wanted to update Members on a Main Board item and that he had spoken to the EA regarding the Bockingfold Sluice work. They have confirmed that the work they were doing had to be stopped for biodiversity reasons and they will be restarting this work around March 2021 time.

5. BANK BALANCES

The Bank Statements balances were confirmed as follows:

	<u>Date</u>	<u>£</u>
Handelsbanken Paying In Account	30 November 2020	666.44
Handelsbanken Paying Out Account	30 November 2020	285,554.74
Handelsbanken Savings Account	30 November 2020	657,099.28
NatWest Drainage Account	30 November 2020	4,343.83
TOTAL		947,664.29

The Chairman of Finance asked if Members had any comments to make.

The Clerk confirmed that the second half of the EA precept has since been paid. He explained that the intention was to try to retain some of the precept for this year, but after discussions with Ian Nunn it was confirmed that as this figure is set and agreed by the RFCC we are obliged to pay the amount that has been set. He explained that he will be having a discussion with the EA on Friday to ask them for a pre-agreed figure and will be requesting details of work being planned going forward. He added that the idea that has been suggested about withholding precept money and releasing it slowly had also been ruled out as an option, because we need to set the precept ahead of time.

The Chairman of Finance said it was a sensible idea to get details of the pre-planned work as this is where we have had trouble in the past.

C Wheeler said that the EA have not got around to doing a lot of the work that they have taken on (work that we used to do the past) and wondered if checks can be made on the waterway works that they should be doing.

The Clerk confirmed that this is something he has been discussing with the EA recently and there are two things to consider. If we do work on a PSCA basis the EA hold on to the overall responsibility of the watercourse and we would be able to reclaim precept as a result of those works. Alternatively, if the EA give it back to the IDB via de-maining we could then argue that the precept would not need to be reduced the following year. He said it really depends on whether we want the responsibility of these potentially critical watercourses or whether we just want to do the work and reclaim some money. He added there is also a potential stumbling block because of EA internal issues with between maintenance and biodiversity/conservation, that led to holding up of works. It was for this reason that they are looking for a PSCA with the IDB.

The Clerk said that we were going to look at PSCA works initially from 2021/2022 and then look at de-maining in the future once the EA are convinced that we are in a position to be able to do it.

The Chairman of the Board said his main concern is the precept amounts are arranged in advance of the work being done and there is no come back should the EA not do the works for whatever reason and this is where we have had the arguments with them in the past.

The Clerk said that should works not be completed as initially proposed by the EA, we could ask for the precept to be reduced further in the future.

The Chairman of Finance said that we are making progress and we should leave this in the capable hands of the Clerk to move forward with this.

The Chairman of the Board said that it would be useful to have a comparison to the last 12 months bank balances in the future.

The Finance Office agreed to put this in place for the next meeting.

6. RATES AND SPECIAL LEVY COLLECTION

REPORTED that Rates and Special Levies collected as of 30 November 2020 amounted to £527,704.43. This is 99% of total rates and levies Due. Rates outstanding are £9,519.36, Special Levies £144.12 and Rates that have paid in advance (£1,669.72). Balance of account is £7,993.76.

The Chairman of Finance asked if Members had any comments to make.

The Clerk confirmed that the 20% outstanding will be chased by the Finance Officer and she will start by chasing a lot of the larger outstanding accounts initially.

The Clerk asked the Finance Committee what level should be set for the first reminder?

The Chairman of Finance requested a breakdown of the £9,000 owed to help the Committee make an informed decision on that.

A long discussion took place regarding debts and it was agreed that larger debts should be concentrated on, and that old debt should be looked into and potentially written off. It was agreed that this would be discussed further down the line once a report had been generated for the Committee to review.

The Clerk confirmed that until a further discussion has taken place, anything owed over £10 will be continued to be chased.

7. FINANCIAL POSITION REPORT

The Finance Officer confirmed that all the special levies had now been received from the councils and she had transferred all sums from the paying in account to the paying out account. She also recommended that when we recharge salaries to the Lower Board that their payment goes straight into the paying out account rather than the paying in account to reduce unnecessary transfers in the future.

All Members **AGREED** for the Lower Board recharges to be paid into the paying out account.

A discussion took place regarding the need for the different bank accounts that we currently have and if it was necessary to have the number of accounts that we do.

The Finance Officer's recommendation was to have a savings account and one other account, and her preference would be to keep the paying in account. She said this would mean closing the Handelsbanken Paying Out Account and the NatWest Drainage Account.

Members were all in agreement that they would be happy with this in principle and this should be looked into further.

The Chairman of Finance confirmed that he supports doing the research of closing the accounts and for the Finance Officer to come back to the Committee with the findings. He also said once we have decided what we are doing, we need to report this to the main Board for information.

All Members **AGREED** with this.

The Chairman of Finance thanked the Finance Officer for everything that she has achieved since joining the Board.

8. RECHARGEABLE WORKS

REPORTED that £47,093.57 including VAT for rechargeable works have been invoiced to UMIDB from LMIDB since April 2020.

REPORTED that £183,414.32 including VAT for rechargeable works have been received from LMIDB since April 2020.

9. BIODIVERSITY

RECEIVED a copy of Carol Donaldson's biodiversity quotation.

(As attached to these Minutes – Appendix 2)

The Clerk said that now it has been over 10 years since the last Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was approved he was asking for approval to go ahead and instruct Carol to commence work the work on the BAP, which she anticipated could be around April time.

The Chairman of the Board confirmed to Members that he had spoken to C Mackonochie since the recent Upper Board Meeting and he had asked her if she would be willing to become the Upper Board's environmental champion. He was very pleased to confirm that she had agreed straight way and that he believes she has a lot to offer in this area.

The Chairman of the Board also said it was critical that the Works Supervisor takes part in the production of the BAP as he will essentially be the person making the decisions on the ground.

The Clerk said that he would make sure that he was integral to it, as he was in the past with the Stour Board.

A long discussion took place about the BAP and the subsequent work that may come as a result of having this in place.

The Clerk confirmed that going forward the BAP should be reviewed every 2-3 years, updated every 5 years and renewed every 10 years. He said that the additional work, ie surveying work needs to be considered separately as it is likely to be expensive. He said that having the BAP done initially is sufficient for our requirements and will fulfil our obligations to DEFRA at this stage.

The Chairman of the Board asked if at any point we can identify any areas of conflict between the two Boards and how would we deal with this.

The Clerk confirmed that Carol's work is done on an individual watercourse basis and she had operated in this way with the Stour Board. He said he believed her experience would resolve this issue.

On a proposition by P Harper seconded by The Chairman of the Board it was **AGREED** to go ahead with the biodiversity quotation of £6,450 per Board and commence work on the BAP and any additional work required will be discussed further with the Board.

P Harper left the meeting.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Salary Increases

The Clerk confirmed that salary increases would be discussed at the Joint Services Committee on 14 December.

Audit

The Chairman of Finance asked if there had been any progress on our audit.

The Finance Officer confirmed that the auditors and herself were working through this now. She said they had sent a long list of items they wanted to see and she was currently working through the list, but it was likely to take some time.

The Clerk confirmed that they are undertaking a shadow audit and they were being very thorough and had requested a lot of random receipts.

The Chairman of Finance asked if it was still likely to see an interim report before Christmas.

The Finance Officer confirmed this was unlikely and that it should be completed early in the New Year.

New Office

The Chairman of Finance confirmed that himself, M Davies and the Chairman of the Board had recently got together, and an email of questions had gone to the Lower Chairman/Vice Chairman last week. He said he would share the answers once they had been received. He said he was very pleased that we now have an open dialogue and are moving in the right direction. He added that he was delighted that M Davies has come on board as he seems to have a clear understanding of these situations. He said his background will be very helpful and will aid us moving forward.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Finance Committee meeting was confirmed to be 25 May 2021, however, The Chairman of Finance said it was likely that a short meeting would need to be called to discuss bank accounts and the rates before then.

12. CLOSURE

There being no further business the Chairman of Finance thanked Members for their attendance and declared the meeting closed.