

**Great Easton & Tilty Parish Council meeting as sole trustee of the Great Easton Parish Hall Fund, registered charity number 295400, on 22 June 2023**

**Time: 7.30 p.m.**

**Minutes**

**Present: Committee members: Tristan Martens (chair and councillor), Marie Benterman (councillor), David Lawson (councillor) and John Stevens (councillor). Kate Rixson (minute-taker/clerk to parish council)**

1. Chair's introduction

The committee appointed Tristan Martens as chairman. He opened the meeting and introduced the business by explaining that this meeting was to deal with the Hall Fund trust only, and councillors were sitting in their role as members of the trustee body. This could be described as "wearing their Trustee hat" instead of their "councillor" hat. In the role of a member of the trustee body each member would take decisions in the interests of the Hall Fund trust only, and would be alert to any potential or actual conflict of interest between the council and the Hall Fund trust. Any personal interest in matters on the agenda must be declared in the meeting and, unless unexpected, beforehand. The group of councillors meeting for this purpose could be called the "Trustee Committee" or the "Board of Trustees" interchangeably.

It was noted that when sitting as a trustee the council had the same powers it had as a local council and no other powers. It was also noted however that the procedures of the charity were governed by charities legislation not the law relating to local councils. Therefore trustee meetings should not be public although invitations to attend could be issued, trustees could take decisions otherwise than in face-to-face meetings and agendas could be amended without notice and new items added during meetings (although this was not desirable if all members were to be able to give proper consideration to the business of the meeting). Further details had been provided to members through written guidance issued by the Charity Commission and the National Association of Local Councils. Guidance had also been provided by the Rural Community Council of Essex's Village Halls adviser.

2. Apologies for Absence

Received from all councillors not present.

3. Written reports had been circulated and were therefore tabled/taken as read on 3.1 Finance

A substantial deficit of income over outgoings was noted for the years 2021-22 and 2022-23. This had resulted in a reduction in reserves of about 10% in each year. In the first two months of 2023-24 losses continued to run at about 1% of the reserves per month so that the rate of loss was continuing. It was noted that the deficit was less in 2022-23 as bookings had recovered to some extent following the pandemic, but that costs still greatly exceeded income.

The hall has reserves of approximately £10,000 in unit trusts (value depending on the price when sold) in a capital investment account with CCLA. (CCLA is an investment firm specialising in managing funds for charities and the church.) It also holds £34,502 in its TSB current bank account. Expenditure to date in 2023-24 is £1,549.73 plus VAT of £133.16 and income to date (with hire payments still to come for May and June) £398.07.

### 3.2 Bookings

There were two regular paying bookings per week (for a total of about 9 hours a week) plus one-off hirings for e.g. social events (about once a month) and by the district council for use as a polling station. Three community groups use the hall free of charge - two on a monthly basis and one weekly – for a total of about 12 hours per month.

### 3.3 Condition, repairs and purchases

A timber beam is sagging due to water penetration and needs to be propped up while repairs are organised. It was agreed to obtain a quote from a reputable local builder. *Action: Tristan Martens/Kate Rixson*

Recent purchases included replacing the microwave, kettle and clock which had all failed. A Ring doorbell system would be installed to improve security arrangements and convenience for hirers (who were now issued with a PIN to gain access independently using the digital lock). Cllr Martens would be reimbursed for this expenditure.

Recent repairs and other work had included plumbing work to fix leaking toilets. The hall cleaner had reported that two dispensers in the toilets had been broken off the wall. The third was already damaged so all three now needed replacement. A new broom had been requested by two of the hirers.

## Decisions taken

4. The trustees confirmed their joint commitment to provide a hall for local people for as long as it is used and needed – this being the purpose of the charity. There were provisions in the Scheme of 2006 (created by the Charity Commission to modernise the original charity documents) to guide the trustees. If changes were needed to the terms of the charity, the Commission's permission must be obtained.

To this end the committee agreed to prepare, over the next year or so, a 2-10 year plan for the hall to include attending to necessary repairs to the building,

managing its finances, considering ways to generate income and capital resources for the charity and improving the hall's appeal to hirers, so that the charity could continue to fulfil its purpose. The trustees concluded that the current loss-making pattern of hirings and costs was not sustainable - at the current rate of loss, reserves would run down within ten years. If major repairs, such as a new roof, were needed (which was likely), the reduction in reserves would be much faster. Grants could be sought for capital expenditure (e.g. replacing the roof) but grant-making bodies usually required grants to be matched with equivalent funds from the hall's own reserves. Grants were very unlikely to be available to support losses from running costs (revenue funding).

It was noted that the parish council's insurance policy included buildings and contents insurance for the hall, and public liability/employers' liability cover for the hall and volunteers working in it. This represented support from the parish council to the hall trust (as the council paid the premium) but was not quantified in the accounts due to the difficulty in separating the costs. Obtaining separate cover was likely to be uneconomic.

5. It was decided to commission a structural engineer's report on the condition of the hall from BRP Associates (based in Dunmow) who had visited already and based their estimate of their charges on this. The cost would be £750 plus VAT. This was required before work could safely be undertaken on the roof in the presence of asbestos. The engineer had already advised that a new roof would ultimately be needed. This would enable the trustee committee to assess the scale of the financial expenditure needed. *Action: Kate Rixson*  
See also point 3.3 above.
6. The trustees appointed the clerk of the parish council as secretary to the trustee and agreed to delegate day-to-day tasks to her in accordance with a scheme very similar to the one in use by the parish council in relation to the clerk role. The scheme would be prepared and approved at a future meeting. The clerk's time would be a donation "in kind" to the Hall Fund charity from the Parish Council. *Action: Kate Rixson*
7. The accounting year of the charity would run from 1 April to 31 March (in line with the parish council's financial year so that the same accounting system software could be used).
8. The Annual Meeting of the Hall Fund charity would take place within about 12 weeks of the date of today's meeting. This would be open to all local residents and follow the guidance in the charity's governing document, the Scheme dated 10 October 2006. The accounts would be made available and the meeting would be an opportunity to hear views on a plan for the hall. A date would be fixed at the next trustees' meeting.

9. The secretary should prepare procedures and financial policies for approval by the trustee committee. It was agreed to adopt standard National Association of Local Councils' Financial Regulations and Standing Orders as these were used by the Parish Council, for consistency and to make governance as straightforward as possible. The purchases listed at 3.3 above were approved, in line with these Financial Regulations. *Action: Kate Rixson*
  
10. To fix another meeting of the trustee committee, to take place before the AGM. *Action: Kate Rixson*