

Minutes of Meeting on 21st October 2025
Elmstead Parish Council – Finance Committee
Community Centre, School Road, Elmstead Market, CO7 7ET

Present: Councillors Martine Ward (Chairman), Amanda Brennan, James Chable and Adam Gladwin.

Mrs Baxter (clerk)

Absent: Michael Hare.

25/026 Apologies of Absence.

Apologies were received from Cllr Hare.

25/027 Declaration of Pecuniary Interests and Personal Interests.

None.

25/028 To agree the Minutes of the meeting of 15th July 2025.

It was resolved to accept the minutes from 15th July 2025 as true and accurate.

Proposed: Cllr Chable, Seconded: Cllr Brennan, all in favour.

25/029 2025/26 Second Quarter

i) To review the second quarter income and expenditure against the set budget.

Members reviewed the figures.

Expenses are over budget because it includes the handyman's safety device which was not in the budget. As the handyman does lone working it is essential for his health and safety.

The insurance looks over budget but there is a refund to come for signing up to a three year long term arrangement which reduces the cost to £1,165 which is within budget.

For office expense we did not budget for moving to .gov e-mails and website, so it will be over budget. Ongoing costs won't be so high because we've paid for 10 years of the website and there was a one-off set up fee this year.

Subscriptions would have been in budget if EALC hadn't put their fees up so much. It was asked if we could question this. Are we getting value for money? If we have employment questions the clerk would go to EALC over SLCC because they have bought in the expertise. You can't be a member of NALC without being a member of your county association which is where we get updates and templates. The clerk would find the job difficult without access to NALC. Some councils feel you should be able to be a member of NALC separately. This could change under Local Government Reorganisation.

General maintenance is under budget but we haven't had the mower serviced yet. The handyman has asked for this to be booked in. He's still cutting the grass at the moment.

Replacement dog bins are over budget, that is what they cost.

The defibrillator budget is for replacement pads and batteries. If it is used the pads need replacing.

The new trailer was paid for from an ear-marked reserve.

There's non budgeted expenditure for Charity Field under open spaces. There's signage, supplies for fixing the gate, contractor costs for works to the field and a dog bin. We received a draw down for the bin from the s106 open space funds TDC is holding and the clerk has requested a draw down for the contractor costs too.

Rent and hire costs look high because we paid half the fee we received from Reed Hall Sentinels to the Community Centre. The regular hire was £106 which is well within budget.

We haven't had any highways expenses yet.

Streetlighting may be over budget this year because they had to replace some parts.

We are under budget for the grants.

Publicity is over budget because of the New Community Centre survey.

The New Community Centre budget is paid for out of the s106 reserve apart from minor costs like parking expenses when we visit the architect. The legal fees for the land transfers are

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included but they should be refunded as Go Homes were to pay those as part of the s106 agreement.

We don't have any events expenses yet, other than for the Wednesday Hub which is paid for by a grant.

For the reserves budget those figures are included in the precept and the income is moved directly into an earmarked reserve. It was asked if we are still saving for a trailer. This could be reduced now that we have purchased a new one. It was a really good deal at £625, our handyman saved us money by finding the offer.

For environs some of Mr Bromage's contractor costs have been designated here to be paid out of the contractor reserve.

We have not spent any of the allotments budget because we don't have the land yet.

We've got a total spend of £108,037.47 but this includes a lot of expenses being paid out of earmarked reserves. If we deduct these we have a net expenditure of £45,923 which is 55% of the budgeted expenditure. If we remove the items which will be refunded we'd have net expenditure of £43,189 which would be 52% of budget.

ii) To review reserves.

The committee reviewed the reserves. The general reserve looks very low, but we do have a large VAT refund to claim. This would put our general reserve back up to £15,500. This time last year the reserve was £15,500. It would be good to put something in the budget to increase the general reserve. Our reserves are low, we should have at least 6 months of expenditure as a general reserve. We'd ideally want about £40,000. We do have very good ear-marked reserves though.

The staff sickness reserve looks low. It wouldn't cover the full worst-case scenario but would contribute to cover if the clerk or handyman is long term sick.

Once we know the tax base we'll know whether we can add to reserves.

25/030 2026/27 Draft Budget

i) To review a draft budget.

The committee reviewed the draft budget and accompanying notes.

We are with Zurich for insurance, who are the cheapest supplier at the moment. We have a three-year long-term arrangement with them.

The committee reviewed the staff costs, the increase in employer NIC is an expensive cost for the council at £5,000. We don't know yet what the pay agreement will be for 2026/27.

Handyman expenses have been increased to include the lone worker safety device.

Where specific increases are unknown the clerk has used the current inflation rate of 4.1%.

The clerk will check this again before we finalise the budget.

Training has been kept the same, do we need £500 for councillors? We need new councillors and they will need training. It was agreed to reduce it to £300. It was commented that the training is so generic and each council is so different.

Subscriptions haven't changed much apart from the EALC increase.

It was asked what we can do about Dene Park, can we dispose of it rather than keep paying for the upkeep? It's not in the Parish (due to a historical change in Parish boundaries) and residents don't get the benefit of it. This is to be added to the PC agenda.

For the mower service and repairs budget it was asked if it's the repairs that are expensive.

The service itself is expensive, last year nearly £2,000. We also went through a period of having to get the tyres repaired. The budget also includes supplies, like diesel. Now that we have Charity Field we are having to purchase more diesel. Cllr Brennan has their ride on mower serviced and they do a great job. We typically use Ernest Doe or Upsons. The clerk is to send the service details to Cllr Brennan to see if her provider can do the job.

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We have asked for quotes over the years from a number of local suppliers, but where they do not get the work they don't want to quote any more. Their quotes were more than our usual supplier.

The open spaces budget is similar to last year. There is nothing in for Charity Field yet. We'll be using s106 funds as much as possible but when the handyman does works over there it doesn't come from the s106 funds. He has fixed the gate and he's bought signage.

It will be a building site for a lot of 26/27. The building contractor will be responsible for the site then. By the time the building work has finished we should have another s106 open spaces fund we can spend on it.

For rent and hire the clerk has deducted the £300 payment we will receive for the use of the car park for the Market Field School roof works from the playing field hire budget.

The clerk needs to check what the external auditor's fee will be. It's not fair because the fee is related to the largest of income and expenditure, and because we are receiving large s106 amounts we are having to pay more, but we don't have any more disposable income, the s106 funds have to be spent on specific works. Once we start on the building works we'll have considerable expenses, and we could also be getting a large grant too. The clerk will escalate this fee issue through SLCC.

The Highways budget has been reduced to £100. This is in case we need to improve signs or buy anti-graffiti supplies.

It was discussed that we still have two gates to install, the Tendring Rangers had them but they don't exist any more.

It was agreed to reduce the grants budget to £2,200 to be in line with awards granted this year and last year.

Publicity has been increased to £270 for a possible newsletter or survey.

For events the working party has checked what supplies they have and it's going to need replacing.

It was agreed that we wouldn't be doing the Christmas tree festival again due to time and personnel constraints at a time of year that is busy for events. The £30 budget for this was removed, and Halloween was increased by £30.

Christmas costs were discussed, 2 halls is £14/hour. As a charity they have to charge, the combined rate is a reduced rate.

The Remembrance Sunday budget was discussed. It's higher than our other events.

Members were in favour of supporting the event but didn't understand why all the costs were transferred to the council when the local British Legion closed. Why are we paying for eight wreaths? We don't get charged for the hall so why for Christmas and Halloween? The clerk is to ask who the organisations are that we are purchasing wreaths for.

It was agreed to reduce the reserve budget for the mower trailer, as we won't need to renew it for a number of years. It was reduced to £100/year and we'll stop saving when we have enough to replace it.

It was asked if we need to start saving for the next Neighbourhood Plans, as there are no longer any grants. The clerk is to check with our planning specialist how much a review costs.

It was agreed that the staff sickness reserve needs to be increased as it hasn't changed in many years, so the £400 that the trailer budget was reduced by was added as a reserve budget figure.

A budget has been added for a contractor to work with our handyman on the village environs. 5 hours/week for 6 months has been included. This is what has been needed in 2025/26.

The committee looked at the net budget figures, but did not have the tax base to consider the effect on council tax. We expect the tax base to increase. Ideally we would also build up our general reserve.

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ii) *To include consideration of staff and contractor costs for 2026/27.*

Our handyman recommends our current contractor because he has been very good in doing the work, and he has been trained to do the work. The handyman's overtime did reduce with the contractor helping out. There is extra work with a longer growing season and additional open spaces to look after. Our handyman works very hard and often needs a second pair of hands for jobs. The contractor will keep his rate the same.

It was agreed to continue with our current contractor for a 6 month period of 5 hours per week. This recommendation will go onto the next PC agenda.

25/031 Date for next meeting.

The next meeting will be to finalise the 2026/27 budget and agree a precept recommendation to full council, so will need to be before the council's January meeting.

To be arranged when we get the tax base.

25/032 Matters raised by Councillors for the next agenda or for information only.

None.

The meeting closed at 8.25pm. Minuted by Mrs. A Baxter
Contact: elmsteadparish@gmail.com

DRAFT

Signature

Date