



MINUTES

Meeting: FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE **Date:** 18th November 2013 **Time:** 7.30pm

Venue: NORTH WEALD LIBRARY, 138 HIGH ROAD, NORTH WEALD, ESSEX

PRESENT:

Councillors (11) C Hawkins (Chairman), B Bartram, N Bedford, B Clegg, P Collins, B Eldridge, Mrs D Adams, Mrs E Godwin-Brown, Mrs A Grigg*, G Mulliner, R Spearman

** for part of meeting*

Also in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca – Parish Clerk

Adriana Jones – Finance and Administrative Officer

Members of the Public (0)

No Members of the public were present.

F.1301 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (4)

NOTED that apologies had been received from Councillors McCormack, Blanks, Stallan and Buckley. Apologies for lateness were also received from Councillor Grigg.

F.1302 OTHER ABSENCES (0)

NOTED there were no other absences.

F.1303 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members **NOTED** that by virtue of the fact all Councillors live in the Parish, each one holds a discloseable pecuniary interest in the preparation of the Budget/Precept. However, as this Parish Council had adopted the Public Law Partnership, an automatic dispensation is in place which allows discussion.

Cllr Spearman declared a pecuniary interest in any items relevant to grounds maintenance, by virtue of owning Happy Grow Garden Centre, from which the Parish Council occasionally purchase items.

F.1304 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

NOTED there were no Members of the Public present.

F.1305 BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2014/2015

Members had been issued with Income and Expenditure papers which, following thorough investigation by the Finance and Administrative Officer, included suggested budget figures for 2014/2015. Members had been advised to review these figures prior to the meeting, and if any members have any questions, these could be individually discussed at the meeting. Councillor Clegg asked for clarification as to if Councillors have a moral obligation to keep the precept at a 0% increase, stating it would be correct to be mindful of wanting to try and keep costs down.

The Clerk stated that the Council was required to precept to ensure its expected expenditure for the following year is covered, taking into account any income received. The Chairman stated he had recently attended a meeting with the Rt Hon Mr Eric Pickles MP, who categorically stated that Parish Council precepts would not be capped going forward.

The Clerk confirmed this, stating that she had mentioned to Mr Pickles that this Parish Council run a library on behalf of ECC at zero cost to Essex County Council, to which Mr Pickles stated that 'no capping' was specifically to benefit Parish Council such as this.

Cllr Eldridge asked if this is what Cllr Blanks referred to last year, to which Cllr Collins stated that it wasn't, and that Cllr Blanks reference last year was to the possibility of EFDC reducing or removing any parish support grant given to the Parish as a result of Local Council Tax reforms.

The Clerk explained that the Parish Council had a duty to review the costs associated with the running of the Parish Council and its assets, and to ensure it precepts accordingly.

Members agreed to address the Additional Items first, before reviewing the income and expenditure. The main points of discussion were as follows:

Members **NOTED** that the Parish Council currently holds £50,000 by way of a section 106 agreement for works regarding the Brent House Farm development in Hastingwood. The second tranche of monies of £50,000 is expected to be received when works commence. The Council are not permitted to spend the £50,000 held in the earmarked reserves until building begins. Cllr Spearman asked what the £100,000 Hastingwood 106 payment was to be used for. The Clerk stated that this was a split of £60,000 for Hastingwood Village Hall, and £40,000 for highway works in Hastingwood.

Councillors **NOTED** that alternative quotes had been sourced for the grounds maintenance of Thornwood Common and the Cemetery, copies of which were attached to the agenda.

Councillors recalled that following the recent welfare reforms, the way in which council tax benefit is calculated had changed, with the responsibility for the benefit scheme being passed to, and agreed by, the local authority (EFDC). This subsequently meant a change in the council tax base, which in turn had the effect of showing a greater increase in the Parish Council percentage of council tax despite there being no changes. The effect this would have on town and parish councils was of great debate in 2012, the outcome of which was that EFDC agreed to pass on a percentage of the support grant they receive from Government to Parish Councils to offset this alteration.

In September 2013, the EFDC Finance Cabinet Committee considered a report submitted by Bob Palmer, Director of Finance and ICT EFDC, detailing that the grants for 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 (part of a current DCLG consultation) would be reduced. The Committee agreed that any reduction in the EFDC grant should be reflected in the grant paid to local councils. This would mean a reduction of 13.6% for 2014/2015 and a further reduction of 14.1% in 2015/2016. These reductions are subject to change dependent on the outcome of the consultation.

What this means in practice is that for last year, EFDC awarded the Parish Council £13,265 by way of a Parish Support Grant to offset the negative effect of the welfare reforms. For 2014/2015 (and assuming the above figures remain unchanged, and subject to changes in the council tax base) the figure will be reduced by 13.6% to £11,461.

[19.40 Cllr Grigg arrived]

Councillors discussed the issue of paying off the Public Works Loans Board loan originally taken out for the construction of the pavilion at the Queens Hall. Councillors **NOTED** that the saving to the council if this is paid off would be £2,774.76 over the next 12 years. After discussion, it was **AGREED** to continue as at present for 2014/2015, and that the Finance and Administrative Officer should investigate if partial lumps sums of the loan can be paid off, and how this will affect both the interest and end date of the loan term.

Cllr Bedford asked what the WWI booklet would be, and when was it for, as he understood the anniversary to be around July/August. The Clerk stated that the thinking behind this was primarily that it would be used around Remembrance Sunday events. Cllr Bedford suggested that perhaps instead of creating a separate booklet, a 4 page spread could be placed in Village Life. Councillors **AGREED** that whilst it was not agreed specifically what would take place, funds should be earmarked to commemorate this anniversary.

Councillors considered self insuring of the Parish Council owned street lighting in the parish, however after discussion it was **AGREED** that the Parish Council are not in the risk business, and should continue with sourcing an outside company to provide this cover.

Councillors **NOTED** that the Thornwood Village Hall and Playing Field Management Committee had submitted a request to this meeting to precept for works to resurface the TWVH car park, which had deteriorated over the years and was now a H&S concern. The Clerk confirmed that she had recently sat on the CIF panel, where grant funding for the resurfacing of a car park had been given, therefore meaning that funding opportunities may be available going forward, especially if it was match funded. Cllr Spearman reminded members that the TWVH car park also houses the ECC recycling bins. Cllr Collins stated that he had looked at the additional suggested precept costs for TWVH, and that these total £8,682, and suggested that perhaps TWVH should be addressed entirely separately. Cllr Clegg agreed, stating that the £8,682 current stands at 5.5% of the precept, however reminded members that this is a Parish hall, for the benefit of all residents in the Parish, not just Thornwood, however if the Council are going to invest this amount of money, this needs to be looked at in terms of priorities. Cllr Spearman stated that the priorities are the roller shutters and the car park repairs.

The Clerk stated that she wouldn't normally refer to a Councillors correspondence if they had given apologies for a meeting, however Cllr Blanks had emailed her expressing his concern regarding the loss in net profit at TWVH, and the associated precept requests. The Clerk reminded members that the TWVH is run by a Management Committee on behalf of the Parish Council – they are not trustees nor have any responsibilities for the hall, and caution should be taken to ensure the Committees considerations are taken seriously. Without a Management Committee, the Parish Council would have to take on the day to day activities of running the hall.

Cllr Clegg stated that it was important they went through this process to be able to justify the costs for the hall.

Cllr Bedford stated that perhaps the suggested £4,000 toward car park repairs should be cut by half, and that £2,000 could be match funded, and then review next year. Cllr Clegg stated that he disagreed with Cllr Bedford, in that many of the users of the TWVH were elderly, and the state of the car park was a very concerning problem that needed to be addressed. Cllr Grigg agreed that she felt it would be correct to address TWVH as a separate entity for the purpose of budgeting and precept.

Following a lengthy meeting between the Clerk and the Finance Officer, the Clerk advised Members that she had asked the Finance and Admin Officer to review the Thornwood Accounts, as they both had concern at the manner in which the Accounts package presented them.

The F&A Officer explained to members that perhaps the figures as presented were somewhat misleading, inasmuch as that the way the accounts system is set up and means that:

- any grants received towards hall work were not included under income for TWVH, however the expenditure was.
- the water bill for the hall also includes the cost of water for the Thornwood Allotments sited directly behind the hall, and a split in costs could not be ascertained.
- The expenditure relating to the Thornwood Play Area comes out of the TWVH code, however is not the responsibility of the village hall.

An updated copy of accounts specific to TWVH was tabled for members (copy below).

THORNWOOD VILLAGE HALL

	<u>2012/2013</u>	<u>2013/2014</u>	<u>2013/2014</u>	
<i>Income</i>		<i>Expected</i>	<i>Budget</i>	
Hall Hire	15306	13586	13112	
Misc	30	0	0	
Returnable Deposit	500	500	0	
Grant for stage	4375			
	<u>20211</u>	<u>14086</u>	<u>13112</u>	
 <i>Expenditure</i>				
Rates	1890	1940	2000	
Utilities (note 1)	3058	3159	3100	
Gen Maint	1359	1792	2250	<i>Increased due to Legionnaires testing</i>
Grounds Maint	1008	1380	1400	
Misc (see note 2 & 3)	8005	4014	1000	
<i>Less Ret Dep</i>	<i>-500</i>			
<i>Less unpaid cheque</i>	<i>-405</i>			

**North Weald Bassett
PARISH COUNCIL**

MINUTES

Meeting: COUNCIL

Date: 18th November 2013

Bin Hire/empty	744.8	744	750
Salaries	9607	9574	9680
	<u>24767</u>	<u>22603</u>	<u>20180</u>
	<u>-4556</u>	<u>-8517</u>	<u>-7068</u>
Net Loss	<u>29.77%</u>	<u>62.69%</u>	<u>53.90%</u>

Play Area costs	<u>4490</u>	<u>18507</u>	<u>1000</u>
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- Note 1 Utilities include Water bill for Thornwood, which also covers the Allotments
 Note 2 Includes £405 as an unpaid Cheque, which was later paid
 Note 3 Grant received for stage of £4375, cost was £5175

Assuming income of same as 12/13	£15,806	£15,306
<i>Net loss would be</i>	<i>53.88%</i>	<i>46.18%</i>

This showed that for 2012/2013, the hall run at a net loss of £4,556, however the Clerk reminded members that there were a number of factors which contributed to this:

- The Parish Council as an employee offers membership of the LGPS (Local Government Pension Scheme) to its staff, and as such the TWVH Caretaker receives a pension to which the Parish Council contributes. It is not thought that any other village hall in the Parish offers this, nor have to bear the expenditure.
- The TWVH Committee recently undertook a thorough Legionella risk assessment (completed by an outside company) which resulted in major costs being incurred in 2013/2014 to have the water supply come directly from the main. There is also an ongoing cost of £90 per month to ensure the Parish Councils H&S obligations are met.
- The TWVH recently paid for a complete Asbestos survey to be completed at a substantial cost.

Cllr Mulliner expressed his concern that the TWVH Committee was requesting a very large sum of money when the hall is making a net loss at the expense of other tax payers in the Parish. The Clerk asked Cllr Mulliner how he would suggest this was dealt with, to which Cllr Mulliner stated that it was his opinion the Parish Council should 'get rid of it'. The Chairman stated that Cllr Mulliner had proposed that the hall should be sold and asked if there was a seconder. Cllr Mulliner stated that he hadn't proposed this, but it was just his opinion.

Cllr Bedford stated that the extent of the legionella testing being completed monthly was not necessarily required, and that the Management Committee could simply complete a risk assessment to identify any areas of risk. The F&A Officer stated that it was not as simple as that, as all the H&S documentation and guidance regarding the issue of Legionella and how to deal with it stated that a competent person should be tasked with the regular required checks. The Clerk asked Cllr Bedford if he would be willing to take on this task for the TWVH, confirming that the guidance received by the PC states something different. Cllr Bedford **AGREED** he would visit the Parish Council office, and discuss why in his opinion the monthly checks currently being

undertaken are not required. It was **NOTED** that Cllr Spearman had stated he would be willing to be trained if necessary to adequately carryout any tests if appropriate.

The F&A Officer stated that the TWVH Management Committee had informed the Parish Council that they believe the state of the car park is now a Health & Safety concern. Therefore, the Parish Council did have a duty to listen to the Committee, and to create a plan of action to resolve or assess the issue. The Chairman stated that he had received a verbal quote of a minimum of £18,000 to repair the car park.

Cllr Bedford stated that each of the requests from TWVH Management Committee should be reviewed using a risk based approach. The request for new doors was not deemed to be a H&S issue and as such was dismissed, as was the flooring works. The car park was however considered necessary works. Cllr Bedford continued, stating that the most essential works had now been identified. Cllr Grigg stated that if the works required were urgent, these funds may need to be taken from earmarked reserves if necessary.

Cllr Clegg **PROPOSED** £4,000 should be precepted for this year to set the wheels in motion for repair works to TWVH car park. This was **SECONDED** by Cllr Eldridge. A vote was taken as follows:

For:	7
Against:	4

Cllr Collins stated that he felt the roller shutters would be a good asset, and **PROPOSED** that they were precepted for. Cllr Adams **SECONDED** this. A vote was taken, the results of which were as follows:

For:	6
Against:	4
Abstentions:	1

CONFIDENTIAL - Regarding Weald Common Play Area, the Clerk gave a summary of the grant funding application made by the North Weald mums to the CIF. Councillor Collins advised Members that he felt that this Council should not put such a substantial sum into the 'pot' - after lengthy discussions, it was **AGREED** not to precept any monies for these works other than the £1000 agreed from the Environmental Committees' Budget – the Clerk would also continue to attempt to contact Paula Etherington to get an answer regarding the Youth Club funds. Cllr Collins asked how this project was being managed, specifically in terms of the equipment being chosen, and if it fits with the original design, and ownership and maintenance. He continued, stating that whilst he remains supportive and encouraged that members of the community are being so active in trying to improve the play facilities in the village, it should not be forgotten that this is land belonging to the Parish Council, and as such the Council should be heavily involved with the process.

Cllr Adams stated she agreed with Cllr Collins comments, and also reminded Members of her concern that Hastingwood has no play facilities, and that it seems quite a lot of money to give considering the lack of play facilities in other areas.

Cllr Bedford stated that he felt the North Weald Mums should present a plan to the Parish Council for consideration. The F&A Officer noted Cllr Collins concerns, stating that the Parish Council should be more involved in this project. Cllr Clegg

suggested that the Environmental Committee should set up a sub-committee to deal first hand with this project. This was **AGREED**.

The Chairman stated that in light of the earlier discussion regarding the profitability of the Thornwood Village Hall, would it therefore be appropriate to charge the North Weald Mums for an event they are holding in the hall over the coming weeks. This comment was noted, however it was **AGREED** not to charge for the event.

Councillors discussed the suggestion of £200 to clean the war memorial, however there was some confusion as to which memorial this was referring to. Cllr Grigg stated that the memorial at St Andrews Church was in need of some 'blackening', and Cllr Bedford stated the paving slabs at the Debt of Honour needed clearing too. The Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council do not own the Debt of Honour, and although it had been cleaned in the past, it may be prudent to contact Winton Ramsey, the owner, to advise him of the Councils concerned. A sum of £200 was **AGREED** toward the cost of works to the memorial at St Andrews Church.

Councillors considered the need for repairs to take place at a number of other parish owned car parks including the Cemetery, and it was **AGREED** that £20,000 should be precepted for and placed into an earmarked reserves for any essential maintenance works.

INCOME

		2014/2015
		SUGGESTED BUDGET
101 Precept TOTAL		
103 Interest - Deposit TOTAL		80
104 VAT TOTAL		0
<i>Misc</i>	105/1 Donations	0
	105/2 Repayments and Refunds	0
	105/3 Grants	11,461
105 Miscellaneous TOTAL		11,461
<i>TWVH</i>	107/1 Hall Hire - Regular user (own Ins)	7,500
	107/2 Misc	0
	107/3 Returnable Deposit	0
	107/5 Hall Hirer - Occasional (no ins)	5,000
	107/6 Hall hire – Storage	612
107 Thornwood Village Hall TOTAL		13,112
<i>Cemetery</i>	108/1 Plot Purchase	2,000
	108/2 Interment	2,000
	108/3 Memorial	1,000
	108/4 Misc Funeral costs	0
	108/5 Transfer Fee	50
	108/6 GOR grant renewal	0
108 Cemetery TOTAL		5,050
109 Dog bin Recharge TOTAL		280

<i>Allotments</i> 110/1 Allotment Rental	1,862
110/2 WFG Key Deposit	0
110 Allotments TOTAL	1,862
111 Weald Common Investments TOTAL	0
112 Remembrance Sunday TOTAL	1,100
TOTAL	32,945

2014/2015 BUDGET / PRECEPT

<i>EXPENDITURE</i>		2014/2015 SUGGESTED BUDGET
<i>Gen Admin</i>	501/2 Telephones & Internet	2,000
	501/3 Stationery	1,900
	501/4 Maintenance and Equipment	750
	501/5 Photocopier	4,000
	501/6 Postage	480
	501/7 Audit	1,260
	501/8 Books & Publications	50
	501/9 Training	500
	501/10 Insurance	4,400
	501/11 Subscriptions	1,700
	501/12 Accommodation	2,173
	501/13 Emergency Planning	50
	501/14 Community Day	0
	501/15 Hospitality Allowance	200
	501/16 Bank Charges	0
	501/17 Website	200
	501 General Administration TOTAL	19,663
<i>TWVH</i>	502/1 Rates	2,000
	502/2 Utilities	3,100
	502/3 General Maintenance	2,250
	502/4 Grounds Maintenance	1,400
	502/5 Miscellaneous	1,000
	502/6 Play Area Maintenance	1,000
	502/8 Bin Hire/Empty	750
	502 Thornwood Village Hall TOTAL	11,500

<i>Office Salaries</i>	503/1 Basic Salary – Admin	50,500
	503/2 Tax & Ni – Admin	15,000
	503/3 Superannuation – Admin	15,000
	503/4 Travel and Subsistence - Admin	1,200
	503/5 Temporary Cover – Admin	0
	503/6 Overtime	1,000
503 Salaries - Office		82,700
<i>Cemetery</i>	504/1 Utilities	0
	504/2 Grounds Maintenance	5,350
	504/3 Furniture	200
	504/4 Miscellaneous	0
	504/5 Memorials	500
	504/6 Bin hire/empty	400
	504/7 Grave Digging Fees (inc 504/2)	1,000
504 Cemetery TOTAL		7,450
<i>TWVH Salaries</i>	505/1 Basic salary – TWVH	4,900
	505/2 Superannuation – TWVH	1,900
	505/3 Travel & Subsistence - TWVH	0
	505/4 Temp Cover – TWVH	0
	505/5 TWVH - Tax and NI	130
	505/6 Overtime TWVH	2,750
505 Salaries - TWVH		9,680
<i>Street Lighting</i>	506/1 Electricity	3,155
	506/2 Light Maintenance	2,000
506 Street Lighting TOTAL		5,155
<i>Open Spaces</i>	507/1 Bluemans End Rental	215
	507/2 Bluemans End Maintenance	900
	507/3 Dog Bins	1,360
	507/4 Noticeboards	100
	507/5 Bus Shelters Maintenance	75
	507/6 Vandalism Contingency	1,000
	507/7 Norwegian Memorial Grounds Maint	800
	507/8 Public Seats	60
	507/9 School Green Lane Play Area	800
	507/11 Village Sign & Grass Cut	450
	507/12 Misc	100
	507/13 Pike Way	660
	507/14 Thornwood Nature Reserve	200
507 Open Spaces General TOTAL		6,720
<i>Allotments</i>	508/1 Utilities	850
	508/2 Grounds Maintenance	800
	508/3 Miscellaneous	800

508/4 Key Deposit	0
508 Allotments TOTAL	2,450
<i>Weald Common</i>	
509/1 Grounds Maintenance	0
509/2 Play Area	0
509 Weald Common TOTAL	0
<i>B/Millen Walks</i>	
510/1 Leaflets and Marketing	0
510/2 Furniture and Signage	0
510 Bassett Millennium Walks TOTAL	0
511 Remembrance Sunday TOTAL	1,450
512 Grants and Donations TOTAL	0
515 Elections TOTAL	250
516 Miscellaneous TOTAL	2,000
518 Public Works Loans Board TOTAL	2,394
519/7 Newsletter costs TOTAL	1,000
520 TWVH - Field Fund TOTAL	750
521 TWVH - Structural Repairs Fund TOTAL	3,000
TOTAL	156,162

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

<u>Item</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>NOTES</u>
1 Recoup monies used for Cemetery Works	£1,000	It was AGREED to precept £1,000 to be placed into earmarked reserves for Cemetery.
2 Play Area Emergency Works Fund	£500	It was AGREED to precept £500 to be placed into an earmarked reserve for play area emergency works.
3 Repayment of PWLB	£0	It was NOTED that the current loan ends on 30th March 2025. Total cost to continue paying twice per year is £27,553.76, a difference of £2,774.76. It was AGREED that the F&A Officer should ascertain if lump sums can be paid off of this loan, and the financial implications of this, however not to pay off for this year.
4 Play in the Park	£200	It was AGREED that £200 should be precepted for this very useful community scheme.
5 Joint Standards Committee	£500	It was AGREED that £500 should be precepted to be placed in an earmarked reserve.

6	Grants for local organisations	£0	It was AGREED not to precept for these costs this year.
7	Bulb Planting 2014/15	£150	It was AGREED that £150 should be precepted for next year, however the Environmental Committee should look at planting poppies in light of the WWI anniversary.
8	Commemorative WWI booklet	£200	It was AGREED that £200 should be precepted for a booklet (full details to be confirmed) commemorating the lives of soldiers who fought in WWI.
9	Restrip Floor TWWH	£0	It was NOTED that the North Weald Village Hall have their floor stripped once every 4/5 years, however the TWWH have never had this done since the hall was opened. However, it was AGREED not to precept for these works.
10	Street Lighting - Insurance	£0	It was AGREED to continue with insurance by way of an external company.
11	Overhead Projector	£200	It was AGREED that the Chairman would ascertain if the projector could be fixed, if not, a letter should be written to the manufacturers, and if this did not resolve the issue, a new one should be purchased.
12	Tour de France	£500	It was AGREED that some form of celebrations would take place, and a contingency of £500 precepted for to cover these costs.
13	Roller Shutters - TWWH	£882	It was AGREED to precept £882 for these costs (please see previous notes in the agenda).
14	Resurfacing TWWH car park	£4,000	It was AGREED to precept £4,000 for these works (please see previous notes in the agenda).
15	Car parks	£20,000	It was AGREED to precept £20,000 toward the costs of repairs to the Parish owned car parks within the Parish.
16	1x set of doors TWWH Extension	£0	It was AGREED not to precept for these costs (please see previous notes in the agenda).
17	Weald Common Play Area	£0	It was AGREED not the precept for these costs (please see previous notes in agenda)
18	War Memorial St Andrews	£200	It was AGREED to precept £200 towards the cost of cleaning the war memorial at St Andrews Church.

19	Administration of Queens Hall	£0	The Clerk explained that this was suggested to the Queens Hall Charity as an idea for them to request a grant from the Parish Council to fund an administrator for the hall, however a large minority were completely against this idea, stating that there would be a caveat attached to any grant. It was therefore AGREED not to precept for any funds, to which a number of Councillors also stated it would be inappropriate to do so anyway.
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Total Additional Items	£28,332
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Members looked at the total anticipated expenditure for 2014/2015 against income in order to establish what the precept for this period should be.

All Councillors **AGREED** a recommendation should be put to full Council for a 0% increase in precept for 2014/2015 at **£152,002**.

F.1306 STAFF SALARIES AND EMPLOYMENT (EXEMPT Para 3)

Members **NOTED** that three recommendations would be discussed at the next Personnel Committee meeting as follows:

- The F&A Officer is expected to finish her CiLCA qualification before March 2014, and as such will be entitled to receive an upgrade of 1 scale point.
- An increase in scale point of 1 point for the Administrative Officer
- The continued employment of the Administrator for a period of 1 year, based on a renewable 3 month contract of employment at basic rate.

These factors have been accounted for in the 2014/2015 budget, however may be subject to change dependent on the agreements reached at the Personnel Committee meeting. This was **AGREED** by members.

With there being no further items to discuss, the meeting was closed.

Meeting closed

Signed