

## HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes: **Policy and Finance Committee** held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021

### Present Cllrs:

**J Knight (Chairman)**  
**C Ash-Edwards (Vice Chairman)**  
**R Bates**  
**R Cromie \*\***  
**C Evans**  
**C Laband**  
**R Nicholson \***  
**M Pulfer**

Apologies \*\* Absent \*

Also present: Steven Trice (Town Clerk), Andrew Sturgeon (RFO). Cllr S. Inglesfield, Cllr C. Cheney and S. Wickremaratchi

### 35. Apologies

R. Cromie – Ill Health – the Chairman wished a speedy recovery.

### 36. Minutes

The minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee held on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

### 37. Substitutes

C. Cheney for R. Cromie

### 38. Declarations of Interest

None.

### 39. Payments and receipts and income and expenditure reports for the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Members had before them the list of payments and receipts and income and expenditure reports for the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020. The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) presented the reports and welcomed questions.

- It was asked, reference the water bills who Castle Water were as most people are billed by Southern Water. It was noted that the Town Council had been with Castle Water since the deregulation of water to companies and they bill the Town Council by default.
- With regard to the Fox Hill village sign it was asked why there was a sum of £1,000 as it was thought that the Town Council had contributed to the installation of the sign. It was noted that this money was a payment that was made by the Fox Hill Residents association for maintenance so has, and will sit as reserve until needed.
- The matter of reserve movements was raised with regards to the trees on South Road. It was explained that this was a sinking fund for their replacement and for ongoing maintenance and will increase in line with the expectancy of replacement.
- It was questioned why a reserve report had not come forward. It was noted that this was due to be tabled in March.

Members then **RESOLVED** to;  
**recommend to Full Council the list of payments and receipts, and income and expenditure for the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020.**

- 40. Allowances payable to Members and staff for the financial year 2021/2022.**  
The Town Clerk presented the report and noted that there needed to be an update to regulate the number of nights (maximum of 3 nights) for stay on a twinning trip, which had been brought to his attention outside of the meeting. This was agreed last year and had not been amended so this would take effect straight away. It was then noted that the allowances showed a 0% rise across the board. Without further comment,

Members **RESOLVED** to;  
**agree the expenses and allowances payable to Members and staff for the financial year 2021/2022 as presented in the tables (a) and (b) under point 4 of this report, which show no change (0% rise) to the rates payable during 2020/2021.**

- 41. Town Council Budget 2021/2022.**  
The RFO presented the 2021/2022 budget by describing the process of how the budget was arrived at including the Environment and General Proposes Committee considering their budget in December. It was noted the budget papers showed the best/a realistic forecast possible to end of March 2021, which demonstrated what a difficult year the Town Council had endured due to the Covid 19 pandemic in relation to the effect on the income for hiring's of the Town Hall. Turning to the budget for 2021/2022, the draft budget showed a normal year of operation with a reduction forecast for income for 2021, but the RFO had achieved a balanced budget with a 1.6% rise in the budget along with a small 0.2% in the tax base. With this, again the RFO welcomed questions. The Leader of the Council thanked the RFO for putting the budget together and commended the budget by stating it was great to see that there was no effect on staffing and the Town Council continues to provide the Community Warden, who had done amazing work alongside the groundstaff at the vaccine centre amongst other valuable jobs around the Town. It was asked if default on Council Tax payments would affect the budget. In response the Chairman stated that Mid Sussex District Council was responsible for Council tax collection and has a guarantee that it will pay the monies due. There were fears previously in relation to the collection rate but this has remained stable in Mid Sussex.  
Finally, it was noted and confirmed that in discussion no Councillor would receive an incremental increase in their allowance during 2021/2022.

Members **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council to;  
**ratify the recommendations of the Policy and Finance Committee dated 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and,**  
**(a) approve the 2021 - 2022 budget as presented in Appendix 1, with a 1.6% increase in Council Tax and a 1.8% increase in the precept (which includes a tax base rise of 0.2%). This equates to a precept of £681,486. This will represent an average Band D Council Tax of £55.86 p.a.**  
**(b) approve the earmarking of a proportion of the projected 2020/2021 underspend to the Western Road Cemetery at £4,000.**

**42. External Auditor for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.**

Without comment and in noting the delay in the response from the External Auditor due to extension in line with the Covid 19 outbreak,

Members **RESOLVED** to;  
**note and formally minute the report of the External Auditor for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.**

**43. Mid-Year Report of the Internal Auditor.**

It was noted that the Internal Audit had been undertaken, again late due to Covid 19 issues, during December by the Town Council's new Internal Auditors. It was noted a comprehensive report was presented with a number of highlighted matters arising, none of which were concerning, but more of a guide to improve and streamline the Council's financial activities and day to day activities. The Clerk made note of the five points raised as presented with the main thrust of putting information in one place on the website in line with Transparency Act requirements. It was stated that it was a very reassuring report, it showed that the Town Council was well managed, it was a credit to the RFO and Town Clerk and it was excellent news that a new Internal Auditor with fresh eyes had given the Town Council a clean bill of health.

Members **RESOLVED** to;  
**adopt the Mid-Year Report of the Internal Auditor, and any recommendation made within the report, as presented by Mulberry and Co.**

**44. Revised process for budget management.**

It was noted that the matter was required to be pulled out of the Internal Audit report as there needed, if agreed, to be a change to Financial Regulations. The matter related to the Town Council's newly adopted Financial Regulations within Standing Orders and the flexibility of budget management. This was in terms that the budget agreed not being able to be exceeded without Committee approval, which whilst being all well and good, was not practical for a Council of Haywards Heath's size. This matter had not been picked up during adoption of the Financial Regulations and only related to the current year, so nothing had occurred out of order to date. Members accepted the principle of the suggested amendment without debate and proceeded to debate the level of flexibility under recommendation a) at £1,000. It was felt that this recommendation was a sensible way forward, did not put any onus on the Town Council and enabled officers to act in a business-like manner, and was unanimously agreed. It was asked whether the matter would be deferred to the Annual Meeting of the Town Council where Standing Orders and Financial Regulation were reviewed. The Town Clerk stated it would be sent to the next Meeting of Full Council on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2021 as the matter needed dealing with within this year, as May would be too late to allow such to occur in the current financial year and the May meeting of Full Council could be after the end of year visit by the Internal Auditor.

Members **RESOLVED** it be recommended to **Full Council** that;  
**a) the Town Clerk be given authority to authorise budget overspend to a maximum of £1,000 in writing to the RFO with the Committee Chairman copied in, with all authorisations being reported to the next meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee.**  
**b) Financial Regulations of the Town Council be amended to reflect the changes resolved under a).**

#### 45. Grants

Members received three applications, including one new application and two that had been deferred from the last meeting of the Committee, which were presented with additional information within the covering report. With regards to the Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity, it was noted that the application was in order as the Town Council had donated money within this year to recognise Dame Vera Lynn on her passing, so the rule of only one grant award per year had not been breached. It was highlighted that a substantial amount of money had been released from Section 106 Formal Sports for the Town to the Tennis Club via Mid Sussex District Council and the Town Council had supported the planning application. It was also noted that the Grove Garden trustees had not made any application for the same project and had diverted other grants to other equipment needed for their project. Members were supportive of all three applications so,

Members **RESOLVED** to;

- a) award a grant of £250 to Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity towards running costs.
- b) award a grant of £500 to Grove Garden towards the purchase of a shed.
- c) award a grant of £750 to Haywards Heath Tennis Club towards the costs of a new clubhouse on the following basis with conditions.

*That a grant be awarded in 'principle' to demonstrate local support and help attract other funders. Give the Tennis Club one year to secure funding and another year to develop the facilities. Monies held until full funding is demonstrated and the Town Clerk, under delegated authority in liaison with the Chairman, agree a level of funding if the full project does not come to fruition.*

#### 46. Town Council's Equality and Diversity Policy and Equal Opportunities Statement

It was noted that after research it was found by officers that both documents were up to date and in good order for adoption. The review of the documents was part of three pledges made by the Town Mayor during debate at July's Full Council meeting regarding Black Lives Matter along with a Forum meeting and staff training (pending) on diversity which had been held. Members approved the documents as presented and then,

Members **RESOLVED** to;

**re-adopt the Town Council's Equality and Diversity Policy and Equal Opportunities Statement after review.**

#### 47. Urgent Business

None

Meeting closed at 8.19pm