

HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes: **Policy and Finance Committee** held on Monday 17th January 2022.

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: Cllr S. Wickremaratchi, Steven Trice (Town Clerk), Andrew Sturgeon (RFO).

40. Apologies

None.

41. Minutes

The minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee held on 15th November 2021 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

42. Substitutes

None.

43. Declarations of Interest

None.

44. Members Allowance and Staff/Members Expenses

Members had before them a report, which presented, in line with the budget setting process, a recommended 5% rise in Members allowances and Town Mayor's allowance along with such a rise for subsistence rates. It was countered whether there was a need for Member Allowances and the proposed percentage rise recommended. It was noted that allowances were in place to enable people with different personal backgrounds and needs to become a Councillor. It was also suggested if the Councillor did not wish to keep their allowance, they could give it to charity or a community organisation. Members noted the other rises within the report without comment. Members then voted, on the grounds that there were differing views on the matter regarding Members allowances, to accept the rise proposed with voting 7 for with 1 abstention. With this the Chairman proposed a resolution, which was seconded, to simplify the wording of the recommendation tabled in the report. This was moved to make the raise in subsistence rates stand out from those other allowances (car and transport set by the NJC Green Book), which could not be change and had to be frozen.

Members **RESOLVED** to **agree the expenses and allowances payable to Members and staff for the financial year 2022/2023 with a 5% rise in Member Allowances and Town Mayor's allowances and a 5% rise for subsistence allowances.**

45. **Budget 2022/2023**

The Chairman thanked the RFO for putting together the budget, which Members had before them for consideration. At that point the Town Clerk explained that there was an error in his covering report and Members noted that under clause 9 of the report it should have read 19p not 9p per month rise in the Council tax charge. With this the RFO presented the budget as per the report and welcomed questions from Members on the basis that a balanced budget had been set showing a 5.3% rise in the precept,

- It was asked why there was a sharp rise in cemetery income. The RFO explained that the figure was based on a 5% rise as agreed by the Town Council in fees and set on a five-year average income.
- It was noted that there was conservative figure on hiring income. The RFO explained this was due to uncertainty at the present time and potential consequences of hirers not returning.
- The cost of diesel versus electric, in light of the new electric van was questioned along with the associated costs. The Town Clerk explained that the electric van was being phased in and the diesel would stay in service until September. The budget was based on this so the realisation of the electric costs would be seen during the next financial year.
- Members also noted that there would potentially be complications with regards to the office salaries budget with the annual pay award, which was not expected for 2021/2022, still being negotiated, which would result in an overspend in this year if agreed, or a need to carry monies over to the 2022/2023 if agreement could not be reach before early March.

Again, due to differing views on the percentage rise recommended, with no substantive reason given, Members voted on the proposed 2022/2023 budget with 7 voting with 1 abstention, with this.

Members **RESOLVED** to **recommend to Full Council,**

(a) the 2022 - 2023 budget, with a 4% increase in Council Tax and a 5.3% increase in the precept (which includes a tax base rise of 1.24%). This equates to a precept of £717,463. This will represent an average Band D Council Tax of £58.09 p.a.

(b) approve the earmarking of a proportion of the projected 2021/2022 underspend to

- a. Capital Budget at £10,000.**
- b. Western Road Cemetery at £5,000.**
- c. Muster Green at £5,000.**

46. **Grants**

Members had two applications before them, which both asked for contributions towards running costs. Without comment, apart from acknowledging the excellent work that both organisations undertook within the community.

Members **RESOLVED** to;

- a) A grant of £250 to 4sight Vision Support towards running costs.**
- b) A grant of £250 to Albemarle Centre towards running costs relating to the Mid Sussex Duke of Edinburgh Centre.**

47. Town Hall Land Rent Review

Members noted the increase to the land rent on which the Town Hall is located upon by Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC). There was surprise that agreement had not been reviewed, but it was accepted that was a failing of the land owner so it was pleasing that the Town Clerk reported that he had challenged a back pay request, which was subsequently waived. There was also surprise that rent fees were asked for, as it was understood that historically MSDC used rooms in the Town Hall for free. The Town Clerk responded that only MSDC officer (internal) meetings were free and any other meetings were paid for.

Members **RESOLVED** to **note the increase in the Town Hall land rent and authorise an increase of the budget in 2022/2023 if required.**

48. Delegated Authority to the Town Clerk

The Town Clerk introduced the item by stating the matter of delegation had been a hot topic of conversation between Town/Parish Clerks via the Sussex Association of Local Councils. This was coupled with advice from Hedly Solicitors (who represent SALC), given the issues faced during the pandemic, that Councils should review the presentation of the legal context that allow such delegated authority to given, so that residents could understand what was allowable for the Clerk to do, as there had been numerous challenges from uninformed residents and sometimes Councillors, due to the lack of clarity in some Standing Orders. The Town Clerk added that the document was not a power grab on behalf of himself, but also offered the opportunity to formalise the scheme of delegation. Members were content with the document, but did question the human resource aspect of the delegation. The Town Clerk responded that as the chief officer and proper officer the Town Clerk needs to have authority to hire, fire and administer appraisal and pay rises etc along with the legally required paperwork. Councillors needed to be judge and jury on any decisions/actions by the Town Clerk otherwise they would be compromised through the process. This issue was relevant in complicated human resource matters in the past. With this unanimously,

Members **RESOLVED** to **recommend to Full Council the revised Scheme of Delegation to the Town Clerk as presented in Appendix 1 and agree to the amendment of Standing Orders to allow the amended scheme.**

49. Urgent Business

None

Meeting closed at 8.10pm