

HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL

POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 15th January 2024

A.M Cooke (*Chairman*)
S. Walsh (*Vice Chairman*)
A. Bashar
R. Cromie
P. Lucraft
A.M Lucraft
A. Murray
A. Rees

* Absent ** Apologies

Also present: Town Clerk, Responsible Financial Officer (RFO),
Committee Clerk and 20 members of the public.
Cllr Pascoe attended (ex officio) and Cllr Ellis.

50. Apologies

There were no apologies.

51. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 13th November 2023 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Chair.

52. Substitutes

None.

53. Public Forum

In relation to item 12 - A representative from Bentswood Hub CIC spoke, she talked about her background and lived experience highlighting the importance of youth services. This lived experience has given her the tools to develop the Bentswood Hub. Bentswood Juniors is a youth group for 7–11-year-olds. She expressed that the need for these services is greater than ever. Without funding the key members of staff who lost their jobs in June after the collapse of Sussex Clubs for Young People have been offering their services for free. She urged the council to continue to fund the youth group, without delay and divert the money from Clarion Housing to the Bentswood Hub CIC, saying the community needs services not research and again reiterated the good work that the club does for the local community. Statements of support from some of the children and parents were also shared with the committee.

A resident then spoke, he wished to note his support in relation to Item 8, in particular the grant application for Bentswood Hub CIC.

Regarding Item 10 para 5 S106 contributions, he stated that policy should be promoted upwards not forced downwards. In relation to the S106 contributions collected he noted they were allocated with the strategic focus upon the forth coming County Park for Hurst Farm not specifically burial grounds. These funds should not be spent elsewhere by MSDC or WSCC but used by the Town Council for the good of the local area.

He also asked that the Town Council consider declining the reallocation of funds under agenda item 12 and that the funds are spent directly for the good of the community.

The chairman thanked the speakers. 17 members of the public left the meeting at 20.15.

54. Members' Declarations of Interest

Cllr Cromie declared a personal interest in items 8 and 12 as she is a director of the Bentswood Hub CIC.

55. To consider Town Council Members Allowance and Staff/Members expenses

Members were asked to consider and agree the expenses and allowances payable to members and staff and consider Members Allowances for the financial year 2024/2025 shown in the report pack.

It was countered by Cllr Cromie that any increase to Members Allowances sends the wrong message during a cost-of-living crisis. Cllr A. Lucraft felt that the members allowance helps to attract potential councillors who otherwise may not be able to apply, allowing for a wide range of candidates and an inclusive Council. The rest of the allowances and expenses including the Staff Recognition were agreed.

A vote was taken. In respect of Members Allowances with a vote of 7 in favour, 1 against and 1 abstaining, members then **Resolved** to agree the increase of 6%.

In respect of General Expenses all were in favour and as such **Resolved** to agree the increases.

56. To consider the Councils Draft Budget for 2024-2025

The Deputy Clerk/RFO gave an explanation of the draft budget and asked for any questions. The RFO noted that income for the coming year was hard to predict because last year the income from weddings was inflated due to the fallout from Covid. A member queried Lindfield PC budget code, the RFO explained this was for a grass cutting service provided historically.

Also queried was the £2000 'Leave no one behind' budget line, the Clerk and RFO explained this is now being shown under a separate line as previously it was included in the Events budget.

The budget heading 'Yearly Subscriptions' was questioned, the RFO gave an explanation and breakdown of the subscriptions, it was thought that the name should be amended to 'Professional Subscriptions' for clarity.

It was suggested that the amount budgeted for the new website seemed high, it was noted that this was an estimated cost and more discussion on the development of the website would take place at future meetings.

It was countered by a member not to raise the 2024/2025 budget due to the cost-of-living crisis and they felt the council should consider cutting back on delivery.

It was countered that the Haywards Heath precept was low compared to neighbouring Towns and Parishes. The rise would allow the council to offer more services to the residents. Now was not the time to cut back on services especially with the lack of funding coming from central government to local councils, if the Town Council had extra funds available these may help to bridge the gap and support the needs of the community as they arise.

A vote was taken and with 8 in favour and 1 against members **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council, the draft budget for the 2024–2025 financial year with a 12.5% rise in Council Tax and a 13.2% increase in the precept (including a 0.65% increase in the tax base) to £869,580, representing the average Band D cost of £69.26 per annum. (In monetary terms a £7.69 per annum rise from the band D cost for 2023/2024 of £61.57, or 64p per month, 15p a week or just over 2p a day).

3 members of the public left the meeting at 20.57.

57. To consider applications for Town Council Grants

Members noted that of the £10,000 budget £7838.89 was already allocated leaving a balance of £2161.11 for the remainder of this financial year.

Although members agreed all the grant applications were for worthy causes members were mindful that the amount of grants requested was higher than the balance remaining in the grants budget. Each application was discussed on an individual basis, with three applications being deferred until more funding can be allocated to the budget.

Members **RESOLVED** to award;

- a) a grant of £250.00 to Age UK to fund a new weekly Sunday gathering.
- b) a grant of £1000 to Bentswood Hub CIC for startup costs to fund 2 months rent.
- c) a grant of £500 to Haywards Heath Lions Club towards running costs for the Swimathon.
- d) The grant application to Haywards Heath Tennis Club toward running costs is to be deferred to a future meeting due to grant funds available.
- e) The grant to St catherines Hospice for a one-off cost towards new bed is to be deferred to a future meeting due to grant funds available.
- f) The grant to St Peter and St James towards running costs is to be deferred to a future meeting due to grant funds available.
- g) a grant of £350 to Sussex Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus towards running costs.

58. To receive the 2024/2025 committee timetable

The Clerk referred to the report in the agenda pack and the timetable presented.

Members **RESOLVED** without comment to

- (a) Agree the timetable of Council meetings for the next Council year 2024– 2025 including the date of the 2025 Annual Town Meeting.
- (b) Continue with the start time of 19.30 for Standing Committee and Full Council meetings.

59. To consider the allocation and potential requests that could be made for the expenditure of Section106 contributions in haywards Heath

Members views were sought, and it was agreed to set up a working group to progress discussions. Terms of reference to be decided.

60. To consider the Town Council Community Award Scheme 2024 onwards

The Clerk referred to the ECO/Project Officers report and reminded councillors that the Community Awards had been previously agreed at Policy and Finance meeting on the 15th November 2023.

Members noted the report and agreed to the criteria presented, welcoming the introduction of the awards. **RESOLVED.**

61. Clarion Futures and youth services for Bentswood

Due to the members of the public in attendance the Chairman brought forward agenda **Item 12 - Clarion Futures and youth services for Bentswood.**

Members were asked to consider the reallocation of monies resolved under minute 25 of the meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee dated 11th September 2024.

Cllr Pascoe suggested that whilst the proposal from MSVA has some merits the proposal was lacking and services to the area should be prioritising the immediate and critical need of communities before considering a research project and therefore they could not justify reallocating the funds.

Cllr Cromie spoke on behalf of the Bentswood Hub CIC explaining the vital role the Town Council can play ensuring there is help for vulnerable families in the community. She spoke of how youth groups mould our children into young adults who want to give back to the community, praising the leadership courses available at the youth group. The member suggested that the proposal from MSVA was generic and urged the council to fund action and delivery to help those who need it the most.

Cllr Rees spoke of seeing the good works of the Bentswood Hub CIC first hand and did not agree with allocating funding towards research.

Cllr Lucraft noted that there was concern in the community over vital service and the Council needed to help to ensure that services continue. It would be useful to get Clarion Futures to contribute funds into the community. It was suggested that future discussions on social media between community groups should be more considered.

The Clerk reminded members that this agenda item was to solely decide upon whether to reallocate the funds it was not tabled to remove funds from Clarion nor was it tabled to allocate funds to another organisation. He reminded members that only items on the agenda can be discussed.

A vote was taken.

With all in favour it was **RESOLVED** not to reallocate monies.

62. Urgent Items

Cllr A Lucraft advised the committee that ex councillor Mr Moons wife Ursula had sadly passed away; the committee gave their condolences. The Clerk will send a letter of condolences on behalf of the council.

The meeting closed at 09.26pm.