

## HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL

### POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

#### Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023

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)

**15. Apologies**

None.

**16. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

**17. Substitutes**

None.

**18. Public Forum**

None.

**19. Members' Declarations of Interest**

In relation to item 11 – Bentswood Hub. Cllr Cromie confirmed that she was no longer a Trustee of the Bentswood Community Partnership, but she stated that she had been in conversations with the Bentswood Hub and Clarion Futures.

In relation to item 8 Appendix 2 – Grants. Cllr AM Lucraft stated that she was a Member of Haywards Heath and District U3A so declared a personal interest.

**20. Lists of Payments and Receipts, and Income and Expenditure Report for the Period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023**

The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) presented the Lists of Payments and Receipts, and Income and Expenditure Report for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. The RFO then welcomed questions, which there were none.

Members **RESOLVED** the **lists of payments and receipts, and the income and expenditure report for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023.**

**21. Bank Balances and Bank Reconciliation Statement as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

Without comment.

Members **RESOLVED** the **bank balances and the reconciliation statement as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023.**

## 22. Grants Criteria

Members had before them the grants criteria as requested at the last meeting of the Committee, which included the four existing grant categories and the levels of funding associated to each. It was noted that the application form was in the remit of the Events and Community Officer and Members were asked to review the policies that underpinned it. Member's initial attention was drawn to running costs in light of the current huge inflationary rises, which had put pressure on groups and organisations. It was felt that the maximum of £250 for running costs needed to be raised to £500 as it was too low an amount of money especially with the added issue of the winter months pending. It was then asked how long the maximum level of grant award for each criteria had been in place for? The Town Clerk responded by saying there had be no change for over ten years even though there had been material changes to the criteria wording. This response led to discussion on the implications of simply increasing the running costs amount of funding or looking at all four criterias that were available for award. It was asked if the running costs could be set at £500 but the other three criteria be left flexible to each application if Members felt more money was worthy of award. The Town Clerk advised against such as it would break Council policy on grant award levels and set a dangerous precedent for future applications. To this end, it was suggested that each of the four criterias be increased by £250 each. Leading on from this decision, before resolving such, Members considered the impact of the suggested rises on the overarching grants budget of £8,500 as Members had concerns the rises would put pressure on the budget with some hard decisions having to be made towards the end of the Council year if demand outweighed the funding available. With this in mind, it was moved that the Grants budget be raised to £10,000 for the rest of the financial year alongside a rise of £250 per grant criteria to absorb higher awards, which was seconded and unanimously agreed. The matter of organisations who had received awards already this year was the raised in terms of whether they could top up their grants through re-application. The Town Clerk stated that only three awards were made at the June meeting of the committee with two being locked in prices for one off purchases so there was no need to revisit those. The other was for running costs from a large organisation so this could be looked into. Members were reminded that organisations can only apply once a year. It also was confirmed that any changes could be implemented straight away and could be applied to the grants being considered under the next item, with this;

Members **RESOLVED** to increase the Town Council's grants budget to £10,000 from £8,500. The cost of the extra £1,500 would be met from unrestricted reserves. In addition, the following increase in grant funding per category was resolved.

- a) Start-up grant (for newly established groups, defined as those in existence for less than 12 calendar months), can include applications for running costs and equipment) - maximum £1,000 (from £750).
- b) Running costs - maximum £500 (from £250).
- c) One off cost (eg purchase of equipment) - maximum £750 (from £500).
- d) Capital costs (eg costs associated with building projects or alterations to premises) - maximum £1,000 (from £750).

## 23. Grants

Members had six grant applications to consider if all being approved, where appropriate, the new funding levels resolved under the previous minute would apply. The awards were made with the following comments. With regards to the stated membership of the Family Support Network it was confirmed that the figure quoted for membership in the application was made up of people engaged with by the organisation. It was felt that this was a reflection on the cost-of-living crisis and the needs of many families. Members made the award with a statement that praised the organisation for working with families and vulnerable people by connecting them to appropriate people and services, whilst also providing outings for children. It was also noted that the organisation had struggled with administrative costs and staffing

over the last twelve months for so extra funding in line with the new grant funding levels would be welcomed. It was then noted that U3A provided excellent services in the Town and had a good working relationship with the Town Council. The Community Cinema at Ashenground Community Centre was welcomed and it was noted that the latest delivery of a cinema was a more professional approach after lessons being learned from previous attempts to provide a much-needed cultural offering in the Town. No comments were made regarding the applications for Air Ambulance Charity Kent, Sussex and Surrey and Kangeroos and awards were made acknowledging the services they offer. In relation to Haywards Heath Town District Guides the amount requested were questioned so the Town Clerk referred to the application and confirmed the amount was correct as a cost £424.80 had been omitted from the report. Members asked that the Town Clerk seek further information to see if more information and costings can be added the grant applied for, circa of £250, to help with other set up costs, for instance uniforms for new members on the basis that the children were not provided with uniform. This information and agreement of the extra funding was delegated to the Town Clerk who would update Members once the matter was resolved. With this;

Members **RESOLVED** to award;

- a) a grant of £500 to Family Support Network towards running costs.
- b) a grant of £239.95 to Haywards Heath and District U3A to purchase a new Gazebo.
- c) a grant of £750 to Ashenground Community Centre to contribute towards equipment for a community cinema.
- d) a grant of £750 to Kangeroos towards the purchase and hire of equipment for a community event.
- e) a grant of £500 to Air Ambulance Charity Kent, Sussex and Surrey towards running costs.
- f) a grant of £748.94 to Haywards Heath Town District Guides towards startup costs for a new guide unit. In addition to this Member delegated authority to the Town Clerk to see if the unit needed further funding towards the costs to the total award level of £1,000. The Town Clerk would the agree if the release of a further £250 was necessary.

#### **24. Investment Opportunities for the Town Council**

On request of the Committee the Town Clerk presented a report outlining recommendations for the investment of Town Council monies so to attract an improved return on the funds that it holds currently, which were not realising a substantial rate of interest with NatWest Bank. It was noted that the recommendation was to invest with CCLA Investment Management Public Sector Deposit Fund (CCLA) on a variable yield funding basis with instant access to funds when required on authorisation by two of the four Members signatories. It was asked what due diligence had been taken on the fund by officers in terms of any risks associated with making such an important decision around the investment of tax payer's money. The Town Clerk stated that the fund was used by Principal Councils (including Mid Sussex District Council), parochial churches and was recommended by the National Association of Local Councils and the Society of Council Clerks. It was also noted on research quickly undertaken at the meeting that the Church of England also invests, who would have undertaken forensic due diligence on CCLA and their ethical status. Furthermore, Town Clerk had spoken to fellow Clerks across the Country who invest with CCLA who provided positive responses and that he had looked at other options such as Unity Trust Bank and Close Brothers who both work within the Town/Parish sector. Each investment option was as risky as each other and that of Natwest Bank. Members then considered the risk element from investment and rereferred to the fact sheet to see where monies were invested in terms of UK vs global opportunities. It was noted that the UK was the biggest proportion as stated in appendix 1 as presented. It was suggested that to protect the Town Council that monies there should be future consideration splitting monies into different institutions. This was noted and felt to be sensible but something that would need to be progressed in the future with the potential for a

further £250,000 being placed elsewhere with the possibility of fixing that proportion of monies in a longer-term fixed arrangement.

It was asked how the recommendation of £300,000 of investment was arrived at on the basis that there was £850,000 in the current account, which was considerably over cash flow needs. The Town Clerk stated it was a best estimate looking at the reserves of the Town Council. Members felt on the grounds of the instant access and the excellent rate of interest coupled with the second half of the annual precept arriving imminently that £500,000 would be in order. This was moved and seconded along with the wish that the interest be re-invested into the fund to gain compound interest. It was then unanimously agreed,

Members **RESOLVED** to invest **£500,000 from the Town Council's current bank account at Natwest into the CCLA Investment Management Public Sector Deposit Fund and agreed that.**

- a) **the monthly dividend being re-invested into the fund.**
- b) **the signatories on the fund account be taken from those who were appointed as payment signatories, namely Cllrs Walsh, Ellis, Cooke and Murray, by Full Council on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023.**
- c) **the Town Clerk is authorised to access information regarding the account.**

## **25. Bentswood Hub Funding**

Members welcomed the news that the Bentswood Hub, under the auspices of Clarion Futures, seemed to be heading in the right direction for re-opening in the forthcoming few weeks. However, there was concern that the process had been rather slow and that the Hub was not back up and operational for the start of the academic year to support the children and younger people and indeed the wider community. It was felt that September was a crucial time for children and younger people who were transitioning between schools, moving into the areas and facing friendship issues. It was reported that the delays were with DBS checks, the issues of re-employment due to Clarion Future's processes, which in hindsight should have been completed over the summer months. It was therefore agreed once the right people were in place the monies should be awarded with caveats that would give a clear message on the importance of youth services at the Hub, ensure money was not diverted to administrative costs and set against measurable targets. It was also questioned what other funding was being pursued by the Hub and if Mid Sussex District Council had been approached, or indeed made an award outside Warmer Place grants made last year? It seemed that nothing had been granted and the Hub raised its running costs through the centre manager last year, but services over and above were funded from larger organisation including Coca Cola and Waitrose. Members on the understanding that Clarion Futures would be funding the operational running of the Hub, felt that ratifying the £6,000 earmarked and adding another £6,000 was appropriate as that would ensure the future of the Bentswood Juniors and allow funding to be sourced for the seniors and other services separately. The award was the formally agreed with the following conditions;

- That the funding be specifically used for running of the running of Bentswood Juniors.
- The funding be paid in two instalments with £6,000 when needed immediately and the further £6,000 six months after.
- That the release of the second £6,000 be subject to satisfactory information being provided to the Town Council through a Service Level Agreement.

Members **RESOLVED** to ratify the earmarked allocation of **£6,000 to part fund the Bentswood Hub Junior Programme from the Community Warden budget underspend and a further contribution of £6,000 to £12,000 to pay for the whole of the annual running costs from unrestricted reserves. The second payment be subject to satisfactory service level, which was delegated to the Town Clerk to review and agree.**

**26. External Audit Report**

Members welcomed the report and noted the comment regarding petty cash and felt that the report was commendable and thanked the Responsible Finance Officer. It was noted that Internal Auditor stated that the Town Council didn't have petty cash but in fact it did, which was confirmed by the Responsible Finance Officer on questioning by the External Auditor. Members felt that everything was in order so it was strange and then it was confirmed only £150 was held

Members **RESOLVED** to **note and formally agree the report of the External Auditor for the year ended 31 March 2023 along with matter regarding petty cash as raised in the report.**

**27. Internal Audit Arrangements**

Members were comfortable with the formal extension of three years and were happy to enter into the agreement. It was felt that Mulberry & Co were a competent Auditor and the support of training opportunities was welcomed. It was asked what the previous hourly rate was, the Town Clerk stated he would need to check and come back to Members. Notwithstanding this, Members felt the rate was very competitive for a qualified Internal Auditor and then;

Members **RESOLVED** to **appoint Mulberry & Co as the Town Council's Internal Auditors for a further three years.**

**28. Items Agreed as Urgent by the Chairman**

It was asked if the Town Clerk would outline the budget setting process. It was noted that the process in place was that undertaken by the previous administration and stated that if Members wished to change or adapt the process, they were welcome to.

The Town Clerk explained that there would be a number of Committee Chair's meetings starting in September, where the Town Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer would get a steer from Members on what they wished to progress in the next financial year with regards to projects and initiatives and officers would add any needs they required for operational matters. On this basis the Responsible Finance Officer would then also start working on the knowns/fixed cost and then roll the figures into a budget proposal. In turn, the Environment and Purposes Committee would consider its budget in December, which then would lead to consideration of the full budget by the Policy and Finance Committee in January with Full Council sign off for submission to Mid Sussex District Council by the deadline of the 31<sup>st</sup> January. There would also be some forward budgeting work undertaken alongside this process.

It was then asked if the Town Council had a disaster recovery plan. The Town Clerk says the basis of one exists and there are a number of plans in place, but the document needs to be formalised.

**The meeting closed at 20:41pm.**