

**HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL
POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 16th January 2023

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

* Absent ** Apologies

Also present: Town Clerk, RFO

37. Apologies

R. Nicholson – work commitments.
C. Evans – personal commitment.

38. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 14th November 2022 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

39. Substitutes

None.

40. Members' Declarations of Interest

There were none.

41. Members Allowance and Staff/Member Expenses Policy.

The matter of Members Allowances was raised as there was a concern regarding a forecasted uplifted of 5% in the budget for the next Council year. It was questioned whether such was acceptable in the current economic climate. This concern was countered by assertion that Members Allowances were in place to ensure that anyone of any circumstance could consider being a Councillor without financial constraints being a consideration. It was also noted that any Councillor could decline to take the allowance and/or donate it to a third pay group or organisation. There were no matters raised in relation to any other of the expenses, but it was noted and agreed that the allowance for an evening meal had not kept pace with rising costs so this allowance was raised to £16 as suggested. The other allowances, it was agreed, were still manageable at the current time. On the basis that there was a Member of the committee opposed to the rise in Members Allowances, with the expenses policy seconded for resolution, a vote was taken with five for and one against.

Members RESOLVED to agree the expenses and allowances payable to Members and staff for the financial year 2023/2024 with a 5% rise in Members' Allowances and Town Mayor's allowances and a 10% rise for subsistence allowances with a specific rise to £16.00 for evening meals.

42. Budget 2023 - 2024.

The 2023 – 2024 budget was presented by the RFO with the following questions being raised.

- It was suggested that both the forecast for cemetery income and Town Hall lettings income was very conservative. The RFO explained that both income streams could have large variances within this financial year and indeed the next. These variances could be incurred due to the uncertainty about the number of interments during the year and as the Town Hall was not seeing a full return to pre-Covid and relies heavily on specific hirers this loss of any established hirers. This was demonstrated recently due to the loss of the Harlequin Bridge Club, which was one of the Town Hall's regular hirers. However, it was noted that the Town Hall was getting busier, but it had been a slow process. Members were satisfied with the response,
- It was noted that the level of the subscriptions budget had increased considerably. It was explained that the Council's subscription to Parish Online had been discounted in partnership with other local Councils through West Sussex Association of Local Councils. This had come to an end and would not be renewed so the Town Council has to pay full fees, for what is a very useful and well used application for both staff and Councillor queries.
- The huge rise in the gas and electric budget was noted. The RFO added that the forecast had been made using recent bills to get the best forecast possible, but felt that there would be a need to adjust the budget in such uncertain times.
- It was noted that Ward Budgets May 2023 onwards would need to be reviewed due to the changes in Ward set up for the Town. The Town Clerk confirmed that a report will be forthcoming for the new Council to consider.

It was then moved by a Member of the committee that the budget needed to be reviewed line by line as was not prudent and good value for the tax payer. This was dismissed by the other Members of the Committee an alternative budget was not forthcoming when the Member was asked to provide one. At the end of the debate the Budget as presented was moved for resolution, on the grounds that it was a balanced budget that allowed for much needed topping up reserves especially in light of £20,000 of works needing to be completed in the current financial year. This was also available within year budgets after the Council had granted to the Ukraine appeal and helped the Bentswood Hub. It also shored up reserves after unrestricted reserves were made available to help organisations with the cost-of-living crisis grants. On the basis that there was a Member of the committee opposed to the budget, with the Budget seconded for resolution, a vote was taken with five for and one against. Then a second vote was taken regarding the movement of reserves (i) to (v) as recommended, which was agreed with five for and one abstention. In closing, the Chairman moved thanks to the RFO for his work and diligence in preparing the budget. These sentiments were echoed by all Members of the Committee.

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

- (a) the 2023–2024 budget as presented in Appendix 1, with a 6% rise in Council Tax and 7% increase in the precept (including 1% in the tax base), representing the average Band D cost of £61.57 per annum. (In monetary terms a £3.48 per annum rise from the band D cost for 2022/2023 (£58.09) or 29p per month 6p a week or a 1p a day).**

- (b) the recommendations made by the Responsible Financial Officer to top up the following reserves (as per note 5 in Appendix 1);
- i. Capital Reserve - £10,000
 - ii. Western Road Cemetery - £10,000.
 - iii. Muster Green - £5,000.
 - iv. Maintenance of Buildings and Grounds - £5,000

43. Grants

Members had before them three grant applications. Members were content that all of the applications met the Council's grant criteria so were happy to make the following awards.

Members **RESOLVED** to;

- a) a grant of £750 to Hope towards start-up costs for a Haywards Heath Sparkle Group.
- b) a grant of £500 to Northlands Wood Primary School towards Physical Education equipment and storage.
- c) grant of £250 to Sussex Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus towards running costs.

44. 2023 – 2024 Committee Timetable

Members agreed the Committee Timetable as presented without making any comment or amendments to the dates suggested. Discussions then turned to the start time of the meetings with varying thoughts about 7pm commencements or in some cases earlier. It was suggested that the new council, at its first meeting in May, would be better placed to decide on timings as it would their timetable. This coupled with the fact that there was going to be a large number of new Councillors who may have different personal circumstances. To this end, it was agreed to leave any consideration until the Annual meeting of the Town Council

Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the **2023/2024 Committee timetable**.

45. 2023 Financial Risk Assessment

Without comment noting the raised risk for Allotment provision because of the ever-increasing waiting list and the Cemetery due to the delay in being able to obtain the land for the proposed new cemetery off Hurstwood Lane, with this,

Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the **2023 Financial Risk Assessment**.

36. Items Agreed as Urgent by the Chairman

None

The meeting closed at 8:26pm.