

## HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes: **Policy and Finance Committee** held on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019

### 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: Town Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer (RFO).

### 36. Apologies

None.

### 37. Minutes

The minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee held on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

### 38. Substitutes

None

### 39. Declarations of Interest

None.

### 40. Members Allowances and Staff Members Expenses for 2020/2021

The Town Clerk introduced the annual review of Members Allowances and Staff Members Expenses for 2020/2021, which acted as prerequisite for the budget. Cllr Bates asked that the Committee re-considered the amount of allowance paid to Councillors generally and the 3% percentage rise recommended in the report. It was also suggested that monies for childcare could be offered on a separate basis. Cllr Laband counted the suggestions that the reason that the Town Council must offer allowances was to ensure that anyone could become a Councillor. He felt passionately that no one should be precluded from doing so because of financial constraints. It was also noted that the Town Council had looked into separating child care expenses but it wasn't justifiable due to tax restrictions. Member were also reminded that the Town Council was the last Town Council in the District to introduce allowances and started at 50% lower than their peers. The Town Council has now caught up to that higher level so not adding a rate of living increase year on year may need for a future budget to be set with large percentage rise to increase allowance, which would not be sensible. It was also felt that the services and equipment that a Councillor uses to undertake the role of a Councillor will increase year on year so the inflationary rise covers this and does not profit a Councillor further. Cllr Bates was reminded that any Councillor could waive their right to receive an allowance when they wished. Councillor Bates restated his opposition to the Members Allowance rise. With this table (a) was then agreed. At this point it was asked that the Committee go back to table a) as Cllr Laband had a further question he had omitted to ask during debate. The Town Clerk advised the Chairman, that on the grounds that the overarching item

had not concluded and the Committee had not moved onto the next item on the agenda it would be allowable to hear the question. It was then asked for clarification on the number of nights that the Town Mayor could claim for accommodation on Twin Town visit as it was not stipulated in the report. It was felt that this good observation and that in future the Town Council could fall foul of prolonged stay. With this in mind it was moved that the stay be limited to three nights, which was duly seconded without debate or challenge. Members then moved to table (b). It was asked if anyone had claimed cycling mileage and whether a payment should be offered for walking. The Town Clerk stated that no-one had claimed for cycling mileage. It was also noted that the expenses were normally paid for trip outside of the Town, which it would be difficult to walk to and probably to ride to. The idea of a walking allowance was then dismissed.

On the closure of discussion Cllr R Bates again re-iterated his objection to the rise in Members allowances. As a result, it was asked if a vote was required, this was confirmed. **Members then voted on the proposed 3% rise in Members Allowances. The increase was Resolved 6 votes to 1 vote.**

Members **RESOLVED** to

**Adopt the expenses and allowances payable to Councillors and staff for the financial year 2020/21. With the addition of wording to table (a) to limit the accommodation of a Town Mayor to three nights per annual visit to one of the Town's twinned towns.**

#### **41. Town Council Budget 2020/2021**

The Town Clerk introduced the report that presented the Town Council expenditure for 2020/2021, which showed a 10.1% increase in the Precept and 8% payable by the Council Tax Payer. It was noted that cumulative rise in Members allowances for 2020/2021 was actually £496 not £970 as stated in table under point 9 of the covering report. Supported by the RFO, who explained the process to arrive at the budget presented as per the covering report, the Town Clerk invited questions from the Committee with the following points and question being raised;

- It was asked why there had been a sharp rise in the caretaking budget? It was noted that the increase of Town Hall hires now meant that the building was a seven day a week operation. The man of hours for caretaking had not increased with the considerable rise in hires. As a result office staff and regular hirers were helping to cover opening and shutting. The increased budget was needed to employ a cover Caretaker when required. It was also noted that it was known that current caretaker may need a prolonged period of absence during the year so again cover would be needed for that period.
- It was asked why there was still a substantial rise in income for roundabouts even though West Sussex County Council had taken income generation back from the Town Council? The Town Clerk explained that a fee for maintenance had been agreed with West Sussex County Council.
- It was asked why the Depot rent had gone up considerably? This was on the grounds that the Town Council got a very favourable deal when it took on the depot back in 2011. Subsequently, the Borde Hill estate management company had realised this and during the re-negotiation of a new three-year lease and had applied current market rates. The Town Clerk explained where this meant that there had been a

considerable in cost, he had negotiated a deal that meant the would be a staggered rise over the three years to meet the current market value of the Depot.

- Officer were asked to explain, for the record, why the Town Council had introduced a budget for highways works? It was explained that the monies would be used to pick ups works, such as weed spraying, that West Sussex County Council had stopped undertaking due to service cuts.
- It was asked why there was no breakdown of the expenditure for Town Council events. The Town Clerk referred the Member to the Environment and General Purposes Committee meeting dated the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 where a full report was presented including a breakdown of events and their budgets.
- The need for an ongoing budget for the South Road tree was questioned? This was a sinking fund to replace the Trees (when they are moved due to size) and the planters come to the end of their useful life. This was envisaged to be circa 10 years so the budget act as a reserve, which was also earmarked to replace any dead trees or broken planters with the level of funding being reviewed year on year.
- The reduction in election expenses was queried on the basis that the Town Council had had one during the current financial year and were officers sure that budget would allow for building reserves for a future by-election and the future full election? It was noted due to the 2019 cost of the 2019 being much lower than quoted by the District Council due a discount generally because of the pilot scheme used that the savings for election, notwithstanding the Franklands by-election which cost is still outstanding, meant that RFO was satisfied that the amount budgeted for was satisfactory. It was added that the Town Council's policy was to pay for by-election within year meant the reserve for election was
- It was asked how many groundstaff the Town Council employed and what the depot was? It was stated that there were five groundstaff and the depot is where they store their equipment.
- It was asked if the current website was fit for purpose a why there was a need for a new one? It was explained that the current website was at the end of its useful life and officers were not happy with its functionality and indeed the service that web company provides. It was noted that the website needed to be upgraded to meet legislation in September for accessibility and the cost for doing so on the existing website was not much different circa £2,000 to £3,000 taking into account the improved functionality of a new website.

On the closure of discussion and all questions being answered satisfactorily for Member the Chairman moved to resolve the budget. Cllr R Bates stated that he objected to the 8% raise in precept on the grounds that the Town Council such a rise was acceptable and the expenditure of the Town Council should be reviewed and reduced. As a result, it was asked if a vote was required, this was confirmed. **Members then voted on the proposed 8% rise in Council Tax as recommended, this was Resolved 6 to 1.**

Members **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council;

- a) **The draft budget for the 2020–2021 financial year with an 8% rise in Council Tax and 10.1% increase in the precept (which includes a tax base rise of 1.97%), representing a**

precept of £669,569 and the average Band D cost of £54.99 per annum.

- b) The recommendations made by the Responsible Financial Officer for the use of the projected unspent monies for the current 2019-2020 financial year including;
- a. Western Road Cemetery - £5,000
  - b. Muster Green (Trees) - £3,500
  - c. Maintenance of Buildings and Grounds - £1,000
  - d. General Reserve - circa £9,800

**42. Grants**

Members considered a re-submitted grant application from St Peter and James Hospice, which was agreed unanimously without comment.

On awarding the grant it was asked what amount of funding was left in the pot as the next meeting of the Committee as the next meeting of the Committee would be last of the year. The Town Clerk reported that with the award made that evening there was still £4,295 remaining, which was a considerable amount in comparison to recent years. It was agreed that the Town Hall and Councillors should promote the grants scheme in the hope that more applications would be made for the meeting in May.

Members **RESOLVED** to;

**Award a grant of £500 to St Peter's and St James Hospice to purchase equipment and materials for art therapy courses.**

**43. Lone Working Policy**

Members considered the Lone Working Policy document and without comment;

Members **RESOLVED** to;

**Adopt the Town Council's Lone Working Policy.**

**44. Urgent Business**

None.

- 45.** Members **RESOLVED** to enter into exempt business.

**46. Exempt Minutes**

The exempt minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee held on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

Meeting Closed at 8.19pm