

## HAYWARDS HEATH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes: **Policy and Finance Committee** held on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2017

### Present Cllrs:

**J Ash-Edwards (Chairman)**  
**C Laband (Vice Chairman)**  
**C Ash-Edwards**  
**A Boutrup**  
**D Dorking**  
**S Hillier**  
**M Pulfer**  
**S Wickremaratchi**

Apologies \*\* Absent \*

Also, present: Mr A Sturgeon (RFO)

**45. Apologies**  
**None.**

**46. Minutes**  
The minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2017 were taken as read, confirmed as a true record and duly signed by the Chairman.

**47. Substitutes**  
None

**48. Matters Arising**  
None.

**49. Declarations of Interest**  
Cllrs Boutrup and Cllr Wickremaratchi both declared personal interests in items 8 and 9 as both items included quotes and/or services offered by South East Business Solutions for whom they are both employed by.  
Cllr Hillier declared a personal interest in item 8, which included income from West Sussex County Council on which he served as a Cabinet Member.

**50. New Administrative Post for Town Hall**  
Members were supportive, in principal, of the Clerks request to employ an additional Member of staff to undertake administrative work at the Town Hall. However, there was concern that the newly established Mayor's Secretary role was not covering five days a week and that consideration should be given to the new administrative post covering the office in the afternoon up to 5pm. This was on the grounds that staffing levels were heavy in the mornings and quite light late pm. In response, the Clerk felt that detail of the contractual arrangements for the new appointment could be dealt with outside of the meeting and informed Members that the new administrative post would cover the Mayor's diary in the absence of the Mayor's Secretary. On this basis, Members sought assurances from the Clerk that the proposal was robust and would meet staffing needs of the Council moving forward. The Clerk re-stated his feeling that within the introduction of the Marketing and Communication post and a small re-organisation of existing job roles that the proposed administrative role was critical to assist existing officers with their workload and indeed lighten the burden of work on the front office. It was also asked what the situation was with pensions and the conditions of the contract. As previously stated the conditions could be agreed by the Clerk in liaison on with

the Staff Working Party and because of the timescales for recruitment that the water could be tested to see what response come from adverts with differing forms of contractual arrangements. Member felt that in light of the responses to their question they were fully supportive of the proposal, with this,

Members **RESOLVED** to;

**Appoint a new administrative Member of staff on a 24 hour per week contract with a starting salary of £10,697 (16,491) NJC scale point 13.**

**That the Clerk be given delegated authority to agree the terms and condition of employment.**

**51. Staff and Councillor Allowance and Expenses Policy**

Member noted the report and that the general expenses recommended were in line with those paid by Mid Sussex District Council, which had no changed for a number of years. It was suggested by a Councillor that Members may wish to consider waving their allowance increase for the 2017/2018 year to help with the budget deficit to being faced. Members felt that this would not be appropriate due the annual rises, as previously agreed by the Council, to bring the Council's Members allowances into line with other Town Councils. Members were also reminded that individual Members do not have to take their allowances and are able to opt out at any time.

Members **RESOLVED** to

**Adopt the Staff and Councillor Allowance and Expenses Policy as presented.**

**52. Town Council Budget 2017/2018**

In light of the resolutions of the proceeding three items Members then turned to consider the 2017/2018 budget as presented without any alterations resulting from the previous decisions made by the Committee. Members noted that the budget presented was based on a 6.5% rise to precept including a 4% rise in Council Tax, but the budget presented still contained a considerable forecasted deficit of £18,791. As a result, the starting point of the Members discussions was based on finding a way to eliminate the forecasted deficit. The Responsible Finance Officer presented the budget and took Members through each budget heading welcoming questions as he went along. The following matter were brought to the RFO's attention.

- Members felt that the forecasted Cemetery income was very cautious against the current year's forecast especially in light of the increase in burial fees as agreed at the last meeting of the Committee. With this in mind the forecasted income was increased to £30,000 from £24,500, which reduced the deficit reducing to £13,291.
- The Street Light improvement scheme budget was reduced by £2,000 which reduced the deficit to £11,291. It was however noted that there was expenditure needed on the Town Council's lighting stock in light of a recent audit undertaken.
- Of the options presented, in the covering report for Election Expenses, it was agreed to take the costs of the Franklands Ward By-Election in the current financial year and reduce the budget for election expenses to £5,065 from £10,965, which reduced the deficit by £5,900 to £6,226.
- The capital budget was reduced by £3,000 from £15,000 to £12,000 to make the deficit £3,226.
- The Advisors Fees budget was reduced by £2,600 to leave a small deficit of £626.

Other points raised during debate included,

- The suggestion of rising different Council Tax bands, which was explained not to be possible.
- That it needed to be noted that insurances would be reviewed next year and the reserve budget was diminishing, so an increased budget would need to be a consideration in the 2018/2019 budgeting setting process.
- It was asked if the Town Council had the best IT solutions. This was in terms of looking at the costs of purchases purchasing computer packages and server arrangements against working from a cloud and the hiring software as a better option. Members views seemed to differ so the matter was left for officers to look into.

Members also agreed to move and earmark £7,280 (New Burial Ground) and £7,500 (Maintenance Building and Grounds) from the general reserve

At the conclusion of discussions, it was confirmed that Members agreed to the changes in the budget to enable a balance budget to be presented to Full Council on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017 and then;

Members **RESOLVED** to

**Recommend the 2017–2018 budget to Full Council for adoption, with a 6.5% increase in the precept representing the average Band D cost of £45.58 per annum and a 4% rise in Council Tax.**

**Move and earmark £7,280 (New Burial Ground) and £7,500 (Maintenance Building and Grounds) from the general reserve.**

*The following item was heard before the budget, because there may have been budget complications resulting from the decisions made.*

**53. Structural Re-organisation of the Town Hall**

Members were presented with a report that outlined the estimated revenue and capital costs for a structural re-organisation of the Town Hall office area. This work had been undertaken by the Clerk in liaison with the staff working party to look at increasing productivity, by reducing disturbances from the front counter and based on the general feeling that staff were working in an unfavourable office set up. It was felt that by some Members that taking forward the project account without any plans or procurement was not justifiable. Where the Clerk tended to agree, it was a difficult position because the architects would want comfort of a capital budget before undertaking the abortive cost associated with planning application and design costs. As a result, the Council needed to commit to the project before plans were drawn up to protect the revenue monies and to give the consultants comfort that the project was viable. In light of the findings of the report and the discussions of the Committee it was deemed the project was cost prohibitive unless the precept was increased further or a public works loan was taken out, again this would mean a precept increase to service the loan costs. It was firmly believed that efficiencies could be found without spending money, politically it would be very difficult to justify spending the money upon such a project and the quotes could come back with an increased price. The Clerk was directly asked, as the head of paid service, what his views on the proposal were because he had to manage the office and the staff on a daily basis. The Clerk felt that a re-organisation would benefit the office and reduce the disturbance of staff, but he could not see a way that he could recommend the expenditure quoted as it would not be prudent take reserves down as far as indicated in the report, a public works loan could not be serviced and s106 monies were not available. In concluding discussion on the matter, it was agreed not to progress the matter. It was suggested that office be

decorated, the Clerk stated that the officer areas would be tidied and consideration given to finding a consultant experienced with space saving ideas could be engaged with. There was also the suggestion of moving some staff upstairs and partitioning off one of the rooms. The Clerk said he would investigate this idea taking into account loss of income from any room effected by changes and how any release of space downstairs could be utilised. Members therefore decided that the propose structural re-organisation of the office are was a nice to have expenditure, especially in light of the needed to reduce a deficit budget, and not necessarily required. With this,

Members **RESOLVED** to

**Not to progress the structural re-organisation of the Town Hall.**

**54. Grants**

Members considered three grants, all of which were approved. The applications two application for running cost made by St Catherine's Hospice and Cruse Bereavement were agreed. In relation to St Francis Bowls Club Members felt it would be more appropriate to grant towards the scoring units and therefore agreed to grant £480. It was also asked if there was the possibility of the scoring unit holding the Town Council logo to recognise the financial contribution for the Council. With this this,

Members **RESOLVED** to award;

- a) **A grant of £250 to St Catherine's Hospice towards running costs.**
- b) **A grant of £480 to St Francis Bowls Clubs for the cost of purchasing six scoring units.**
- c) **A grant of £250 to Cruse Bereavement Care towards running costs.**

**55. Urgent Business**

None

**56. Exempt Business**

None.

Meeting closed at 9.43pm