



**HAILSHAM TOWN COUNCIL**  
**FINANCE, BUDGET, RESOURCES AND STAFFING COMMITTEE**

**REPORT (Minutes)**

of the meeting of the Finance, Budget, Resources and Staffing Committee,  
held at the Fleur-De-Lys Meeting Room, Market Street, Hailsham  
On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019 at 7.00 p.m.

FBR/19/5/  
39

**Public Forum**

No members of the public attended the meeting

40 **Present:** Cllrs. G. Blake-Coggins (Chairman), N. Coltman, B. Granville, R. Grocock (Vice Chairman), K. Hinton, B. Holbrook (Substitute for P. Holbrook) & T. Powis.

41 **Officers Present:** Mr J. Harrison (Town Clerk).

42 **Apologies For Absence:** Cllr P. Holbrook & Ms M. Foster (Finance Officer)

43 **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of Finance, Budget, Resource and Staffing Committee (Ref: FBR/19/4/21-38) held on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019, may be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the chairman.

44 **Declarations of Interest:** None made

45 **Accounts and Audit – Budget for 2020-2021**

45.1 Mr Harrison talked through the report from the Finance officer which gave the detailed budget as has been worked out in the previous meetings, including the key reasons why things changed:

45.2 There have been amendments to the budget papers for 2020-2021 since the July 2019 meeting;

- 3% increase across most of the budget areas as per the five-year budget in the business plan.
- Additional funding to Dog bin waste of £19,700, due to the expensive cost to get dog waste collected and disposed of.
- increase in utilities across most sites for Electric/Gas and Water due to increase prices.
- Drainage at Maurice Thornton Playing Field and Western Road recreation ground, this was previously agreed to come from reserves indefinitely however this is not sustainable.
- Plant/Skip hire costs as per the maintenance requirements
- The Horticultural and grass cutting contract is out to tender later this year, and as the current contractor under quoted for the grass cutting at the cemetery, and the recreation ground at James West due to come under the town council, there will be

an increase in the cost of this contract. Further details will be available in the Autumn. £25,000 as a guide figure from the Deputy Town Clerk.

- Festive Lighting increase for additional lighting as per costed plan detailed at communities committee. (£5K).
- Wealden Works! – Full council agreed to fund the project from 2020-2021 (£6K)
- Changing Spaces Pod – Full council agreed to provide a Changing Spaces pod however this is a new budget line for maintenance/cleaning/utilities (£13K).
- Defibrillators – New budget as previous funds have now depleted, and yearly maintenance is required.
- Continued funding for SOX Street Lighting Repairs agreed by Full Council £17,297.00
- Staffing budgets increased by 3% as per Town Clerk information. Members Allowances have 2.5% potential increase.
- Neighbourhood plan new funds added of £5,000.00
- The vehicle leasing contract is due for renewal in March 2020, as such we are will not know the actual expenditure cost for 2020-2021 in time for the budget setting, on the advice of the Deputy Town Clerk, a 10% increase (£1,000) in the budget would be prudent.
- Youth Project additional funds for security fencing (£3K)
- 4 Market Square is currently empty due to tenant ceasing letting agreement, so this budget may have to be removed - £6,500.00
- James West Centre income for hire/letting is now built into the budget.

45.3 Taking all the above adjustments into account and the removal in the Council tax support grant from Wealden District Council of £17,819.00, there is a shortfall at present of £92,759.00.

At the current band D tax rate of £138.55 this would require an additional 669 houses to be added to our current tax base of 7649.3. Council is expecting the tax base information anytime.

To cover the current shortfall, Council would need to increase the band D tax rate by 9% which is an additional £12.47 per year bring band D to £151.02.

45.4 It was also noted that we did not include in budget to quote for electronic devices for council members. We have an indicative quote close to £4K to supply tablets plus ongoing maintenance if committee wished to factor this into the budget.

45.5 **Queries raised and items discussed by the committee:**

The committee agreed that it was unsustainable to continuously add to the budget and that a 9% increase in the band D rate was not desirable.

45.6 Explanation of the context surrounding the Council Tax Support Grant, that had originally made up 20% of total budget. It was introduced when council tax benefit came in and reduced tax base by 20%. Central government had funded the short-fall with top-up grant on a reduced scale – paid to District Councils to be given to parishes and was passed on by WDC. Next year is first year without any CT support grant.

45.7 Query over the additional £5,000 requested by the neighbourhood Plan Committee: Mr Harrison clarified the situation. There is £11,175 remaining on the budget. The NP committee had agreed to commission the existing consultants to undertake a professional appraisal of the WDC Conservation Area at £2300 plus expenses and to ring-fence £4K of what's left to promote the referendum – this therefore only leaves £4-5K of the existing budget. The Consultants will need to do more work i.e. meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> needs consultant present. The NP Committee felt it was prudent to increase budget now rather than needing extra budget later on.

45.8 It was clarified that financial controls and audit regime determines that the council is required to keep an amount equalling 6% of budget in reserves.

45.9 Query as to whether it is possible to determine which areas of the budget are 'absolute costs' council will always have as overheads and therefore what's available for grants, projects etc.

45.10 Discussion that when groups or individuals come to meeting and ask for support, the council does not necessarily take into account whether these are meeting the council's priorities.

45.11 Discussion over the Changing Spaces pod. WDC have been asked WDC to part fund the installation, but that will not cover the revenue cost of maintenance.

45.12 How is the 3% 'blanket increase' across the budget actually applied and how much of it is going to be spent?

45.13 The Vehicle leasing contract is up for renewal and therefore council won't know the real price until March. Council is pushing to go onto electric vehicles however these are still very expensive. Committee agreed we should look at this again in three year's time as it is not worth considering now until the infrastructure gets better and the costs reduce.

45.14 How long is the contract on dog bins in place for? If HTC made a decision to stop using dog bins in a years' time this would reduce the budget. Other councils have done the same (examples given as Eastbourne and Tunbridge Wells). Council will need to highlight this is one of the reasons for the increase.

45.15 Confirmation of the budget setting process - where does the committee stand on the areas that have been agreed by council? FBRSC would come up with a report making recommendations and options to council with differing budgets. There is potentially less of an issue with a 4 or 5% increase. It largely depends on the increase in the tax base.

45.16 RE Street lighting - replacement of SOX lamps. Is this a four-year plan and how much longer is that running for, i.e. what year are we into in the four-year plan – **to be confirmed.**

45.17 Is the Street-light maintenance agreement we had with County Council set at a fixed amount therefore we don't need to increase it? - **to be confirmed**

45.18 Changing Spaces Pod: The budget includes an increase of £13K for the cleaning and maintenance, emptying Sani-Bins, supply of toilet roll etc. & this is probably a conservative estimate. The committee discussed whether we can delay installation to reduce the costs. This is not rescinding a previous resolution as there was no indication of deadline

45.19 4 Market Street property; it was explained that the property is currently vacant therefore there is no current rental income. It is not quite ready to be marketed but when it is will be done so through commercial agent. The rental income is in the budget as an income but need to be aware that might be an issue. HTC is reasonably confident it can be rented out and will be a rental stream.

45.20 Explanation of increase in dog hygiene bins emptying. The Contract was 'bought-out' and the new company refused to empty dog bins. Therefore HTC had to find a new contractor to empty the dog bin. HTC Had to agree a two-year contract. Committee discussed whether we can we reduce the bins – will also save money on staff time and black bags.

45.21 **RESOLVED to check terms of the contract to assess the costs of reducing the service or completely withdrawing and removing all dog bins.** Can we withdraw from the contract with adequate notice? Also agreed to find out what other councils local to Wealden and local district are doing.

The committee agreed a future meeting would be require din January when we had full view of the tax base;

**RESOLVED** to explore options of budgets without some of the key additions:

- Go through line by line and work out which don't need the blanket 3% increase.
- Not to add additional £5K to Neighbourhood Plan budget.
- To take out additional money for Festive Lighting £5K (& therefore keep budget at £11K)
- To recommend the reduction of the Grants Allocation by £5K (as was underspent by this amount this year)
- To Take out additional money to Wealden Works (£6K)
- To recommend deferring installation of the changing spaces pod by six months or more in order to reduce/remove the costs of maintenance and cleaning (£13K)

45.22 **RESOLVED** to produce three budget projections in conjunction with these reductions at: 0%, 5%, 9%.

45.23 **RESOLVED** to set an additional meeting for January to go over these amendments – the date set for Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2019 at 7.00pm.

46.0 There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.26pm

CHAIRMAN

DRAFT