



HAILSHAM TOWN COUNCIL
FINANCE, BUDGET, RESOURCE & STAFFING COMMITTEE

MINUTES

of the meeting of the Finance, Budget Resources & Staffing Committee,
held at the James West Community Centre
On Thursday 8th July 2021 at 7.00 p.m.

FBR/21/2/
27

Public Forum

None presented

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Present: Cllrs G. Blake-Coggins (Chairman), N. Coltman, P. Holbrook, M. Laxton & T. Powis

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Officers Present: J. Harrison (Town Clerk)

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Apologies For Absence: Cllr R. Grocock, Cllr K. Hinton and Mrs M. Foster (Finance Officer)

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Declarations of Interest: None

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Minutes of Previous Meetings

RESOLVED to accept the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance, Budget, Resource & Staffing Committee held on the 17th June 2021 (Ref: FBR/21/2/14-26) as a correct record and that they are signed by the Chairman.

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Accounts and Audit – Budget for 2022-2023

33.1

The committee discussed at length the report that had been presented by the Town Council's Finance Officer detailing the recommended approach to the budget and including specific recommendation or questions for the committee to consider.

33.2

Councillor Hinton had also submitted a document detailing a recommended approach to the budget. It was agreed that for the most part, this document gave a more detailed view of the current approach that was already being implemented.

The reference to Service Managers essentially meant the key officer team in the town council who do currently liaise with the Finance Officer on what their requirements will be for the coming financial year. The committee structure also then feeds into this process by assessing the budgets and suggesting projects and expenditure via resolutions and plans, including the Managed Maintenance Plan.

33.3

The Finance Officer had also included in the report a comparison and benchmarking exercise assessing how similarly sized town councils (i.e. with a similar level of precept) undertake their budget approach and the level of budget information they publish. Hailsham TC's budget approach looked for the most part very similar to other town council's and with a similar (and often more detailed) level of information. This had also been verified by the council's external auditor.

33.4

The suggestion of zero-based budgeting and how that might be built into HTC's process was discussed. The Town Clerk explained that a lot of the town council's activities were legal requirement, for e.g. the running of the cemetery, allotments and the maintenance to acceptable standards of the other buildings and properties, so for those aspects, a zero base might not be appropriate.

Cllr Powis stated that there are different views of what a zero-based budget approach is, and to a large extent, taking a set amount for existing activities that the council knows will be needed for the following year as a starting point could be seen as a zero-based approach.

33.5 Other points of clarity raised:

- Where budget amounts are underspent at the end of the financial year, budgets are 'rolled over' only where there is an ongoing commitment crossing financial years, not automatically.
- The 3% increase is not automatically added to all budgets - where they have been underspent this would not be applied.
- The committee agreed that Cllr Hinton's report was useful in capturing the process in a level of detail and formality not previously captured

33.6 Cllr Powis advised the committee that he had made contact with an officer at WDC who could provide estimates of housing completions each year, which would help predict the approximate increase in the council's tax base. For this year it would be 56 houses and for next 134 although these are very approximate numbers. The officer would be able to update the town council every six months. It was agreed that Cllr Powis would pass the details onto the Finance Officer Ms Foster.

33.7 The committee discussed the various points and questions raised by the Finance Officer's report:

Utility costs are currently being reviewed but are very unpredictable. Cllr Laxton noted that Hellingly Parish Council had recently fund a new supplier and made savings on their utility costs.

There is still very much a need for a budget to covid safety measures.

The situation with the Post office was still unknown due to the pandemic. It was hoped that income would increase as lock-down is lifted and due to the closure of Barclays Bank. **The committee requested that an analysis of Post office income would be prepared for the next Budget meeting.**

33.8 Community Grants – the committee agreed that they would like to see the grants back in the budget, as it had been removed this year, with a review of the criteria and reporting requirements to ensure full accountability.

RESOLVED to £11,000 to the budget for Community Grants (subject to final review at subsequent meetings and final recommendation to council of the budget in January 2022).

33.9 **Pitch and Hire Fees** - The Town Clerk reminded the committee that it is necessary (and a requirement for audit) for the committee/council to have reviewed its Pitch and Hire Fees annually. The committee agreed that the planned arrangements for the Maurice Thornton Playing Field, in discussion with hailsham Active, meant the situation there could be very different in the near future.

33.10 **Changing Places** – the committee agreed that it would need up to date cleaning and maintenance costs for the budget. The previous figure of £13K was now two years old. **Cllr Laxton to request these from Eastbourne BC, Knockhatch and other known providers of the facilities.**

The question of the possibility of vandalism and whether the Changing Spaces unit would be covered was raised. The committee also questions whether a review of hailsham's CCTV provision would be undertaken.

- 33.11 **Dog Waste Bins** – the committee was reminded of the previous resolution of council to replace all dog bins with multi-use bins in order to cut the costs of dog waste collection (£15K per annum). The question of whether the bins could be sponsored by pet companies was raised
- 33.12 **Brunel Drive Public Open Space Maintenance** – the Deputy Town Clerk had recommended adding £1000 to the budget for general maintenance of the area which was agreed. The committee discussed the process for HTC adopting the land and noted advice from the Town Clerk that Taylor Wimpey had not yet completed the outstanding tasks as required.
- 33.13 **Budget shortfall** – the committee noted that with everything included in the Finance Officer's report, this left a £17,068 shortfall. The budget setting process would involve more budget setting meetings and requests for funding from the significant committees, so this situation would change, subject to final recommendation of the budget to 'full council' in January, so there was still a long way to go.
- 33.14 The committee **RESOLVED** to accept the recommendation in the Finance Officer's Report plus those adjustments and additions it had discussed:
- 3% increase across most of the budget areas as per the five-year budget in the business plan.
 - Review of utilities across most sites for Electric/Gas and Water ongoing at present.
 - Staffing costs to be adjusted to reflect scale point movements, pension costs, and pay increase as per government notification, this is PENDING as information due in the Autumn.
 - Members allowances to be reviewed in December 2021, pending WDC panel update.
 - Covid-19 expenditure budget has been maintained at £5,000 for 2022-2023.
 - £20,000 in the budget to help support the post office
 - £11,000 Annual Grants to local community groups to be added to the budget
 - All hire and letting fees of properties/playing fields need to be reviewed as per Internal Audit requirement
 - Changing Places cleaning and maintenance costs to be added once up to date figures received
 - Ringed fenced for replacement bins - £2,369.00, as per previous resolution.
 - There are no further costs for the newsletter or additional costs for the council's various websites.
 - Outdoor Works Supervisor is currently reviewing the maintenance plan for 2022-2023 and once completed, the committee will be updated.
 - To include an additional £1,000 for the maintenance of the POS and play area at the James West Centre
 - The costed budget for Communities and Events 2022-2023 will be considered by due to the communities committee in August 2021, therefore the budget has been input as it stands in 2021-2022.
 - The Youth service budget will be discussed in the coming month and will be updated if necessary for the next budget meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.57pm.

CHAIRMAN

DRAFT