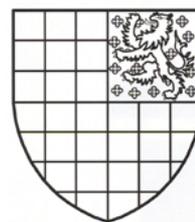


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

of the meeting of the **Finance Review Working Party**

held on **Tuesday 2nd December 2014**, in the **Yarrow Room, Town Hall**, Lewes at **6:30pm**.

PRESENT Cllrs M Chartier (*Chairman*); J Lamb; S Murray; and (*not appointed to the Working Party*)
Cllrs Catlin and Stockdale.

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*) Mrs F Garth (*Asst. TC and Civic Officer*)

FWP2014/01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Apologies were accepted from Cllrs Daly, who had a long-standing charity commitment; A Dean (no reason offered); R O’Keeffe (a County Council commitment); and Dr Turner, who had a Mayoral engagement. No message had been received from Cllr Eiloart.

FWP2014/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: There were none.

FWP2014/03 QUESTIONS: There were none (No public or press were present).

FWP2014/04 REMIT OF THE WORKING PARTY:

The working party was asked to examine the detail of estimated expenditure and income for the Council’s operations, and to agree a budget and level of Council Tax precept for the 2015/16 year, for recommendation to Council.

Further: the Working Party was asked to make appropriate provision for items to form the Council Plan for 2015/16.

FWP2014/05 BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:

1 There was a continuing lack of clarity over the Government’s intentions for capping Council Tax increases, with no formal announcement made for 2015/16 except a repeat, in a recent conference speech, of the statement that the Minister “is prepared if necessary to apply referendum principles to higher spending town and parish councils from 2015 to 2016 onwards”.

2 In the year of introduction (2013/14) of the Government’s Council Tax Support Grant scheme, Lewes District Council had passed-on the whole amount which had been sufficient to maintain the Town Council’s band ‘D’ precept unchanged. However; this was reduced for 2014/15 by £15,737 (18%), and was to reduce again by £11,030 (15%) for 2015/16 (and reduce to nil at some point in the near future). The Town Council (LTC) therefore faced an enforced increase to precept to simply maintain budgeted nett expenditure at the present level.

3 The Working Party considered the service budget estimates for 2015/16 (*copies in the minute book*). The assumptions and basic principles applied in compiling the recommended budget had been commended by the Council’s internal auditor, who stated: “I would go so far as to say the budgeting process at the council is a model of clarity and a good model for other councils”. These were shown in the working notes, and the application to individual accounts and services was explained and discussed. Various adjustments had been made to accommodate the agreed acceptance of parks and open spaces devolved from Lewes District Council, and other items resolved by Council. Budgets had been drafted to take account of:

- Provision for known/anticipated increases in public Utility supplies, NNDR *etc.*
- Adjustments for completed and imminent (previously-approved) projects.
- Provision for elements identified in the Council’s forward plan.
- Establishment of appropriate reserves for anticipated projects.
- Provision for anticipated increases in insurance and other overhead costs *etc.*

- Provision for known increase in employers' pension contribution.
- Refinements of overhead allocation to services and base service cost estimates.
- Recognition of anticipated adjustment to salaries.
- Provision for known and anticipated increases in cost of contracted services.
- Re-establishment of exhausted reserves and continuation of prudent contributions.
- Provision for costs of assets or services accepted through devolution by Lewes District Council, and for necessary transitional costs.
- Fees & charges tariff increase of 3%, rounded to an appropriate value for the service concerned.

It was acknowledged that there was a continuing need to address the proper maintenance of the Council's physical assets and adequately fund continuing services.

4 The draft budget combined specific amounts for known costs and committed project items, with prudent allowances for reserves, and provided for a flexible response to any devolution proposals. Following several years with no growth this had been achieved with only a modest £4,000 increase in estimated nett expenditure, equal to less than half of one percent. To offset the reduced support grant necessitated a further increase; giving a precept increase of £15,030 – equal to 2%. Most of the reserves earmarked for the Council's significant service and project requirements were considered suitably robust and adequate to fulfil their purpose. After a lengthy discussion, which involved explanations of service accounts at a detailed level, the service budgets were agreed for recommendation to Council.

5 The Council's forward plan was considered, and it was understood that this involved significant burden on the Council's existing staff and resources, and was as expansive as could be practically undertaken. Members recognized that some projects could exceed original "informed guess" estimates of cost, and earmarked reserves could be insufficient. Building and engineering works were of particular concern in this regard, as the Council's assets had all been taken-on with considerable historic dilapidation, and contexts such as heritage listing status. It was considered that there was no other organization in a position to offer appropriate support for such as the Town Hall; All Saints Centre; Malling Community Centre or the Pells, which were such important and well-used local community assets. Projects could be "topped-up" by drawing from the General Fund which; although adequate, would then need to be restored in future years to the levels recommended by government auditors.

6 With these issues in mind, Councillors agreed a forward plan for recommendation, and proposed that Council should be asked to approve the operational service budgets as discussed, and to choose between two options for the level of precept – either the value of a 2% increase, or a 4% increase; allowing for an additional £15,000 contribution to the reserve earmarked for refurbishment of the Town Hall.

FWP2014/06

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL:

1 That the budgets for estimated operational service expenditure and income for the 2015/16 financial year; recommended and accompanying these minutes, be approved.

2 Council select from two options; either:

A The total sum to be raised by precept on council tax for 2015/16 be set at £765,496 when anticipated Council Tax Support Grant of £62,504 is accounted-for. (To service a nett requirement of £828,000) *or:*

B The total sum to be raised by precept on council tax for 2015/16 be set at £780,496 when anticipated Council Tax Support Grant of £62,504 is accounted-for. (To service a nett requirement of £843,000)

FWP2014/07

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contribution and declared the meeting closed.

The meeting ended at 8:40pm

Signed:

Date:



Lewes Town Council proposes to initiate and complete (where possible and practical), or continue, the following major areas of work in the year 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. These are in addition to various projects and initiatives itemised in the Council's budgets and accounts, and represent larger-scale activities deserving special attention.

*The plan will be updated in course of time, to show key elements and progress towards completion, as appropriate.

1 Town Hall repairs & conservation

Major refurbishment of South (High Street) elevation *Detailed survey completed*
Schedule of Quantities and detailed plan in preparation
Works scheduled to commence Spring 2015

Refurbishment of office accommodation; WC's; kitchenette *etc*
Plans in progress

2 Pells Lake ecology project

Improvements to water quality } *partially completed – specialist report obtained*
Introduction of aquatic plants } *W/Party remit to consider structural integrity of lake perimeter.*

3 Pells Recreation Ground and kiosk/café development (with Santon Group and others)

Engagement with Santon Group and others to improve the “urban realm” in the area as an integral component of necessary flood-defence works; taking the opportunity to replace children's play equipment and introduce equipment for a wider age-range, and to provide an enhanced café facility for the swimming pool, recreation ground, and surrounding parkland.
planning application pending (works planning to follow)

4 Malling (Bridgeview) Community Centre refurbishment

To carry out a comprehensive refurbishment of the community centre, with modern heating and lighting, with improved facilities for community use, including more flexible interior spaces and better integration of the sports changing-rooms with the adjoining sports pitches and recreation ground.
Working Party recommendations expected

5 Commemorations:

To engage with, and inspire, appropriate community recognition of

National commemoration of the Centenary of the outbreak of the first World War (2014) *ongoing 2014-18*
Research commission re additional names for War memorial

Centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (2019) *pending*
National commemoration of the signing of Magna Carta (2015) *pending*

6 Neighbourhood Plan (with Community partners)

Development of a Neighbourhood Plan for Lewes under provisions of the Localism Act 2011
Programme structure and timetable drafted
Consultant engagement pending

7 Continuing programme of environmental enhancements and specific site improvements

Engage with appropriate projects arising from third-party initiatives (*eg* highway safety/traffic management).
Continuing improvements to own assets (*eg* allotment sites)
Currently agreed: school highway marking

8 Devolution of assets & services

Provide for transfer of ownership of various assets/services from Lewes District Council. (currently subject to ongoing negotiation)
Malling Rec and Landport Bottom agreed for first tranche 2015/16
Discussions ongoing re further sites