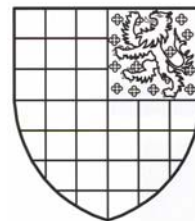


Town Hall
High Street
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 2QS

☎ 01273 471469 Fax: 01273 480919

✉ info@lewes-tc.gov.uk
www.lewes-tc.gov.uk



**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

of the meeting of the **Finance Review Working Party**
held on **Wednesday 27th July 2011**, in the **Yarrow Room, Town Hall, Lewes** at **4:00pm**.

PRESENT Cllrs M Chartier; J Daly; A Dean; I Eiloart; S Murray; R O’Keeffe; R Rudkin; M Turner, and also present (*not nominated to serve on Working party*): Cllr J Stockdale (*Mayor – ex officio*)

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

FWP2011/01 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN:** Cllr Dr M Turner, as Lead Member for Finance & Policy, was elected as Chairman.

FWP2011/02 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** There were none

FWP2011/03 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were none

FWP2011/04 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS:** There were none. (No public or press were present)

FWP2011/05 **REMIT OF THE WORKING PARTY:**

The remit of the Working Party, as defined by Council at its meeting on 16th June 2011 was noted as:

The working party is to review the finances of the Council, especially in view of potential devolution of assets or services from the District Council.

(minute ref FC/2011/26.1) The Budget Review Working Party be renamed the Finance Working Party and be convened immediately to consider the Council’s finances with regard to supporting the devolution process whilst safeguarding current public services. An initial report should be brought to the next practicable Council meeting.

(minute ref FC/2011/26.2) The working party consider the terms of reference of the Audit & Governance Panel, with a view to this panel meeting regularly to receive reports on financial matters, policy implementation, Quality Parish related matters, and such other matters as the working party sees fit. A full report to be brought to Council in November.

FWP2011/06 **BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:**

1 Members considered a budget variance report for the first financial quarter of 2011/12; an extract from Budget review working papers; and other working documents. The question was raised as to the feasibility of making savings within existing budgets, to support the devolution of assets or services by Lewes District Council (LDC). TC referred to the standard guidance on best practice in avoidance of “double taxation” for local taxpayers when assets are devolved. Members were reminded of the preliminary meetings held with LDC, in which the likely costs of various buildings and services had been discussed. It was acknowledged that the Town Council’s existing budgets contained some provision that could be re-deployed for other uses, although this would aggregate to a relatively modest amount in the context of the assets under consideration. It had been agreed with LDC that the timescale for discussions might conveniently spread across two years, and a further meeting was due in the autumn. Decisions on devolution would inevitably be balanced between affordability and the Town Council’s assessment of the relative importance to the community of particular assets.

2 The current financial position was described as healthy; with successive Budget Working parties in the past nine years having followed sound principles and established prudent budgets to service the operations of the Council. Adequate earmarked reserves for projects and ongoing maintenance had been established and maintained, and any operating surplus each year had contributed to a balance on the

Continues...

unreserved General Fund currently near the level of around 50% of gross annual expenditure, in line with national audit guidelines. This contrasts with the period 2000-2001 when the Council was unfortunately required to follow an improvement plan imposed by the Audit Commission. Auditors since that time had been consistently positive and complimentary regarding the Council's financial management and corporate governance.

3 There was some discussion regarding the level of subsidy for the All Saints Centre (ASC), and the question arose as to the practicality of managing the Centre without staff on-site. The potential for common management with the Town Hall was queried, and TC briefly explained the background to the two services. The principles underlying rates for hire of the ASC facilities were discussed, and the context of the market in which it operated. It was **agreed** that the ASC Steering Group should be asked to meet and assess any potential for a reduction in the current level of subsidy.

4 The function of the Audit & Governance Panel was discussed, and it was **agreed** to recommend that Council review the membership of this panel; with a suggested constitution of five Members, avoiding the appointment of any who serve on the Finance Working Party. It was further proposed that the Panel should meet 3 times per year, with a remit to monitor treasury management and monitor budgets. It should retain its current role in governance, acting as a public complaints review panel should the need arise. It was recognized that the Quality Parish Working Party held a significantly different remit, and that the requirement for re-accreditation every four years was best served by maintaining this distinction.

FWP2011/07

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL:

1 It is recommended that the All Saints Steering Group should be asked to meet and assess any potential for a reduction in the current service cost.

2 It is recommended that Council review the membership of the Audit & Governance Panel; with a suggested constitution of five Members, avoiding the appointment of any who serve on the Finance Working Party. The Panel should meet 3 times per year, at a practical time following the end of the 2nd, 3rd, and final financial quarters, with a remit to monitor treasury management and monitor budgets. It should retain its current role in governance, acting as a public complaints review panel should the need arise.

FWP2011/08

Following a brief general discussion on miscellaneous aspects of the Council's financial structure, the Chairman declared the meeting closed.

The meeting closed at 5:55pm

Signed:

Date: