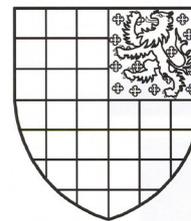


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

Of the meeting of **Lewes Town Council**,
held on **Thursday 12th November 2020**, online via Zoom Meetings at **7:30pm**.

PRESENT Cllrs Dr J Baah; M Bird; R Burrows; S Catlin (*Deputy Mayor*); G Earl; R Handy; O Henman; J Herbert; J Lamb (*Mayor*); I Makepeace; Dr W Maples; M Milner; R O'Keeffe; S Sains; J Vernon; R Waring and K Wood.

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*); Mrs F Garth (*Assistant Town Clerk & Civic Officer*) and Mrs E Tingley (*C'ttee. Admin.*)

Observing: Ms H Roxx (*Asst. All Saints Centre Manager*); B Courage (*Town Ranger*) and Ms F Willis (*Reception/ Admin Officer*)

FC2020/69 **QUESTION TIME:** There were no questions. One member of the public was present.

FC2020/70 **MEMBERS DECLARATIONS of INTERESTS:** There were none.

FC2020/71 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Dr G Mayhew who was unwell.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/71.1 Reasons submitted for absence from this meeting are noted.

FC2020/72 **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

a) The Mayor had recently attended the Citizens Advice Bureau AGM where an update had been given on issues facing Lewes clients. This had presented a rather gloomy picture compared with the previous year, and key support services had seen a growth of nearly 90% in casework. Continued funding from the Council was vital, and much appreciated.

b) Ten applications had been received for the Mayor's Covid Hero Award. The Mayor urged Members to encourage further nominations for the award. Posters and fliers had been sent to Members to assist in this.

c) The Mayor had submitted report to the November edition of the Lewes News giving updates on Council activities. The deadline for any Town Council business/events/information for the next publication of the Lewes News was 21st December.

d) The Mayor thanked Lizzie Zeyfert; Faye Willis, and Fiona Garth for their work in creating the new Lewes Town Council *Facebook* page.

e) The Mayor had attended a recent forum hosted by Lewes District Council where East Sussex County Council had highlighted a Digital Inclusion initiative to help more people to get online through training, mentoring and the provision of equipment.

f) The Mayor reminded Members of the Lewes Coronavirus Volunteers 'Community Meet-Up' which would be held on Saturday 14th November from 3-5pm. A link to this was provided on the Town Council Facebook page.

g) The Mayor reminded Members of a recent email sent by TC containing links to the East Sussex County Council Cycling and Walking infrastructure consultation. The consultation would end on 11th December and all were encouraged to comment.

h) All present wished Fiona Garth a very Happy Birthday for the following day.

FC2020/73 **MINUTES:**

It was resolved that:

FC2020/73.1 Minutes of the Council meeting held on 8th October 2020 were received and agreed as an accurate record.

FC2020/74 **WORKING PARTIES AND OUTSIDE BODIES:**

Members are reminded that anyone who may have attended a meeting of any recognized outside body which

has covered issues that deserve attention by the Council, should ensure that TC is aware of this before the Council's next meeting, and preferably before the agenda deadline. Reports on all activities of the organization are not expected.

a) Finance Working Party 28th October 2020. Council considered the Minutes of this meeting (*copy in minute book*).

Members had been provided with working notes illustrating various assumptions & background values; together with draft service budgets for 2021/22 and miscellaneous comparative values *iro* present status compared with budget and with the same period in the previous year; and whilst the full effects of Covid-19 continued to develop, these helped with context.

TC had elaborated upon the draft budget proposed and explained underlying assumptions and reasoning; demonstrating factors such as value assumptions and estimated levels of increase for 'standard' elements such as insurances; utilities, staffing costs *etc.* and described the principles that had been applied to estimating unavoidable transition costs related to his retirement in 2021. Working Party Members satisfied themselves that all these were reasonable.

There was no longer any Government Council Tax Reduction Support Grant (CTRSG) as that scheme (to offset government-imposed changes to calculation factors in 2012) had ended the previous year.

TC emphasized that the Council must continue to heed auditor's advice that the uncommitted General Fund (GF), depleted in recent years due to the cost of major repairs to heritage-listed buildings, should ideally be increased by at least £200,000. The strategy to achieve this was an annual appropriation from precept of £50,000 solely for the purpose of rebuilding the recommended GF balance – shown in tables and the published accounts as Reserve P10 'General Fund reinstatement'. Operating surpluses in recent years had been minimal, however, and this amount had not improved the balance as quickly as anticipated. This situation could be allowed to continue its slow rate of development, however, because the Council held significant other Reserves which could be appropriated *in extremis* and auditors recognized this position.

With these points in mind, the Working Party had considered the draft service budget estimates presented for 2021/22 and noted that alongside the Council's financial systems generally, the assumptions and basic principles and the process of compiling the recommended budget had again been commended by the Council's independent Internal Auditor (IA).

General considerations: Principal in these deliberations was recognition that many taxpayers in 2021 could be facing a variety of financial hardships due to Covid19, and there was a common desire to avoid increases where possible. It was acknowledged, however, that there was a continuing need to address the proper maintenance of the Council's physical assets and adequately fund continuing services; to continue the restoration of the General Fund balance, and to provide for unavoidable, foreseeable, expenses. Building and engineering works were of particular concern, as the Council's assets had all been taken-on with considerable historic dilapidation, and contexts such as heritage listing status. Applications for grant from community organizations continued to increase in number and value as other sources diminished, and Council had asked the Working Party to allow for a public Participatory Budget.

The working party considered the draft annual plan; proposed contributions to reserves; and operational requirements, in detail. The draft budgets presented took 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 'major items' plan.
- Appropriate reserves for agreed/anticipated projects.
- Provision for anticipated increases in insurance and other overhead costs *etc.*
- Provision for any known increase in employers' pension and NI contributions.
- Refinement of overhead allocation to services and base service cost estimates.
- An estimated adjustment to salaries (a national agreement reached through the local government joint negotiating body).

- Provision for known and anticipated increases in cost of contracted services.
- Maintenance of the small grants fund, recognizing the consistently high level of applications received.
- Re-establishment of exhausted reserves and continuation of prudent contributions.
- Provision for costs of assets or services acquired through devolution.
- Fees & charges income.

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 unforeseen issues. The Major Items plan was as expansive as could be practically undertaken.

Members of the working party were keen to make prudent estimates and maintain some flexibility in the budget, although concerned to avoid an increase in Precept if possible. Provision was made for all 'unavoidable' increases to give a base value, and 'live' modelling of various options was conducted throughout the meeting.

Participatory Budget: With regard to a Participatory Budget (PB); Members were interested in the possibility offered by the existing list of projects identified in the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan, which were eligible for funding from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts and was the result of community involvement at a detailed level. Each annual tranche of parish CIL must be spent within five years but the Council currently held over £44,500 in aggregate; the date of each component receipt offering the opportunity to apply this as a PB pilot scheme, if desired. It would be straightforward to survey public opinion and in collaboration with local press to prioritize that list, which currently mixed yet-to-start projects (eg Cycle route 90) with items originally considered to be aspirations.

The draft budget initially presented had indicated a modest precept increase. Refinement of some Reserve provisions during the meeting reduced this substantially, and TC indicated some areas where further subtle refinement would certainly reduce this to Zero. Members asked that this be done and that the resulting revised draft be prepared for recommendation to Council. It was agreed that fees and charges should not be increased.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/74.1 The Minutes of the meeting of the Finance Working Party held on 28th October 2020 are received and noted.

FC2020/74.2 Budgets for estimated operational service expenditure and income and contributions to financial Reserves for the 2021/22 financial year; recommended by the Finance Working Party following its meeting on 28th October 2020, are approved although a final decision and setting of the value of Council Tax Precept is deferred to a later meeting in light of the potential for further Covid-related adjustments.

FC2020/75

COUNCIL VISION REVIEW:

It was agreed at the October meeting of Council that the Council Vision Review would be re-visited to look at priorities. Members were provided a list of all Resolutions passed by Council since the inception of the current administration in May 2019, and documents outlining principles and philosophies underlying the agreed Vision. TC advised that the schedule of major items of work was itself fairly onerous, and the coming year would see several unusual demands. Councillors questioned how they should follow progress on decisions and were reminded that all Agenda and Minutes comprehensively describe all ongoing matters, and each meeting receives an update on matters in progress. If any member considered there was inadequate coverage or any omission on a subject in which they had an interest, they should enquire of the Town Clerk. TC agreed that he would revise the format of the Resolutions table such that it would reflect headings from the Vision statement and indicate whether a specific Committee or Working party was progressing the subject. It would then be included with the Major Items Plan update at each meeting. This was the **agreed** way forward.

FC2020/76

ESTABLISHMENT of STEERING GROUP:

Council considered a report (FC016/2020 *Copy in the Minute book*) on the establishment of a new advisory group.

Councillors at their meeting on 8th October 2020 had expressed a wish to establish a Malling Community Centre Steering Group, to supplant the Building Working Party's interest once

building works are complete. The report advised that the legal status would be an advisory body to Council. It was for Council to establish the size of such a Group and appoint Members to serve. Standing Orders allow the Group to elect its own Chair.

The existing All Saints Steering Group was tasked with general oversight of that Centre's operation, meeting *ad hoc* and formulating recommendations for Council or other committees; functional panels, or working parties as appropriate.

It had been suggested that the remit for a Malling Community Centre Steering Group should include "reviewing current, future and proposed business plans including staff structure and costs, and profit and loss, contracting out and regular income and expenditure reporting as well as review of booking, any operational issues and management plans". In agreeing a remit, Members were reminded that councillors can have no role in operational management, and advised to avoid unnecessary overlaps with existing Council systems (eg Audit Panel) or the roles of the full Council, the Centre Manager and the Town Clerk. An underlying principle was that it is good practice for Council to deal with as much as it practically can as a complete body, with delegation of *ad hoc* or excessively detailed, time consuming, or burdensome issues to subordinate bodies if required.

It was resolved that:

FC2020/76.1 A Working Party, initially consisting of Cllrs Dr J Baah, M Bird, S Catlin, G Earl, J Lamb, M Milner, S Sains and K Wood, be set up as an advisory body to Council in respect of Malling Community Centre.

FC2020/76.2 The Malling Community Centre Steering Group is tasked with general strategic oversight of that Centre's operations, meeting *ad hoc* and formulating recommendations for Council or other committees, functional panels, or working parties as appropriate. This may include scrutiny of current, future and proposed business plans; staff structure and costs; profit and loss; contracting-out; income and expenditure reporting as well as review of booking, operations issues and management plans.

FC2020/77

UPDATE ON MATTERS IN PROGRESS

Malling Community Centre – TC would be meeting with the contractor's the following day (13th November). Work had slowed slightly, due to Covid-19 effects on the industry supply-chain for materials needed in the late stages of the work. It was thought likely that the major works would be complete by the end of November. In answer to a question TC elaborated upon the type of equipment that would be needed to provide for a range of users, and the systems which remained to be commissioned.

FC2020/78

NOTICE of ITEMS IN PROSPECT

Members, asked to consider items arising from this meeting worthy of a Press Release, indicated:

Malling Community Centre Steering Group & Zero Growth Budget

Dates to note etc for forthcoming meetings and events:

- A Planning Committee regarding Astley House and Swift Policy would be held on Tuesday 24th November at 7:00pm
- The Audit Panel would be on Wednesday 25th November at 6:00pm
- The Transport Committee would meet on Thursday 26th November at 6:30pm
- A Personnel Workshop would be held on Friday 27th November.
- The next cycle (3 of 4) of the grants programme deadline for applications (now online only) was 20th November, with an online meeting of the Grants Panel on Wednesdays 2nd December to formulate recommendations to Council on 17th December.
- The next Council meeting would take place on Thursday 17th December at 7:30pm, with a deadline for agenda items to reach TC by noon on Monday 7th December.
- Meetings to be confirmed: Personnel Panel Workshops, Buildings Working Party, UN Sustainability Goals Working Party and Open Council Working Party.

There being no further business the Mayor closed the meeting; and thanked everyone for their contributions.
The meeting ended at 8:55pm

Signed: Date: