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**LEWES  
TOWN  
COUNCIL**

To: **Cllrs Addecott; Chartier; Cooper; Murray (S); O'Keeffe; Rowell**

A Meeting of the **Finance Working Party, to consider the Council's forward plan; operating budget; and Council Tax precept for 2016/17**, will be held on **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016**, in the **Yarrow Room, Town Hall, Lewes** at **7:00pm** which you are requested to attend.

S Brigden, Town Clerk  
6<sup>th</sup> January 2016

## **AGENDA**

### 1. QUESTION TIME\*

To consider any questions received regarding items on the agenda for this meeting.

### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

To receive apologies from members of the Working-party who are unable to attend.

### 3. MEMBER'S DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

To note declarations of any personal or prejudicial interests in matters on this agenda.

### 4. MINUTES

To agree Minutes of the Working Party meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015

*attached page 3*

### 5. MATTERS WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE WORKING-PARTY

To note the remit of the working party:

The working party is asked to consider 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 2016/17 year, for recommendation to Council.

The Working Party is asked to ensure appropriate provision for items constituting the Council Plan for 2016/17.

### 6. DRAFT BUDGET and COUNCIL TAX PRECEPT 2016/17

To consider draft budget information and relevant background data (*working material will be available on computer at the meeting for live analysis and modelling.*)

**This continues the work commenced at the meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015. Members are asked to bring with them to the meeting any background documents; worksheets, notes *etc* from that earlier meeting.**

### **\*NB: POTENTIAL EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

As this Working Party is likely to discuss low-level detail of the Council's finances, it is possible that, during the meeting, personal details related to past and present employees, and proposed expenditure on contracts for supply of goods and services (potentially commercially-sensitive) may be disclosed.

Should these circumstances arise; the chairman will be obliged to move:

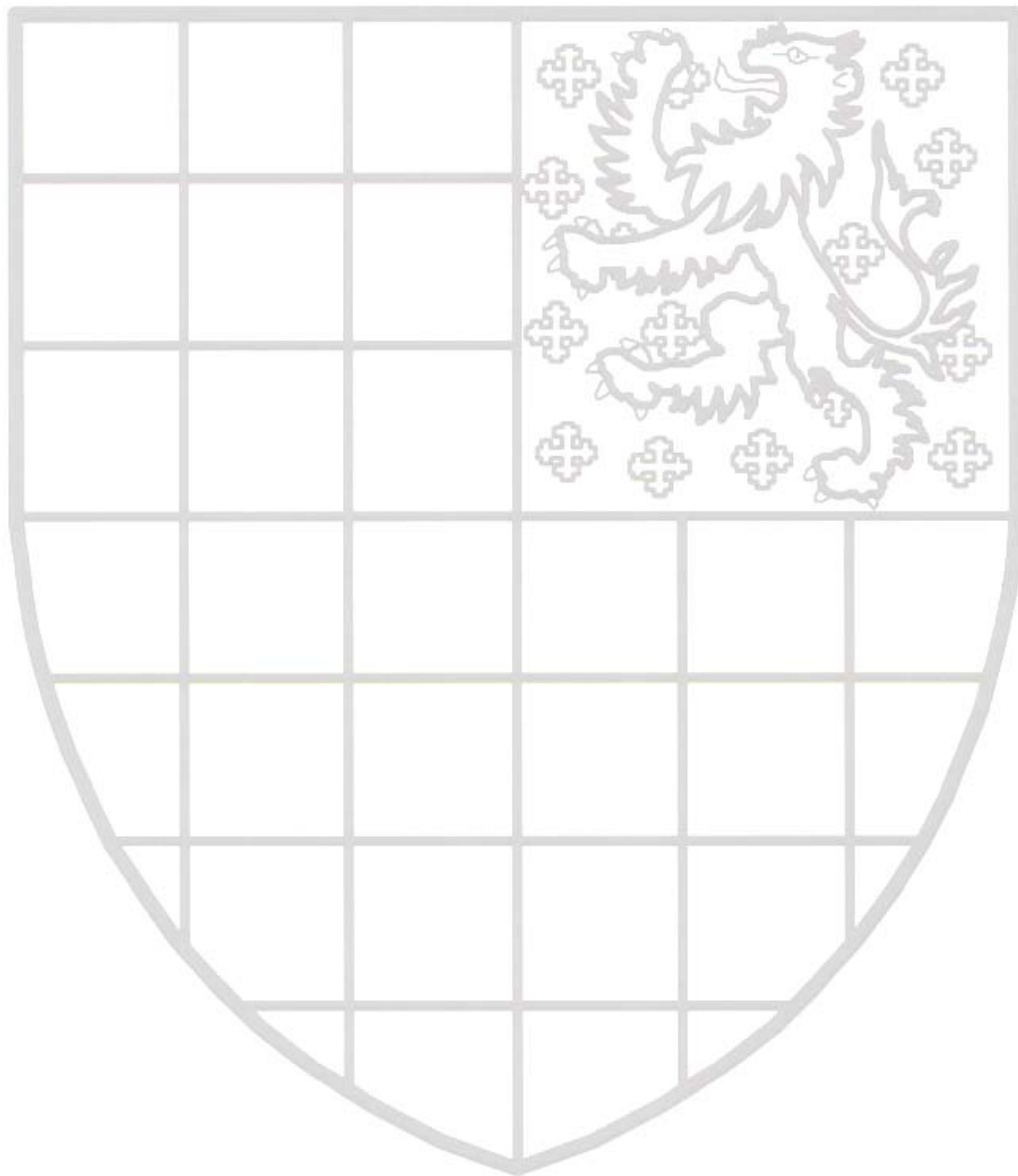
"That in view of the confidential nature (*to be specified*) of the business to be transacted during the remainder of the meeting, pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960; any members of the press or public present be excluded and instructed to withdraw"

***For further information about items on this agenda please contact the Town Clerk at the above address.***

**PUBLIC ATTENDANCE:** Members of the public have the right, and are welcome, to attend meetings of the Council – questions regarding items on this agenda may be heard at the start of each meeting with the Chairman's consent, and subject to time available. Questions or requests to address the Council should, whenever possible, be submitted in writing to the Town Clerk at least 24 hours in advance. **PLEASE NOTE:** As space is limited we would appreciate advanced warning if you plan to attend in a group; perhaps with neighbours, or to bring a party of student observers. We may be able to arrange for the meeting to be held in an alternative room. General questions can be raised at our offices between 9am-5pm Mons- Thurs; 9am-4pm on Fridays – our staff will be pleased to assist.

**Distribution:** Cllrs Addecott; Chartier; Cooper; Murray (S); O'Keeffe; Rowell (*all Cllrs: for information*)

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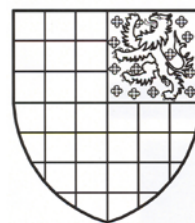


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**LEWES  
TOWN  
COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES**

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

held on **Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015**, in the **Yarrow Room, Town Hall, Lewes** at **7:00pm**.

**PRESENT** Cllrs F Addecott; M Chartier; S Murray; R O’Keeffe; A Rowell and (*not appointed to the Working Party*) Cllr I Makepeace

*In attendance:* S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*)

**FWP2015/01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN:** Cllr Rowell was elected Chairman of the Working Party for the 2015/16 year. (*Note: Cllr Rowell has subsequently requested that he be referred-to as “Chair”*)

**FWP2015/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** It was discovered after the meeting that Cllr Cooper had belatedly left a message advising that she was unwell.

**FWP2015/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were none.

**FWP2015/04 QUESTIONS:** There were none (No public or press were present).

**FWP2015/05 REMIT OF THE WORKING PARTY:**

The working party was asked to consider 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 2016/17 year, for recommendation to Council.

The Working Party was asked to ensure appropriate provision for items constituting the Council Plan for 2016/17.

**FWP2015/06 BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:**

1 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’ equivalent” precept unchanged. However; this grant had reduced significantly each year since then and was to reduce from the current year amount by a further 15% for 2016/17, to £53,128. The Town Council (LTC) therefore faced an enforced increase to precept to simply maintain budgeted nett expenditure at the present level. Parish Councils again await a definitive statement from the Government as to their intended referendum/capping policy for 2016/17.

2 The Working Party considered the service budget estimates for 2016/17 (*copies in the minute book*). Alongside the Council’s financial system 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) during a recent inspection, who made two observations in his interim report: “*I am pleased to report that overall the systems and procedures you have in place are entirely fit for purpose and I would go so far as to say are a model of good practice.*” and “*The very detailed working enables sound and robust decisions to be made...However.. current indications are that general reserves could be reduced by a further £150k in the 2017 year, this level of reduction would be considered putting the council’s general reserve into financial distress. Council needs to consider the RFO’s proposals seriously and discuss reserves provisioning in this regard.*”

3 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 forward plan.

- Establishment of appropriate reserves for agreed/anticipated projects.
- Provision for anticipated increases in insurance and other overhead costs etc.
- Provision for known increase in employers' pension and NI 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 as presented resulted in a 13.24% increase in precept (to £883,872) but this was attributable to various factors, some of which are flexible and may not be agreed, and also should be considered in context of a partial offset by reduction in the sum chargeable to Lewes taxpayers by the District Council. The actual cost to a Band 'D' household equated to an extra £17.36 per year; 33.9 pence per week.

5 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 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. 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. This was the prospect that had triggered the exhortation of the IA in his interim report, as it was possible that the Council's General Fund could drop below an acceptable minimum in the next two years.

6 With these issues in mind, Councillors considered the forward plan; proposed contributions to reserves and operational service requirements, in detail. Two Members had submitted a number of questions late the previous evening, and these were addressed as the presentation unfolded. At the end of this process Members of the Working Party were equally divided (*Cllr O'Keeffe had left the meeting [at 10:15pm] before this point*) as to their preferred course of action: whether to promote the budget to Council on 17<sup>th</sup> December and deal with any suggestions for amendments at that meeting, or to hold a further meeting and defer recommendations until the Council meeting scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> January 2016.

**FWP2015/07**

**CONCLUSIONS:**

After some debate it was agreed to defer a final decision on recommendations pending a further meeting. Council will then be asked to consider these at its meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2016.

**FWP2015/08**

The Chair declared the meeting closed.

*The meeting ended at 10:45pm*

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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017. 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 roof repairs/replacement to Assembly Room and Corn Exchange

*Works required for safety and integrity of building.*

**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.*

*pending commencement of 3<sup>rd</sup>-party works in locality to achieve best VFM – links to item 3*

**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.

*NSQ planning application due for C’ttee decision Dec 2015 (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.

*Invitation to submit design ideas early 2016*

**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 – ongoing; end date 2018**

Centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (2019)

*pending*

Programme to be developed to 2019, as Council resolution 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015 (ref pending)

**6 Neighbourhood Plan (with Community partners)**

Development of a Neighbourhood Plan for Lewes under provisions of the Localism Act 2011

*Reg14 consultation on draft Plan by April 2016*

**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: pursuing highway crossing, Church Lane, Malling*

**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 – legal transfer process delayed by LDC. Decisions pending re further sites (next tranche originally identified Southover Grange Gdns)*