



Minutes of a meeting of the Finance Working Party held on Thursday 5 January 2023 at 6.30pm in the Council Chamber, Lewes Town Hall.

Present:

Councillor Earl
Councillor Herbert
Councillor Lamb (Chair)
Councillor Mayhew
Councillor Makepeace
Councillor Wood

In attendance

Town Clerk

1. Filming of council meetings and mobile phones

1.1. The procedures were noted.

2. Apologies for absence

2.1. There were none.

3. Members' declarations of interests

3.1. There were none.

4. Question time

4.1. There was one question from Councillor Maples regarding the proportionality of expenditure on Christmas and expenditure on essential versus discretionary expenditure. Further clarity was sought on what is classified as essential, which was determined in this example as utility and premises costs. This discussion identified the limitation of the Town Council's ability to change a significant proportion of the budget as many premises costs were essential and had to be met.

5. Chair's announcements and urgent items

5.1. There were none.

6. Officers' reports

6.1. Draft budget for the financial year 2023 to 2024

6.2. The Town Clerk explained that the draft budget had undergone further revisions to include the items agreed by the working party at its meeting on 5 December 2022 and further work on various budget lines including utilities. The aim was that by the end of the meeting the Finance Working Party would agree a draft budget to put forward for Full Council to consider at its meeting on 19 January 2023.

6.3. The earmarked reserves should be reviewed as part of this process and were included in the report on the agenda for that purpose.

6.4. It was agreed to allocate £2,500 in the budget for activities to mark the King's coronation. The Commemorations and Events Committee would consider the activities that could be delivered.

6.5. The working party queried utility budgets. The Town Clerk explained that billing had been erratic, smart meters had been installed but had failed and meter readings had not been in place. Regular monthly meter readings are now being submitted but the last set of reliable bills were from 2016/2017. The Finance Officer and Responsible Financial Officer had undertaken a piece of work using the data available to provide the best possible estimate for the draft budget. The Finance Officer has been asked to not pay estimated bills going forward and to ensure monthly readings are submitted.

6.6. The maintenance requirements of the venues were discussed, particularly for the Town Hall and All Saints given the level of earmarked reserve proposed in the draft budget for maintenance of £100,000 for each which was agreed. All Saints had some urgent works required but there was further maintenance required as outlined in the surveyors report, likely to be in excess of £750,000. The Council will need to consider how this is financed, including exploring grants and loans.

6.7. The budget for Malling Community Centre alarms was increased to provide for an alarm call out service. The Town Clerk explained that the roof above the main hall needed replacement. A quote had been received of £12,000 to replace one half of the roof to replace batons, felt and replace tiles. Due to the findings it is likely the other side will need similar work. Damp penetration has also been discovered to the small hall, causing damage to the skirting boards, and it is likely that repointing work is needed to the external wall to resolve this issue.

6.8. It was suggested that the Town Council looked to advertise its venues on the Halls Hire website.

6.9. Hire charges were considered by the working party and it was agreed to increase charges by 5%.

6.10. Grounds maintenance has been increased by 10% as advised by Lewes District Council.

6.11. The Pells Lake dredging and stonework was discussed, and it was noted this may be a major project and possibly a capital repair along with the works at All Saints Centre. Minor works removing overgrown shrubs should be undertaken as part of general maintenance work.

6.12. It was agreed to start a Pells Playground earmarked reserve particularly as some play equipment has been removed due to failure and that it is a well-used park. It was acknowledged that there may be funding to come from the North Street Quarter development. It was agreed to recommend to Council to use the CIL funding that was due to expire in May 2023 for the playground if it was no longer needed for the other projects it had been committed to.

6.13. It was agreed to stop contributing to the Pells Kiosk earmarked reserve based on the current reserve standing at £150,000 and pending confirmation of a calculated scheme.

6.14. The Town Ranger was still chasing quotes for self-delivery of urban meadow and wildlife verges. It was likely that the cost would exceed the income from East Sussex County Council.

6.15. It was noted there is already £15,000 in earmarked reserves for environmental audits. This was for the initial audits to ascertain the baseline and these were yet to happen. It was agreed by the working party that a further £15,000 would be included in the budget to support the work and continuous audits arising out of the initial audits.

6.16. Allotment grounds maintenance was reduced from £6,000 to £4,000 based on this year and last year actuals.

6.17. The Allotment Working Party would consider any further increases on allotment rent later in the year. 12 months' notice must be given on any increase. The renewal date has changed to October each year and the rent was increased in to £7 per rod from 1 October 2023.

6.18. The Town Ranger is sourcing quotes for restoration of the war memorial as well as an annual maintenance contract. No budget seems to have been allocated for this previously so it is proposed the Repairs and Maintenance Amenities budget within the Open Spaces and Amenities cost centre includes the annual maintenance. The restoration work could come from the Environment Enhancement earmarked reserve.

6.19. The Environment Enhancement earmarked reserve purpose was discussed. There was a question as to whether this earmarked reserve was for solar panels at the Pells Pool. Expenditure from the EMR over the years has been on items such as floral baskets, replacement light fittings, all of which should come from the general reserve. Further investigation was needed but this earmarked reserve may need to be repurposed or returned to the general reserve.

6.20. It was agreed to recommend to Council that the earmarked reserve for grit bins should include the purchase and refill of a grit bin, rather than just the purchase.

6.21. The amendments had resulted in a 5.47% increase to the Precept. The working party agreed to recommend this to Full Council having thoroughly analysed each budget line and taking into consideration all known external factors.

The meeting closed at 9:10pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....