

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 Working Party**

held on **Wednesday 11th January 2017**, in the **Yarrow Room, Town Hall, Lewes** at **7:00pm**.

PRESENT Cllrs M Chartier (*elected Chairman*); H Jones; Dr G Mayhew; R Murray; S Murray, and R O’Keeffe

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

FWP2016/01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN: Cllr Chartier was elected Chairman of the Working Party for the 2016/17 year.

FWP2016/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: There were none

FWP2016/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: There were none.

FWP2016/04 QUESTIONS: There were none (No public or press were present).

FWP2016/05 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 2017/18 year, for recommendation to Council.

The Working Party was asked to ensure appropriate provision for items constituting the Council Plan for 2017/18.

FWP2016/06 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 2017/18, to £45,158. The Town Council (LTC) therefore faced an enforced increase to precept to simply maintain budgeted nett expenditure at the present level. Parish Councils had avoided the government’s threatened referendum (“capping”) regime for the coming year, but this would undoubtedly arise again in future.

2 The Working Party considered the service budget estimates for 2017/18 (*copies in the minute book*). 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) during a recent inspection, who had nonetheless drawn Council’s attention to the level of the General Fund; observing in his interim report: “*It is anticipated that...the general reserves at year-end will be circa £250,000, this equates to roughly four to six months of monetary cover, depending very much on additional spending required for maintenance. This is a little low for a council of this size and I draw Council’s attention to it.*”

3 With these issues in mind, Councillors considered the draft forward plan (*appended to this report*); proposed contributions to reserves and operational service 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 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 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 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 auditors. This was the prospect that had triggered the warning 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 year. Borrowing was also possible (from the Public Works Loans Board) at very favourable rates, but seen as a 'last-resort'.

5 Members of the working party were keen to make prudent estimates and maintain some flexibility in the budget, although concerned to keep increases within reasonable limits. The draft budget as originally presented had been updated to reflect the recently-published increase in the number of "Band 'D' equivalent households" for 2017/18, which reduced the individual impact of any increase in precept. Provision was made for all 'unavoidable' increases to give a base value, and 'live' modelling of various options was conducted throughout the meeting with the implications and overall impact carefully assessed at each point.

6 The budget* finally arrived-at for recommendation to Council was agreed unanimously, and resulted in a precept requirement of £944,758. This represents an increase on the current year of 9.85%, with the actual cost to a Band 'D' household rising to £154.26 per year. This equates to an extra 24 pence per week.

*Details of the underlying assumptions; calculations, and resulting budgets are available separately from these minutes.

FWP2016/07

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Council would be asked to consider the recommended budget and precept at its meeting on 26th January 2017.

FWP2016/08

The Chair declared the meeting closed.

The meeting ended at 8:45pm

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 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018. 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 should complete late Spring 2017. Updated general survey proposed to re-prioritize future works.

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 3rd-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.

s106 and works planning in-progress. Working Group re recreation & public realm currently consulting with public.

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.

Architects tenders due for return early Feb 2017

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 12th 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 commences February/March 2017

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: pedestrian crossing, Church Lane, Malling adj S Malling School (ESCC scheduling installation) and contribution of <£25,000 to crossing on A277 Brighton Road near Montacute Rd junction.

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. Legal transfer process halted by LDC. Re-start of transfer has been requested. Decisions pending re further sites

9 New council website

New website to be researched – Council resolution FC2016/19.4 (16th June 2016) refers.

Preferred providers to present proposals to W/pty Feb 2017.