

HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the **POLICY, RESOURCES and COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE** meeting held on **Tuesday 19 November 2019 at 7.30 pm**

Attendees: Parish Councillors: Frances Gaudencio (Chair), Kate Bailey and Peter Gibbons.

Visiting members: Cllr Kristian Berggreen

Clerk: Ian Cumberworth

PRC19/48 APOLOGIES: Georgia Cheshire, Frank Rylance, Ian Weir and Sue Hatton.

Absent without apologies: Cllrs David Hammond

PRC19/49 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS: None declared.

PRC19/50 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15th October 2019 as previously circulated were accepted.

PRC19/51 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

There were no members of the public present.

PRC19/52 CLERKS REPORT

19/52.1 Draft Budget 2020/21

The Clerk introduced the Draft budget paper and took members through each element of the paper. Members were advised that the table set out on page 3 illustrates a precept for a band D property based on 3,407 properties would equate to £82.34 per annum, however since the publication of this paper MSDC have advised the Council that the latest property base figure currently stands at 3,451. The Clerk advised Members that due to the tax base increasing this would reduce the figure down for a band D property to £81.29 which would equate to a reduction of around 2% on council tax paid compared to this year due to the precept being spread over a larger number of properties.

The budget had been prepared for illustrative purposes based on the assumption that the Council did not amend its overall budget requirement.

The Clerk explained that the budget table set out on page 4 of the report summarised the projected/estimated out turn for this year in the left hand column. In the right hand column this detailed the potential budget requirement for the next financial year to cover the operational costs of the Council. Members were informed that this budget had been prepared to illustrate the impact on the precept on the basis that no additional funds were allocated to Earmarked Reserves at the budget setting and the impact of the increase in the property tax base.

Member's attention was drawn to a number of notes set out on pages 6 and 7 of the report which provided further context on the rationale behind some of the budget allocations. In addition the Clerk took members through page 5 of the report which detailed the impact on the Councils Earmarked Reserves in the event no specific additional funding was allocated as part of the current budget setting process. Based on the current proposals and known commitments it is anticipated that Earmark Reserves would decline from a balance as at 31/3/20 of £217,122 to a balance as at 31/3/21 of £97,122.

The Clerk advised Members that in light of the anticipated movement in Earmarked Reserves Members may also wish to consider allocating further funds as part of the precept setting process for next year's budget in light of the increased property base and the reduction on council tax due to individual properties if the budget were to be retained at the same level as this year. The Clerk suggested that it would be prudent to allocate specific additional funds where feasible to Earmarked Reserves rather than rely on any in year savings being realised to support the ongoing priorities of the Council.

The Clerk acknowledged that based on the projected budget out turn for this financial year (2019/20) there is likely to be an opportunity to allocate further funding to Earmarked Reserves to support the Councils priorities from savings in this year's budget. It was suggested that Members may wish to revisit this towards the end of the financial year once the Council is clearer on the final outturn position.

The Clerk then took Members through the detailed notes set out on pages 6 and 7 of the report which set out the rationale as to how some of the budgets had been determined and some of the variances.

Members sought clarification on a range of items covered within this section of the report which the Clerk responded too. Members were satisfied with the responses provided however they sought further clarification in relation to proposed sum to be included towards Twinning within the Civic budget. The Clerk informed members that this sum had been proposed by the Chair of the Council to support the event next year however the extent of any financial support would require to be approved by the Council as part of the budget setting process. A number of members believed that the twinning hosting event was not due to be scheduled until 2021 therefore if this was the case this allocation should not be included in next year's budget. The Clerk undertook to clarify this position and if this was the case then it would be removed from the budget proposal. If it was to occur next year Council should be invited to consider this allocation as part of the budget setting process in December.

Member's views were sought regarding the level of precept and whether they wished to propose a precept level to full council at this stage or whether they wished to defer to Council to determine the final precept level for 2020/21 after reflecting any proposed change Policy Resources and Communications may have this evening.

Members discussed various options as to whether the Council should simply apply an inflationary increase or an inflationary increase plus a contribution to Earmarked Reserves to continue to support the Council priorities. Members felt that although the Council had reviewed its Business Plan recently further work was still required on prioritising some of the projects and suggested this be examined further in January.

The consensus amongst Members was that the Council should consider applying an inflationary increase and contributing further funds to Earmarked Reserves to support the Councils priorities identified within the Business Plan. Members were minded at this point not to propose a level until it could be established the impact on Council tax levels that would fall due to individual households.

The Clerk suggested that to assist Members at Full Council in determining the final level of precept he will prepare a series of spreadsheets detailing the impact on Council Tax precept for each £2,500 increase in Council tax applied i.e.: £2,500, £5,000, £7,500 etc. and circulate these in advance of the meeting to assist Members in making an informed decision at the Council meeting in December.

Members welcomed this proposal and based on this approach they **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that they consider applying an inflationary increase and an additional contribution to support Earmarked Reserves when considering the precept level for 2020/21.

19/52.2 Communication

The Clerk informed Members that the attached policy represented the amended version of the Communication Policy and incorporated the agreed amendments from the previous Policy Resources & Communications Committee meeting. Members duly noted the revised policy.

19/52.3 Information Technology – Email system

The Clerk introduced a report setting out a proposal to review the Councils current email system used by Members. It was proposed that the Council Members should migrate over to using Outlook Exchange which would provide a secure email system. This would also align the systems to those currently used by staff who are able to access emails remotely. Members were advised that the current system used by Members has a number of vulnerabilities.

If Members were to move over to this Outlook Exchange all member email accounts will change from ending .net to .gov.uk which would be consistent with almost all local authority email addresses.

To achieve this would cost circa £524 pa in licence fees plus additional set up costs in the first year. We have also been advised that it will be possible to configure the set up of the email accounts to enable members to be notified when emails have been received via this account. Member's views are sought on the proposal.

All Members were in favour of the proposal to move over to Outlook exchange system and implement .gov.uk accounts.

Members therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the migration over to Outlook Exchange and for the initiative to be funded from the IT support budget.

19/52.4 Information Technology – Website.

Members were advised that all public sector websites will be required to meet the accessibility standards set out in the Public Sector Bodies (website and mobile applications) (no2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 by 23rd September 2020.

The Clerk had held discussions with the Councils website provider who has confirmed that the Council website can be made compliant but would require further development to do so. This could be achieved in the sum of £640 (net).

In addition the Clerk confirmed that the Councils website was currently not fully mobile friendly therefore it was proposed that at the same time further development work could be undertaken to deliver a solution to enable the Councils website to become mobile friendly. This could be achieved in the sum of £320 (net)

Members were therefore requested to consider the proposal and were informed that this initiative would be funded via the Communications budget which held sufficient funds to meet the costs associated with these works.

Members were in support of this proposal and the approach of undertaking both pieces of work at the same time.

Members therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the proposals to ensure that the website complies with the accessibility regulations and that the website is mobile friendly.

PRC19/53 Urgent Matters. There were no urgent matters.

PRC19/54 DATE OF NEXT MEETING. 17 December 2019

PRC19/55 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS In view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted Councillors will be referred to the confidential agenda. If any members of the public or press are present they will be requested to withdraw from the meeting.

PRC 19/56 STAFFING MATTERS.

Minutes 19/56.1 – 19/56.3 Discussed under confidential session.

Discussed under confidential session to page 18.