

MINUTES of the POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE held in the NEW MILLENNIUM CHAMBER, MANOR HOUSE, CHURCH STREET, LITTLEHAMPTON on MONDAY 17 DECEMBER 2012 at 6.30PM

Present: Cllrs Emberson (Chair),
Belchamber MBE, Gammon,
Squires and Hulmes.
Cllr Ayres attended as a
substitute for Cllr Long.

In attendance: Cllr Dr Walsh KStJ

2012/2013

36. EVACUATION PROCEDURES

The evacuation procedures were noted.

37. MOBILE PHONES

Members and the public were reminded that the use of mobile phones (other than on silent) was prohibited at Town Council and Committee meetings.

38. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Long and Weston.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and Officers were reminded to make any declarations of disclosable pecuniary or personal and/or prejudicial interests that they might have in relation to items on the Agenda. Councillors Emberson, Gammon and Squires declared personal interests as Members of the District Council with regard to the items on the Localisation of Council Tax Support and the Full Council Draft Budget 2013/14.

40. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2012 (previously circulated) were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

41. CHAIR'S REPORT AND URGENT ITEMS

There were none.

42. PUBLIC FORUM

There were none.

43. OFFICER'S REPORT

43.1 Council and Committee Dates 2013/14

The Committee considered proposed dates for Council and Committee meetings in 2013/14 (previously circulated). The Clerk explained that he had endeavoured to avoid clashes with Arun District Council's meetings and had included a revised meeting schedule for the Property and Personnel Committee. The Clerk asked Members to consider the list further and to let him have any comments prior to the circulation of the Council agenda in January. It was **RESOLVED** that:

The emerging calendar be noted.

43.2 Localisation of Council Tax Support

43.2.1 The Committee considered a report (previously circulated) which set out the rationale for and the implications of the introduction of Localisation of Council Tax Support. The Clerk explained that the new regime required that Parishes were notified of the Tax Base values between 1st December and 31st January leaving very little time to calculate the Precept and set the budget. Despite a campaign by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) the Government had so far ignored the impact of the lateness of this notification in terms of precept and budget setting in the long term. However, a grant had been made available to billing authorities to mitigate the financial impact of the changes to the calculation of the precept. The Clerk reported that whilst the District Council's Cabinet had recommended that the grant funds were paid to Parish and Town Councils, their decision was subject to confirmation by the Full District Council on 9th January 2013. Therefore depending on the outcome of discussions on this and the later Budget item, it might be necessary to convene an extraordinary meeting of the Committee in January.

43.2.2 The Committee discussed the implications of the tight timescales and was concerned about how Localisation of Council Tax Support would operate in future years. The Committee understood that the new regime aimed to give billing authorities more freedom on how they paid benefits but questioned the resultant lack of accountability for Parishes. The Committee also expressed reservations about the availability of grant support from Government in future years and supported a suggestion that the Town Council backed the campaign by NALC.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

(1) A letter be written to the Government expressing the Town Council's concerns about the implementation of the Localisation of Council Tax Support.

(2) The decision as whether an extraordinary Policy and Finance meeting is required in January be deferred for consideration of the Budget item.

43.3 Wick Post Office – New Premises and Modernisation

4.3.1 The Committee considered a letter from the Post Office setting out proposals to move the Post Office branch in Wick Street, Littlehampton to a new location at Wick News, 137 Wick Road, in February 2013. The Committee considered this was a positive move providing overall better facilities than at present. The Committee also reviewed the products and services that would be available

and considered the impact in the area of the empty shop front left by the old premises.

- 4.3.2 Regarding the impact on the High Street, the Clerk reported that the newly created Town Centre Economic Development Officer post would be charged with developing initiatives to encourage economic growth. The Committee questioned the exclusion of ATM facilities from the products and services that would be available at the new premises and sought clarification on this point. It was **RESOLVED** that:

A letter be written to the Post Office seeking the inclusion of the provision of free ATM facilities at the new premises.

44. ACCOUNTS

44.1 Finance Report

The Committee considered a report (previously circulated) highlighting variances from budget and income and expenditure for the Policy and Finance Committee's budget for 2013/14. The Committee noted that expenditure in the Town Centre Management budget was held back in anticipation of the successful appointment of the new Economic Development Officer. Regarding investments, the Clerk stated that the report aimed to show the distribution of medium term investments and that the amount of income was stated in the accounts. It was **RESOLVED** that:

The report be noted.

44.2 Policy and Finance Committee Draft Budget 2013/14

The Committee considered a report (previously circulated) that set out the draft Policy and Finance Committee budget for 2013/14 and projected budgets for 2014/15 and 2015/16. The Clerk reported that there were slight changes in some of the budget heads leaving very little overall change and highlighted the diminishing income from investments. The Committee noted that some of the Ward budgets were under spent and discussed ways in which the level of grants awarded could be improved. It was **RESOLVED** that:

The draft Committee budget for 2013/14 and the projected budgets for 2014/15 and 2015/16 be RECOMMENDED to Council as part of the overall Council budget.

44.3 Full Council Draft Budget 2013/14

- 44.3.1** The Committee considered a report (previously circulated) which set out a proposed Council budget for 2013/14. Referring to the Localisation of Council Tax Support, the Clerk reported that the recommended precept included a provisional Band D Base and grant to offset the changes arising from the implementation of the new regime. This resulted in an increase of 2.42% or £2.52p per annum and he explained that the levels to call a referendum were at this stage unknown.

- 44.3.2** The Committee discussed these proposals in the context of the level of services provided, the implications of recommending an increase above the possible cap and whether to defer making a decision until such time as the

level of grant from District Council was confirmed. The Clerk reported that Officers were confident that the proposals were consistent with the Council's financial strategy and that the cost of an increase over 2% could be met from reserves if required should a referendum become an issue.

44.3.3 The Committee went on to examine the budget in more detail and the following points were noted from the ensuing discussion;

- Regarding the proposal to transfer earmarked reserves for notice boards back to the general reserve, Members noted that Ward budgets could be available for this purpose.
- Regarding the reduction in income from the Manor House, Members noted that the scale of charges was competitive and that the charges and usage would be reviewed by the Property and Personnel Committee.
- Members noted that the level of community grants and partnership initiatives budget had been aligned to expenditure in previous years.

44.3.4 Members were supportive of the recommendation within the report with the proviso that to avert a referendum, the cost of an increase over 2% be met from reserves should the need arise. It was **RESOLVED** that:

Council be RECOMMENDED to agree a budget for 2013/14, setting a precept of £886,080, that being an increase of 2.42% or £2.52p per annum on Band D Council Tax with the proviso that the cost of the increase over 2% be met from reserves should the need arise.

45. MASTERPLAN – NORTH LITTLEHAMPTON

The Clerk reported that he expected the North Littlehampton Section 106 Agreements to be signed off by the end of the week.

The meeting closed at 7.40pm.

CHAIR