

## HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the **POLICY, RESOURCES and COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE** virtual meeting held on **Tuesday 17 November 2020 at 10.30 pm**

Attendees: Parish Councillors: Frances Gaudencio, Ian Weir and Sue Hatton.

Clerk: Ian Cumberworth

**PRC20/19 APOLOGIES:** Kate Bailey, Peter Gibbons and Frank Rylance.

**PRC20/20 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS:** None declared.

### **PRC20/21 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020 as previously circulated were accepted.

### **PRC20/22 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.**

There were no members of the public present.

### **PRC20/23 CLERKS REPORT**

**20/23.1 Draft Budget 2021/22 –** The Clerk introduced the proposed budget report set out as Appendix 1 in the agenda which set out a draft budget illustrating the projected out turn position for this financial year (20/21) and a proposed budget for next year (21/22).

Members were advised that the impact of Covid 19 this year has been significant, impacting on the Council's miscellaneous income streams and revenue expenditure for the year.

Members were referred to page 3 of the report that summarised the precept levels applied by the parish council in previous years. The summary shows that if the Council chose not to increase the current precept level for the next financial year with the increase in the property base the effect would be to reduce the Parish Council tax element payable.

On a band D property if the council chose to retain the current precept level for next year this would reduce the current payment of £85.22 (20/21) to £83.77 as a result in the increase in the property base to 3528. Members were advised that the property base figure remains an estimate and the Council is awaiting confirmation of the actual figure from MSDC. Once this is known this may result in a further adjustment.

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

Members were then taken through the table detailed on page 4 of the report which summarised the projected revenue out turn for the current financial year and the proposed budget requirement for the forthcoming financial year (21/22) to cover the operational costs of the council.

The Clerk informed Members that the budget had been prepared on the assumption that more normal working patterns would return for the larger part of the next financial year.

On page 5 of the report it summarises the level of capital expenditure for the current financial year which had been significant.

The Clerk indicated that the budget had also been prepared to illustrate the impact on the reserves on the basis that no additional funds are to be allocated to earmarked reserves as part of the budget setting process, however this does remain an option for members to consider.

Member's attention was drawn to a number of notes on pages 6 and 7 of the report which provided members with further context on the rationale behind some of the budget allocations and variances.

On page 5 the report detailed the impact on the council's earmarked reserves in the event no specific additional funding was allocated as part of the current budget setting process. Members were advised that based on the current proposals and known commitments it is anticipated that earmark reserves would reduce from a balance as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 of £93,652 to a balance as at 31 March 2022 of £63,652.

Members were reminded that with the anticipated movement in earmarked reserves members may wish to consider either allocating further funds as part of the precept setting process or to allocate some of the projected revenue underspend for this financial year towards supporting ongoing priorities.

The Clerk indicated that if members were minded to allocate further funds to Earmarked reserves from the projected revenue underspends for this year it would be prudent to revisit this in February once the Council has a clearer position regarding the final outturn position. This would not prevent the various committees considering options at the current time that they may wish to consider supporting/promoting going forward however any initiative should be informed by the business plan.

Appendix A (last page of this report summarises the impact on the parish council element on council tax across all property bands if the precept level were to remain unchanged and that the estimated property base is correct.

Based on the current property base calculation if the precept remained unchanged a band D property charge payer would pay £1.45 less per annum than the current year. The table also indicated that with every £1,000 increase in precept raised this would put 28 pence per annum extra on a band D property in respect of the parish council tax element.

Members sought clarification on a range of elements within the budget which the Clerk responded to and the consensus amongst members was that the Council should continue to adopt a prudent approach as there are still a number of unknowns regarding any future impact on activities with the pandemic. It was acknowledged that more contractors were continuing to trade through the current lockdown arrangements when compared to earlier in the year, however there was

still likely to continue to be some catch up which could impact on the timing of delivering schemes.

Members debated the merits of increasing the precept or retaining the current level which generated a difference of views.

Cllr Weir indicated that in order to continue to support the council priorities based on the estimated property base the Council should consider a modest increase of say 1-1.5% to offset the increase in houses within the parish to enable funds to be set aside. Cllr Weir went on to state there may be potential scope to increase the precept without requiring residents to pay any more than they currently pay for the parish element as a result of the increase in numbers of the property base.

It was restated that the parish element represents a very small proportion of the overall council tax payment and it was likely that due to the financial pressures experienced due to the pandemic it's likely that both WSCC and MSDC will consider increasing their Council tax element by the maximum % permitted to try and address the shortfall in their respective budgets.

Cllr Gaudencio and Cllr S Hatton expressed the view that **their** preference was that the proposed precept should be retained and that no increase be applied for 2021/22 particularly in the current times.

Members were therefore invited to consider making a recommendation from Policy Resources and Communications Committee to Council when they consider the budget proposals.

After careful consideration of the proposed budget requirement Members **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** to full Council that they consider retaining the current precept level at £295,545 and to not apply an increase for the forthcoming financial year 2021/22.

**20/23.2 Communication** the Clerk informed members that a number of press releases/Communications have been issued since the last Policy Resources & Communications Committee which have included:

- Item regarding the **Christmas lights (Hassocks Life/Talk about)** drawing attention to the fact that the parish council fund the lights and the proposed date for the lights to be switched on
- All schools were contacted and requested to notify all pupils and parents via their email systems that the skate park was closed in line with government guidelines.
- An article was also due to appear in the Mid Sussex District Council (generated by their communications team) - **Mid Sussex Matters** publication which features Adastra Park and the delivery of enhancements by Hassocks Parish Council utilising s106 funding. The article is to be titled '**Adastra reaches for the stars**'.

Although the deadline had been missed for an article by the Chair of Planning, Members suggested that regular articles should be generated setting out the activities of the Council.

It was proposed that the Chair of Planning and Grounds & Environment Committee be approached initially with a view to generating articles covering the work/initiatives of their respective committees. Cllr Weir and the Clerk undertook to liaise with the relevant Chairs with a view to obtaining articles for future publication.

**20/23.3 Business Plan** Cllr Gaudencio and Cllr Weir (IW) have been working jointly on reviewing the current plan. Cllr Weir introduced a revised format of the Business Plan with a view to improving the clarity and focus of the document and to aide prioritisation of various work streams. Members were taken through each page on screen (via zoom), members were advised that the content had not really changed it was more about the style of presentation. The key change related to the summary page setting out the project timeline for the initiatives to be delivered.

Members welcomed the revised format and presentation of the information. IW confirmed that the current document remains a work in progress and required further development. Members agreed that Cllr Weir and Cllr Gaudencio should continue to develop the document further for consideration by this committee at its next meeting in January.

**PRC20/24 Urgent Matters.** There were no urgent matters.

**PRC20/25 DATE OF NEXT MEETING.** 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**PRC20/26 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.