

HASSOCKS PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the **Parish Council** held on 12th December 2017
at 7.30pm in the Parish Centre, Adastra Park, Hassocks.

Attendees: Parish Councillors Ian Weir(Chair), Peter Gibbons ,Bill Hatton, Leslie Campbell, Darryl Sinclair, Kate Bailey, Frances Gaudencio ,Sue Hatton and Judith Foot.

Parish Clerk: Ian Cumberworth

Visiting Member: District Councillors Gordon Marples (apologies), Michelle Binks (apologies)
Kirsty Lord (County Councillor)

MINUTES

PC17/113 APOLOGIES

Cllrs Georgia Cheshire, Victoria Standfast, Nick Owens, Jane Baker and Justine Fisher.

PC17/114 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Disclosure by Councillors of personal interests in matters on the agenda, and whether the Councillor regards their interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.

None

PC17/115 MINUTES

The minutes of the Council meeting held on the 14th November and were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meetings.

PC17/116 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was 1 Member of the public present who observed proceedings but did not raise any questions or comments.

PC17/117 MINUTES

To note the minutes of the Planning Committee 20th November 2017, Policy Resources & Communication Committee 21 November 2017 and the Grounds and Environment Committee 27th November 2017.

PC17/118 FINANCE

The Finance report and payments totalling £18,935.01 for the period ending 31st October 2017 were approved.

PC17/119 Reports

- 119.1 District Councillors reports: - Cllr Gordon Marples and Cllr Michelle Binks sent their apologies but had not submitted any written reports. Cllr Weir invited Cllr Sue Hatton to update Members on any District Council matters. Cllr Hatton informed Members that the District were currently looking at site selection together with ways of increasing the number of affordable housing units in the round. Members were informed that Affinity Housing Association has recently been taken over by Clarion Housing Association who have indicated they will only consider affordable housing on sites in excess of 50 units.

MSDC website indicates that they received 1037 responses from Hassocks regarding the proposed amendments to the District Plan, they have confirmed that they have submitted all submissions and produced a summarisation of the contents of these on their website. Cllr Bill Hatton raised concerns that although assurances have been provided that all information has been provided to Jonathan Bore's office it is reliant on them reading the detailed submissions. With regard to HPC we submitted a number of appendices including the Landscape study, and although referenced in MSDC summary this is not specifically referenced as an appendix. The statement from the National Park is set out in full however they do not appear to raising any particular concerns regarding the proposed strategic site.

- 119.2 County Councillor report: Cllr Kirsty Lord updated Members on a number of issues that she had recently been involved in .It was confirmed that Health Visitors are now back in Hassocks. The library is currently undergoing development at Standford House however access will be maintained during the development works. At present WSCC appear to be committed to retaining all libraries in West Sussex.

Ongoing discussions are being held with Sussex Clubs for Young People regarding the youth service within Hassocks and it is anticipated a further update will be brought to this Committee in the New Year.

- 119.3 Rail matters – Cllr Campbell informed Members that he had nothing to report.

Cllr Gibbons informed Members that 123 trains had been cancelled in October and further 66 that were scheduled to stop failed to do so .For the year to date 2717 trains have either been cancelled or failed to stop which equates to approximately 8.13 trains per day being cancelled.

- 119.4 Youth/Police matters - Cllr Bailey updated Members on both Youth and police matters. Cllr Bailey indicated that Hassocks was currently experiencing anti- social behaviour within the village from a specific group

of youngsters and urged any persons witnessing this to call 999 in the first instance to enable the police to investigate the incidents further.

- 119.5 Report from Councillors on meetings of outside bodies where the Council is represented- none

PC17/120 CHAIRMANS REPORT –.

Cllr Ian Weir thanked the Light up Hassocks team for all the work that went into making it a successful event. He went on to remind Members that the Council offices will close for Christmas/New Year break at 12 noon on the 22nd December (normal closing time) and reopen at 10am on Tuesday 2nd January 2018. In acknowledgement of the work undertaken this year by the support team will be receiving a gift voucher as a thank you on behalf of the Council which will be funded from the Chairs allowance.

PC17/121 CLERK'S REPORT

121.1 Councillor Vacancy.

Members noted the resignation of Christopher Hobbs and were informed that 'A Notice of Vacancy' has been published inviting electors to request a poll. If no such request is received within the prescribed time the Council may co-opt a Member (Local Government Act 1972 s87).

121.2 Draft Business Plan

Members were requested to consider the draft business plan set out in pages 8 – 17 of the agenda which details the high level priorities of the Council. Members were requested to agree the attached document which had been previously considered by the various Committees in its journey to this point and authorise the business plan working group to consult with key stakeholders and work towards the finalisation of the plan for distribution. The Clerk indicated that the working group numbers had now decreased to two therefore Members may wish to consider inviting others to join the group .Cllr Foot indicated she would be happy to do so.

Cllr Gaudencio confirmed the intention of liaising with key stakeholders is to identify opportunities to work together to support the delivery of the plan

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the working draft document and authorise the team to consult with key stakeholders to work towards the finalisation and publication of the Business Plan

121.3 Draft Budget 2018/19

Members were requested to consider the draft budget proposal for 2018/19 set out on pages 18 – 30 of the agenda.

The paper set out the projected out turn position for 2017/18 and a proposed budget for the next financial year 2018/19 which has taken into account a number of factors which the Clerk indicated he would be happy to go through in more detail.

Based on the projected outturn for 2017/18 the budget is likely to return a deficit in the region of £52,491.

The budget projection for 2018/19 with a nil increase in precept would result in a deficit budget in the region of £86,249. This figure reflects further savings identified as requested by Policy Resource and Communications Committee. **(PRC/17/38.1)**

The Clerk informed Members that the current approach to using general reserves to fund operating costs would not be sustainable indefinitely.

At present Parish councils are the only tier of government where % precept increases are not capped, however this may change at a future point to align with the other tiers of local government.

On page 20 item 2 – summary of budget information the Clerk set out the HPC property tax base and precept for the last 3 years. It was noted that for a band D equivalent property between 2013/14 to 2017/18 HPC (£56.38) precept had only increased by a net 69 pence per annum in this time.

Members were informed that the national average parish precept for 2017/18 was £61.03 and the average Mid Sussex District parish council was £63.97 per annum therefore HPC current precept is below these thresholds.

On page 21 of the agenda the Clerk set out a summary of receipts and payments projected for 2017/18 and 2018/19.

On page 22 of the agenda the table set out the impact on reserves based on projected income and expenditure. It was illustrated that if all Earmarked Reserves were spent next year as intended and precept levels were not increased it would reduce the Councils overall general reserves to £77,225. This would be at the lower end of reserves required for contingencies.

Members were advised that they may need to review the scheduling of these schemes.

As part of this budget setting process members were requested to consider increasing the precept to work towards a balanced budget. Within the report on page 26 the table set out the impact on individual's precept for every £10,000 incremental increase.

For every £10,000 increase it would reduce the budget deficit by the same value therefore to achieve a balanced budget in 1 year would require an increase of £86,249. Anything below this level would mean the council would continue to operate a deficit budget.

Members debated the options at length in relation to the budget but there was a general consensus that the Council needed to work towards a

balanced budget, particularly in light of the challenging agenda members have set themselves to deliver the Business Plan. It was acknowledged that Hassocks have been subject to incurring additional expenditure in the current financial year and future financial years as a direct result of Government policies in relation to Auto enrolment pensions which was outside of their control.

Members expressed the view that the Council should look to maximise other funding sources such as Section 106 funding to support the planned Councils initiatives.

Some members expressed concern of the overall precept % increase required to close the budget gap but it was acknowledged that in terms of a pure monetary increase it was more modest although it would still impact on household's weekly bills. It was also acknowledged that as the Council continues to expand it has been necessary to modify previous practices and increase resources however they felt real progress is starting to be made. Members felt that any increase in precept should be effectively communicated to residents setting out why the Council has taken its decision and where the funding is spent and potential things it wishes to deliver going forward.

Prior to Members finalising their decision they wished to place on record their thanks to the Clerk for the detailed work undertaken on the budgets which has assisted members in making a more informed decision in setting the precept.

Members summarised their views and indicated in principal they were keen to move towards a balanced budget.

Members **RESOLVED** to agree to increase the precept for 2018/19 by £86,249 to deliver a fully funded balanced budget.

All members were in favour of this proposal.

121.4 **Appointments to Outside bodies**

Due to individuals changing circumstances vacancies have occurred for representations on two outside bodies therefore the Clerk sought members views to nominate alternative representatives:

1 Downlands School Sports representative – RESOLVED Cllr Bill Hatton indicated he would be happy to take up this role

2 Adastra Hall Management Committee

Cllr Kate Baily confirmed she was happy to continue to fulfil this role but requested the Clerk contact the Committee and request that they ensure meetings do not coincide with the Councils scheduled meetings to enable her to attend.

121.5 Standing Orders/Financial Regulations (amendment)

The Clerk referred to the revised Standing Orders/Financial Regulations which were adopted on 12/09/17 (**PC/81.8**) which superseded the previous version. However since the adoption an omission has been identified where the clerk does not have the authority to incur expenditure in the event of urgency. This was available under the old regulations as Financial Regulation 3.4. To facilitate the day to day operation of the Council the Clerk requested Members to consider the inclusion of this regulation into the current Financial Regulations as 3.6

Members considered the request and **RESOLVED** to authorise the amendment of Standing Orders/Financial Regulations to incorporate the previously adopted Financial Regulation 3.4 into the revised Financial Regulations as 3.6.

121.6 Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)

The Council recently received a letter from the CPRE requesting additional donations to support a number of initiatives. The Council is already a member of the organisation and pays an annual subscription fee. Members discussed the merits of making an additional donation however they **RESOLVED** not to make an additional voluntary contribution on this occasion.

121.7 Appointment of External auditor

Members were informed of the outcome of the recent market testing for the appointment of the External Auditor for parishes in West Sussex. The auditor appointed on behalf of Hassocks Parish Council will be Moore Stephens who will replace the previous external auditors for the West Sussex region (PKF Littlejohn LLP)
Moore Stephens have been appointed under the Local Audit (smaller) Authorities Regulations 2015 for a 5 year period.

PC17/122 URGENT MATTERS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN for noting and/or inclusion on a future agenda.

There were none.

PC17/123 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the date of the next Council meeting is **Tuesday 9th January 2018 at 7.30pm.**