

**UNADOPTED  
POLEGATE TOWN COUNCIL**

Minutes of the Finance and Policy Committee meeting held on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013 in St Georges Church Hall, 110 Eastbourne Road, Polegate at 9.00 p.m

**Present:** Cllrs M Cunningham **MC** (chair), H Parker **HP**, Mrs C Berry **CB**, J Harmer **JH (ex officio)**, Mrs J Voyce **JV**, T Voyce **TV**, E Board **EB**, J O’Riordan **JOR (8)**

**Not Present** S Shing **SS**: M Pybus **MPy**, (2)

1 members of the public present

Minute Number	Resolution	Follow-Up
10811	<b>Election of vice chair</b> It was resolved to elect Cllr H Parker as vice chair VOTE 6 for 2 abstentions	
10812	<b>Apologies for absence</b> Cllrs S Shing, M Pybus	
10813	<b>Declarations of interest in any items on the agenda</b> None	
10814	<b>Opportunity for Public Comment</b> None	
10815	<b>Minutes of Finance &amp; Policy Committee Meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013</b> <b>The minutes were agreed and signed by the chair as an accurate record.</b> <b>VOTE All in favour</b>	
10816	<b>Policies and Procedures</b> The new policies had been circulated prior to the meeting. The clerk had not received any queries prior to the meeting. A Councillor asked what was the clerk to do in the event of stress, a Councillor commented that she should probably go to the councillors or personnel. A Councillor asked if this was only work related stress, the chair stated that the policy had always included non work related stress. One Councillor stated he did not have the policies. The clerk gave a copy to the Councillor. The clerk stated that as she did not have access to the computer although she had copies of the policy she could not access the tracked changes and did not have the older policy at the meeting. There were minor emendations, but she could not confirm what they were without access to the old paperwork. <b>It was agreed to defer this matter to the full council pending further paperwork detailing the emendations.</b>	JO
10817	<b>Preliminary Budget Discussions</b> The chair initiated discussions on each of the topics listed the following additional comments were made. A Councillor asked the clerk if she had considered getting IT services from Eastbourne Borough Council. She stated that she had had arrangements with East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council in the past, but that she had not approached Eastbourne. She explained about The Link, and what they planned for parishes regarding cost effective computing. A councilor commented that Citizens Advice also used cloud backup.  The clerk confirmed that in last years budget 2013/14 council had resolved to use the pavilion refurbishment fund and this would be absorbed back into general reserves.  The clerk was asked about the school crossing patrol and she informed the committee that the council was required to hold the ear marked reserve, but it appeared that the school had negotiated for East Sussex County Council to pay for the school crossing patrol and that once this was confirmed the ear marked reserve would be free for reallocation. The Town Focal enhancement reserve was discussed regarding dog bins and	

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A Councillor asked about the street lights reserve. Many questions were raised on the amount of failed columns and the timescales that they would need to be replaced or repaired. The clerk clarified that at present the contractors were doing a pilot area, the columns would be removed and tested, and this would allow them to see if the electrical test was valid. Once the results of this were known the clerk would be able to reassess whether the replacement needed to be carried out immediately or could be delayed to obtain a lower quotation. The clerk was asked if Council would have the figures in time to set the budget. The clerk stated that it was not certain, but that enough further information should be available to make an informed decision.

A Councillor asked what the present situation was with the High Street toilets. The clerk stated that she was waiting for a meeting date with officers from Wealden District Council and had asked them to come with details such as how much they planned to charge the Town Council, whether they would be doing a full repairs lease, the costs of purchasing the building and other questions. A Councillor asked to clarify that the service (provision of High Street toilets), which council tax payers had previously been paying for was now planned to be stopped and the Town Council would be asked to fund this through further council tax receipts. The clerk confirmed that this had been provided for by Wealden District Council but due to cuts in budgets and it being a non statutory provision, it was something that they could cease to fund and use the funding for other things. The Councillor stated that he felt that to make the Town Council pay for the toilets was double taxation as this was already paid for, others agreed. The clerk confirmed that there were now a number of County and District services that the Town Council were paying or planned to pay for such as the weed killing.

The clerk was asked how updated she was kept by the District Councillors on the High Street toilet issue, she stated that she had some information which had already been passed onto council, but that she had looked at the district council minutes and felt there were issues with the background papers that the district council had based their decision on. A Councillor stated that everyone knew there was no community scheme possible and that we should keep asking Wealden to continue funding it. The chair confirmed that the meetings about to be held were to discuss all of the options and then the Town Council can look at the options that were viable. A Councillor stated that if the District Council had made a decision to close or move to a community scheme (if that were possible), the Council would not be able to go back on that, so it was for the Town Council to decide how to move forward and to see if it could afford to take on the toilets in some form and how much that would cost the council tax payer in Polegate. The clerk stated as a guide this would increase the council tax by around 3%. A Councillor stated that the Town Council in that instance should consult the public and ask whether they were prepared to accept that increase in order to keep the toilets. A Councillor commented that if the Town Council took on this responsibility and then in the future could not maintain that through their own cuts, then the Town Council would be seen to be closing the toilets instead of the District Council who had closed them and the Town Council who saved them. A Councillor stated that the Town Council should be prepared to negotiate hard bearing in mind it was the District Council who were closing the toilets. Another Councillor stated the alternative was to find out if there was a way to get the District Council to change its mind.

The committee discussed the general reserves for 2014/15, the clerk stated that she had prepared a risk assessment on the reserves and that it would be useful

for councillors to have a copy, which she would circulate shortly.

The clerk read out some of the recommendations: to set aside at least £30,000 on top of normal expenditure to the street lighting ear marked reserve. To set aside £16000 for an annual poll. Recommend that Council do not exceed 50% of the precept in general reserves at the year end (March 2014). Under spends could be placed in ear marked reserves for desirable items such as drainage for Brightling road, purchase of land for a cemetery and other items previously resolved by council to pursue. The clerk stated that she had investigated the costs for drainage (which varied considerably) but that at present it was unlikely that Council could afford to make an ear marked reserve for this. The clerk also mentioned that Council may wish to set aside £8000 to cover the toilets, but long term this would need to be included in a budget each year. Recommend that Council maintain a reserve of 3-6 months normal expenditure.

The clerk confirmed that it was likely that the councils grant funding from the District Council would be cut by a little over £4500, but this was yet to be confirmed by the District Council. The clerk stated that in the whole of the UK some council had not been given a grant at all last year to buffer the change in the Local Council Taxation Support Grant. Wealden had given the whole amount last year and it was likely to reduce each year. The Council could be asked to fund the whole difference (over £30,000) which would mean a cut in the budget each year of this sum or an increase in the precept. This year that increase would be in the region of 15.53% to cover this reduction based on the budget as presented. A Councillor asked what that was in monetary terms. The Clerk stated it was 30 pence per week and £15.32 per year for a band D household. He asked what the grant was the clerk stated last year the grant was £32286 and this year was likely to be reduced to £25743. (£4543 shortfall).

A Councillor asked whether money could be moved from the general reserves to the street lighting ear marked reserve. The clerk confirmed that this was possible and that it was recommended, but that Council had other finance issues that it would need to consider before making a decision on how much would be moved. The chair confirmed that Council was likely to have to make difficult decisions on the setting of the precept based on all of the reductions in income, grants and precept figures. A Councillor asked if Wealden District Council had lawfully reduced the precept, the clerk stated that they had. He asked that she obtain the law that they had used to do this. The clerk said that she would get the details of this and send it to him.<sup>i</sup>

The clerk was asked about details of the potential office move, the clerk stated that the report was being prepared and aimed for it to be available for 9<sup>th</sup> December, possibly available for the 25<sup>th</sup> November depending on workload.

The meeting closed at 10.09 pm.

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The Government gave financial support to District Councils, through Revenue Support Grant and Retained Business Rates, to reduce the Council Tax Requirement of Town and Parish Councils. The District Council then passed on that amount in full, so that if the Town and Parish Council kept its precept the same, there would be no increase in Council Tax.

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10817	<b>Preliminary Budget Discussions</b> The chair initiated discussions on each of the topics listed the following additional comments were made. A Councillor asked the clerk if she had considered getting IT services from Eastbourne Borough Council. She stated that she had had arrangements with East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council in the past, but that she had not approached Eastbourne. She explained about The Link, and what they planned for parishes regarding cost effective computing. A councilor commented that Citizens Advice also used cloud backup.  The clerk confirmed that in last years budget 2013/14 council had resolved to use the pavilion refurbishment fund and this would be absorbed back into general reserves.  The clerk was asked about the school crossing patrol and she informed the committee that the council was required to hold the ear marked reserve, but it appeared that the school had negotiated for East Sussex County Council to pay for the school crossing patrol and that once this was confirmed the ear marked reserve would be free for reallocation. The Town Focal enhancement reserve was discussed regarding dog bins and	

the possibility of putting signs on the bins. The clerk stated that she would investigate the feasibility and the costs and bring that back to council for possible use of the Town Focal Enhancement Reserve.

A Councillor asked about the street lights reserve. Many questions were raised on the amount of failed columns and the timescales that they would need to be replaced or repaired. The clerk clarified that at present the contractors were doing a pilot area, the columns would be removed and tested, and this would allow them to see if the electrical test was valid. Once the results of this were known the clerk would be able to reassess whether the replacement needed to be carried out immediately or could be delayed to obtain a lower quotation. The clerk was asked if Council would have the figures in time to set the budget. The clerk stated that it was not certain, but that enough further information should be available to make an informed decision.

A Councillor asked what the present situation was with the High Street toilets. The clerk stated that she was waiting for a meeting date with officers from Wealden District Council and had asked them to come with details such as how much they planned to charge the Town Council, whether they would be doing a full repairs lease, the costs of purchasing the building and other questions. A Councillor asked to clarify that the service (provision of High Street toilets), which council tax payers had previously been paying for was now planned to be stopped and the Town Council would be asked to fund this through further council tax receipts. The clerk confirmed that this had been provided for by Wealden District Council but due to cuts in budgets and it being a non statutory provision, it was something that they could cease to fund and use the funding for other things. The Councillor stated that he felt that to make the Town Council pay for the toilets was double taxation as this was already paid for, others agreed. The clerk confirmed that there were now a number of County and District services that the Town Council were paying or planned to pay for such as the weed killing.

The clerk was asked how updated she was kept by the District Councillors on the High Street toilet issue, she stated that she had some information which had already been passed onto council, but that she had looked at the district council minutes and felt there were issues with the background papers that the district council had based their decision on. A Councillor stated that everyone knew there was no community scheme possible and that we should keep asking Wealden to continue funding it. The chair confirmed that the meetings about to be held were to discuss all of the options and then the Town Council can look at the options that were viable. A Councillor stated that if the District Council had made a decision to close or move to a community scheme (if that were possible), the Council would not be able to go back on that, so it was for the Town Council to decide how to move forward and to see if it could afford to take on the toilets in some form and how much that would cost the council tax payer in Polegate. The clerk stated as a guide this would increase the council tax by around 3%. A Councillor stated that the Town Council in that instance should consult the public and ask whether they were prepared to accept that increase in order to keep the toilets. A Councillor commented that if the Town Council took on this responsibility and then in the future could not maintain that through their own cuts, then the Town Council would be seen to be closing the toilets instead of the District Council who had closed them and the Town Council who saved them. A Councillor stated that the Town Council should be prepared to negotiate hard bearing in mind it was the District Council who were closing the toilets. Another Councillor stated the alternative was to find out if there was a way to get the District Council to change its mind.

The committee discussed the general reserves for 2014/15, the clerk stated that she had prepared a risk assessment on the reserves and that it would be useful

for councillors to have a copy, which she would circulate shortly.

The clerk read out some of the recommendations: to set aside at least £30,000 on top of normal expenditure to the street lighting ear marked reserve. To set aside £16000 for an annual poll. Recommend that Council do not exceed 50% of the precept in general reserves at the year end (March 2014). Under spends could be placed in ear marked reserves for desirable items such as drainage for Brightling road, purchase of land for a cemetery and other items previously resolved by council to pursue. The clerk stated that she had investigated the costs for drainage (which varied considerably) but that at present it was unlikely that Council could afford to make an ear marked reserve for this. The clerk also mentioned that Council may wish to set aside £8000 to cover the toilets, but long term this would need to be included in a budget each year. Recommend that Council maintain a reserve of 3-6 months normal expenditure.

The clerk confirmed that it was likely that the councils grant funding from the District Council would be cut by a little over £4500, but this was yet to be confirmed by the District Council. The clerk stated that in the whole of the UK some council had not been given a grant at all last year to buffer the change in the Local Council Taxation Support Grant. Wealden had given the whole amount last year and it was likely to reduce each year. The Council could be asked to fund the whole difference (over £30,000) which would mean a cut in the budget each year of this sum or an increase in the precept. This year that increase would be in the region of 15.53% to cover this reduction based on the budget as presented. A Councillor asked what that was in monetary terms. The Clerk stated it was 30 pence per week and £15.32 per year for a band D household. He asked what the grant was the clerk stated last year the grant was £32286 and this year was likely to be reduced to £25743. (£4543 shortfall).

A Councillor asked whether money could be moved from the general reserves to the street lighting ear marked reserve. The clerk confirmed that this was possible and that it was recommended, but that Council had other finance issues that it would need to consider before making a decision on how much would be moved. The chair confirmed that Council was likely to have to make difficult decisions on the setting of the precept based on all of the reductions in income, grants and precept figures. A Councillor asked if Wealden District Council had lawfully reduced the precept, the clerk stated that they had. He asked that she obtain the law that they had used to do this. The clerk said that she would get the details of this and send it to him.<sup>i</sup>

The clerk was asked about details of the potential office move, the clerk stated that the report was being prepared and aimed for it to be available for 9<sup>th</sup> December, possibly available for the 25<sup>th</sup> November depending on workload.

The meeting closed at 10.09 pm.

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<sup>i</sup> The Government changed the calculation of the Council Tax Base in The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 so that the discounts brought about by Local Council Tax Support Schemes, introduced by the Local Government Finance Act 2012, reduced the Council Tax Base of Town and Parish Councils.

The Government gave financial support to District Councils, through Revenue Support Grant and Retained Business Rates, to reduce the Council Tax Requirement of Town and Parish Councils. The District Council then passed on that amount in full, so that if the Town and Parish Council kept its precept the same, there would be no increase in Council Tax.