

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance Sub-Committee**
on Tuesday 7 January 2025 at 6.30 pm
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield.

PRESENT: Cllr. D. Manvell (Chair) Cllr. P. Ullmann
Cllr. S. Mayhew Cllr. D. Ward

IN ATTENDANCE:

Town Mayor, Councillor Karen Bedwell
Councillor Donna French
Councillor Jackie Love
Councillor Peter Selby

Sarah D'Alessio – Assistant Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
Holly Goring – Town Clerk
Minutes taken by Sarah D'Alessio

1.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members and officers were reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to items on the agenda.
None received.

2.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

One apology had been received from Councillor B. Cox due to sickness. He attended the meeting online, to ensure engagement as Vice-Chair.

3.0 MINUTES

3.1 Minutes of the meeting of the Finance Sub-Committee held on the 16 December 2024

FS.08.01.25

Members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance Sub-Committee on 16 December 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4.0 DETAILED REVIEW OF DRAFT BUDGET PAPERS FOR 2025/26 AND PROPOSED CONSOLIDATION OF EARMARKED RESERVES

Members were provided with a further revised draft of the working budget papers for 2025/26, which did not rely on the use of reserves, for members to discuss and consider in comparison with the version circulated with the agenda papers, which saw reliance of £45-50k on reserves.

The Assistant Town Clerk & RFO explained the detailed changes in the draft version of the budget circulated and published with the agenda for this committee meeting, and then the revised version providing other options for consideration which had been circulated to members that day.

Members reviewed the differences between the options presented, and then went line by line through the income and expenditure for 2025/26 by committee area. During this detailed exercise, members highlighted the following points:

- Contingency - the importance of having funds set aside for contingency, as recommended by the Internal Auditor;
- Income streams for room hire – with improvements to the Town Council buildings and reconfiguration of some areas, it was suggested that a campaign be run to market our room hire, and promote the facilities available;
- Festive lights – confirming the proposed income and expenditure figures to ensure it was right for the coming year taking into account potential contract costs, and additional works required by East Sussex Highways. The Town Clerk explained the difficulty with prior loss of overheads due to property ownership changes and street lighting column issues. This was an opportunity to listen to local residents and increase the lighting display for 2025;
- Member allowances – an initial members’ poll was split. At present, the figure in both versions of the draft working budget papers were based on 10 Councillors claiming allowances at a 5% increase. A decision would be taken at Full Council on 13 Jan 2025;
- Service Level Agreements – after discussion it was recommended to renew these agreements for 12 months, to maintain Wealden Volunteering at £8k, and for Wealden Citizens Advice to receive £23k. It was recommended that the main Community Grant funding allocation (General Power of Competence) be set at £23,000;
- WPA – it was questioned whether staff were fully utilising the scheme. The Assistant Town Clerk explained that the majority of staff were. Others were being signposted when necessary and it

- was confirmed that a review meeting with all staff was currently being arranged;
- Mayoral chain – the detachable centrepiece required some restoration, and the main mayoral chain needed capacity to add the next Mayor;
 - Insurance reinstatement valuations of built asset portfolio – the Town Clerk explained the need to ensure the values were current in the event of any damages. It was recommended to keep this in the budget and to be renewed every 2/3 years;
 - Play Areas – the Town Clerk explained that due to vandalism and age/deterioration, a number of the play areas required attention. The cost of replacement parts had also increased, so further funding had been allocated within revenue and for saving in reserves, to have funding in place to renew and repair the play equipment when necessary to meet the needs of families. The councillors agreed;
 - Waste collection – the Town Clerk explained that a review would be taking place of the Town Council's commercial waste contract. to ensure that costs were kept to a minimum. At present, it was costing in the region of £12k per annum just for the collection of the waste emptied from the Town Council's 76 bins on Town Council land. It was suggested that communications be issued to ensure residents were made aware of the costs and be asked to take their rubbish home where they could;
 - Events programme – work was underway to plan for further marketing and communications on room hire, functions and annual Civic Centre events programme;
 - Staffing – members considered and discussed the proposed need for further resource. This would ensure the Town Council met existing need and demand within service provision, compliance and legal requirements. It would improve service standards for the town's residents, assist with the delivery of large projects to improve the condition of the Town Council's assets, alongside preparing for future growth, and possibly the future devolvement of services should the UK Government's White Paper be enacted. The Town Council had a duty to local residents, staff, contractors and customers/visitors to the town, and at present a great deal was being delivered on the shoulders of staff who were going above and beyond to provide a positive experience for customers and residents. Members understood the pressures on existing staffing levels and difficulties in capacity to deliver, alongside the desire to further increase income streams. It was recommended that officers continue to explore further options for staffing to support the Town Council in its management of the current asset portfolio and potential future growth of the town. Members also supported the Town Council's continued desire to raise a third of the council's income, through its own means, rather than rely solely on the precept (council tax).

FS.09.01.25

Bearing in mind the very difficult decision, with requirements to effectively deliver the Town Council's services in 2025 and beyond, members **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council, a proposed annual budget for 2025/26 of £1,986,903 with a precept of £1,321,883 subject to any final alterations or amendments based on updated financial calculations from quotations, contractors or year to date expenditure. Subject to those final calculations, it would result in an increase of £30.30 (15.95%) per annum for the average Council Tax Band D household (approx. £3.03 per month),

Members reviewed the second part of the documentation which set out the revised presentation of the Town Council's earmarked reserves. Previously the earmarked reserves had been presented by in the region of 70 lines, of bits and pieces of remaining funding from funding allocations. These had been consolidated and reduced to approximately 26, and had also been prioritised in terms of delivery. Members felt this was much clearer.

FS.10.01.25

Members **RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council, the consolidation of earmarked reserves as presented by officers, for ease of usage and monitoring.

5.0 MATTERS DEEMED URGENT BY THE CHAIR

Nothing further to raise.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm.