

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance Sub-Committee**
on Monday 16 December 2024 at 5.30 pm
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield.

PRESENT: Cllr. D. Manvell (Chair) Cllr. P. Ullmann
Cllr. B. Cox (Vice-Chair) Cllr. D. Ward
Cllr. S. Mayhew

IN ATTENDANCE:

Town Mayor, Councillor Karen Bedwell
Councillor P 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

No apologies had been received. All members of the sub-committee were present.

3.0 MINUTES

3.1 Minutes of the meeting of the Finance Sub-Committee held on the 18 July 2024

FS.07.12.24

Members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance Sub-Committee on 18 July 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4.0 REVIEW OF THE DRAFT BUDGET PAPERS FOR 2025/2026 AND PROPOSED RECONCILIATION OF EARMARKED RESERVES

Members were provided with a copy of the early draft of the budget for 2025/26, similar to that presented to Full Council on 2 December 2024 (*which set out two proposals – (i) running services as is, and (ii) what's required to deliver the Town Council's legal/financial*

requirements, priorities and the expected standard of service by our residents in 2025/26 with additional staffing).

The Assistant Town Clerk & RFO explained that the main variation from the early draft presented to Full Council on 2 December 2024 was the change in the council tax base, which had been received that day from Wealden District Council. The Council tax base was the figure by which the total budget was divided (*after the Town Council's own income streams were subtracted*). This gave an indication of the cost to the average council tax band D household.

Members spent the majority of the meeting discussing the following points with the Assistant Town Clerk and Town Clerk's guidance:

- the impact of the changes to the National Insurance Threshold and percentage comparisons (*which would see approx. £19.5k increase to the Town Council on existing salary costs*);

- prediction of further salary increases, based on the National Joint Council's increase in 2024/25;

- proposed staffing requirements to meet the needs of organisation and delivery of services and priorities (*in particular in the service areas of finance and administration, estates, and functions/events*).

The Town Council was currently under resourced to deliver the existing workload, let alone prepare the organisation for future growth with a number of new developments being built in and on the periphery of the town;

- the review of the service level agreements for Wealden Citizen's Advice and Wealden Volunteering and their requests for further funding (*at present Wealden Citizen's Advice were provided with £19,000 per annum and requested £28,000, and Wealden Volunteering were provided with £8,000 per annum and requested £9,000*). Members discussed the need for the terms of the service level agreements to be strengthened and for the new agreements to only be set for 12 months;

- the structure of the Town Council's Community Grant Programme;

- clarification on the current progress of tree surveying, tree works and more specifically works to address ash dieback, and the liability to the Town Council. The Town Clerk explained that previously funds had been re-allocated from earmarked reserves to assist with the cost of this work, which had helped to keep revenue expenditure on this, manageable;

- members discussed the potential need for funds to be set aside as a contingency to assist with matters such as these where liability fell to the Town Council;

- initiatives and income streams for Civic Centre events/functions and Luxfords Restaurant, as well as associated business planning;

The Town Clerk reminded members that another Finance Sub-Committee would be held on Tuesday 7 January 2025 to go

through the draft budget papers in finer detail prior to Full Council on 13 January 2025. The Town Clerk advised members that they should feel able to challenge each other on the prioritisation of funding to deliver the Town Council's priorities and that of the town's residents. Further detail would be provided to members over the Christmas break to inform these meetings.

5.0 TO NOTE THE REPORT OF THE INTERNAL AUDITOR

Members reviewed the latest report of the Internal Auditor from their visit on 12 November 2024.

The Assistant Town Clerk & RFO explained that a VAT specialist was scheduled in to undertake a light-touch review early March 2025.

The year-end financial process would be changing to better reflect the AGAR form (Annual Governance & Accountability Return), which would require some external support in the transition period over the next two years.

It was noted that a review of the Town Council's accountant would be prudent in 2025.

Members were advised that the annual review of the Town Council's investments would be undertaken prior to March 2025.

Members thought the report was excellent, and incredibly useful. One member also noted the recommendation of the Internal Auditor to have a contingency within earmarked reserves. Members subsequently noted the report.

6.0 MATTERS DEEMED URGENT BY THE CHAIR

Nothing further to raise.

The meeting closed at 6.52pm.