



BOGNOR REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

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MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING

HELD ON MONDAY 22nd NOVEMBER 2021

PRESENT:

Cllr. M. Stanley (Chairman); Cllrs: J. Barrett,
S. Goodheart, H. Jones, S. Reynolds and
B. Waterhouse

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs. G. Frost (Town Clerk)
Mrs. J. Davis (Civic & Office Manager)
Mr. D. Kemp - DCK Accounting Solutions Ltd
Cllr. Mrs. J. Warr in the public gallery
1 member of the public in the public gallery

The Meeting opened at 6.44pm

81. WELCOME BY CHAIRMAN AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chairman welcomed everyone present and read the Council's opening statement.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. Cunard due to annual leave and Cllrs. Erskine and Woodall who were unwell.

82. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman asked Members if they wished to confirm any declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registrable and/or Ordinary Interests that they may have in relation to items on this Agenda.

As noted on the Agenda, Members and Officers should make their declaration by stating:

- a) the item they have the Interest in
- b) whether it is a Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registrable or Ordinary Interest
- c) the nature of the Interest
- d) if it is an Ordinary Interest whether they intend to temporarily leave the meeting for the discussion and vote
- e) if it is a Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Registrable Interest, and therefore must temporarily leave the meeting for the discussion and vote, whether they will be exercising their right to speak on this matter under Public Question Time.

They then need to re-declare their Interest and the nature of the Interest at the commencement of the item or when the Interest becomes apparent.

They should request that it be recorded in the Minutes that they will leave the meeting and will neither take part in discussion, nor vote on the item.

As per the Agenda, it is each Member's own responsibility to notify the Monitoring Officer of all Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registrable or Ordinary Interests notifiable under the Council's Code of Conduct, not already recorded on their Register of Interests Form, within 28 days.

The Chairman reminded Members to declare their Interests as any arise or again at the relative point in the meeting if they have already.

Cllr. Goodheart declared an Ordinary Interest in Agenda item 5 for any discussion relating to Bognor Regis Community Gardeners, or Rox Music & Arts

83. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27th SEPTEMBER AND THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING HELD ON 8th NOVEMBER 2021

The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to **APPROVE** the Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th September and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 8th November 2021 as an accurate record of the proceedings and these were signed by the Chairman.

84. ADJOURNMENT FOR PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND STATEMENTS

The Chairman adjourned the Meeting at 6.50pm

There were no questions from those seated in the public gallery.

However, written questions had been submitted by Cllr. Brooks who was unable to attend the meeting in person. In response to Cllr. Brooks' question about items requested to be placed on future Agendas that had been delayed owing to Covid-19, the Chairman confirmed that, in terms of requests made to the Policy and Resources Committee, these were discussed by the Chairman and Officer and were largely addressed in the order in which they had been received, unless considered particularly urgent. He understood a similar process was also adopted by the other Committees.

The remaining questions received from Cllr. Brooks had been in relation to staffing matters and it was not, therefore, possible to discuss these further as they were of a contractual nature and fall within the remit of the Joint Consultative Sub-Committee (Staffing).

The Chairman reconvened the Meeting at 6.52pm

85. ADJOURNMENT FOR TOWN COUNCILLORS NOT APPOINTED TO THIS COMMITTEE TO MAKE COMMENT AND ASK QUESTIONS ON THE DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2022/2023

The Chairman adjourned the Meeting at 6.53pm

Cllr. Mrs. Warr, who did not serve on the Policy and Resources Committee, asked questions of the Accountant and made statements on the draft 2022/2023 budget.

Whilst acknowledging that a rise in the Precept was probable, Cllr. Mrs. Warr asked whether there were ways in which any increase could be kept to a minimum. Attention was drawn to the revised Budget Summary papers, that had been circulated at the meeting, which incorporated significant savings and thereby reducing the Precept first proposed.

Two questions had also been submitted by Cllr. Brooks, for the Accountant, to which responses had been sent to Cllr. Brooks directly.

The Chairman thanked the non-Committee Members for their input.

The Chairman reconvened the Meeting at 6.55pm

86. TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2022/2023 INCLUDING RECOMMENATIONS FROM COMMITTEES

- 86.1** The Town Clerk's report, including the statement regarding restrictions on voting under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, was **NOTED**.

It was also **NOTED** that all Members of the Council had received a hard copy of the draft Budget proposals, prior to the meeting, which had also included a Budget Summary, together with breakdowns of Income and Expenditure for the financial year ending 31st March 2023. These had been prepared in liaison with the Town Council's Accountant and the Chairman of this Committee and based on the recommendations from the various Committee Meetings. It was further **NOTED** that the Budget Summary, and breakdowns, had subsequently been revised to those previously circulated.

The Clerk reminded Members that these should all be treated as confidential at this time, as a final draft will need to be presented to Council for approval in the New Year.

- 86.2** The Chairman proceeded to invite Mr. Kemp to address Members regarding the draft Budget before them.

Mr. Kemp reminded Members that the 2021/2022 Budget had resulted in a deficit of £11,395 and that this needed to be rectified. He went on to explain that the draft Budget before Members had been prepared at a time when there were still significant unknowns, particularly in relation to

staffing costs. Negotiations are ongoing between the National Employers, who are offering a 1.75% pay increase, which falls short of the 10% uplift that unions representing local government services are demanding. Whatever the outcome, the scales agreed will reflect directly on Bognor Regis Town Council. Furthermore, from April 2022 national insurance contributions, by both employees and employers, will rise by 1.25% under new health and social care reforms in England. Whilst the government plans to compensate public sector employers for this increase, it will not apply to the Town and Parish Council's as they are not subject to capping rules.

Following discussions with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, Mr. Kemp reported that revisions had been made to the first draft of proposals, incorporating significant savings in two particular areas, thereby reducing the proposed Precept from 9% to 3.64% on Band D equivalents.

Given the effect of all the requests coming forward from the Committees, savings of around £26,000 had been found within the Administration Budget and a reduction in the Rolling Capital Programme from £60,000 to £30,000 had also been identified.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Kemp for his report and invited questions from the Committee.

86.3 In response to a question about the intended purpose of a budget for Capital Funding Provision, Mr. Kemp explained that money is set aside in the Precept to replace assets as and when needed, such as replacing Town Force vehicles, office equipment etc.

A Member asked whether it was wise to target a Precept of 3.64% or, as an Accountant, would Mr. Kemp recommend a higher Precept. The advice given was that no council should ignore increases in inflation and that any Precept should be in alignment.

It was noted by a Member that the Band D equivalents figures had gone down and the question was asked as to whether this was usual. Mr. Kemp replied by stating that this was not as a result of properties changing Band but that these figures were affected by new property (not new build) occupations, and also the principal authorities' calculations built-in to factor for uncollectable council tax. Therefore, it was likely that the reduction in equivalency suggested either an increase in student accommodation, or in the number of people claiming benefits. Mr. Kemp went on to say that last year the equivalencies for Bognor Regis had gone up, which was unusual since universally there was shown to be a decrease, but that this could account for the decrease this year by way of a correction.

The Chairman then read questions submitted by a Committee Member who had been unable to attend the meeting.

- 86.4** Having received all comments and questions from Members, the Chairman moved first to a decision regarding the Ward Allocations with concern having been expressed about the recommendation from the Community Engagement and Environment Committee to increase this budget from £2,000 to £4,000. A Member commented that there was often monies unspent in these budgets and that they did not, therefore, feel it was necessary for an increase. Following a vote, it was unanimously **AGREED** that there should be no increase in Ward Allocations for the 2022/2023 financial year and these should remain at £2,000.
- 86.5** Discussion then moved on to the Flexible Community Fund (FCF), for which the Community Engagement and Environment Committee had recommended an increase in the budget from £5,000 to £7,000. Consideration was given as to whether the budget for the FCF should not be increased but instead moved across to be incorporated into the Grant Aid budget. However, there was opposition to this suggestion as the FCF could be applied for quickly and easily throughout the year, whereas Grant Aid funding was much more prescribed and only open to applications during a certain timeframe. Following a vote, it was unanimously **AGREED** that the Budget should remain within the Community Engagement and Environment Committee and that there should be no increase in the Flexible Community Fund for the 2022/2023 financial year, remaining at £5,000.
- 86.6** In considering the 2022/2023 budget for Christmas Illuminations, whilst it was noted that the proposed budget of £55,000 was double the budget for 2021/2022, comment was made in relation to the high-quality and spectacular effect of the new illuminations. The Christmas displays, funded by Bognor Regis Town Council, are always so well received, encouraging people into the Town Centre and helping local businesses to thrive.

A Member asked whether the increase in the budget for Christmas Illuminations could be covered by General Reserves, instead of increasing the Precept. Mr. Kemp stated that, in his opinion, the biggest funding issue is that the Town Council have never owned Christmas lights but instead lease them every year, which creates an ongoing revenue commitment. He felt it would be unwise to fund any purchase out of Reserves. The Town Clerk pointed out to Members that, were the Town Council to purchase their own Christmas lights then installation of the displays and maintenance, for example, would need to be considered, all of which would be an additional cost to the Council.

The Chairman acknowledged that there were alternative avenues to be explored for the future, in relation to sourcing Christmas Illuminations, and asked that the Events, Promotion and Leisure Committee carry out an investigation into the benefits of purchasing or leasing lights.

For 2022/2023, following a vote, Members **AGREED** a budget of £55,000 for Christmas Illuminations.

Cllr. Mrs. Warr, seated in the public gallery, left the Meeting

An explanation of the budget for Christmas Activities was requested by a Member, to which Mr. Kemp replied that it was to cover unknown costs with any unspent monies going back into General Reserves.

- 86.7** Consideration then moved to the recommendation from the Community Engagement and Environment Committee that £5,000 funding be made available to the Bognor Regis in Bloom Working Group to allow for tree planting as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Mr. Kemp left the Meeting

The location proposed for the tree planting was queried, as there had been mention of this being in an area that bordered with Bognor Regis, in Bersted, but details of the exact location had not yet been decided upon.

Mr. Kemp returned to the Meeting

The Chairman sought clarification from the Town Council's Accountant as to whether Working Groups can provide funding. Mr. Kemp confirmed that Working Groups could not, and that this funding would have to come under the control of the Community Engagement and Environment Committee. He went on to say that, as the tree planting for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee was a one-off, it could be treated as a Capital project. Each Committee has a Capital Cost Centre and can manage their own projects.

Following a vote, Members unanimously **AGREED** that £5,000 be provided from the Rolling Capital Programme to the Community Engagement and Environment Committee, as a one-off Capital Budget, for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee tree planting project.

- 86.8** In considering the budget decisions taken so far, following a recalculation, Mr. Kemp informed Members that the proposed draft Budget would result in an increase of 2.26% in the Precept for a Band D property for 2022/2023.

In light of the reductions made to the budgets proposed, a Member suggested that the Committee task the Joint Consultative Sub-Committee (Staffing) with making similar savings. This was **NOTED** by the Chairman.

Mr. Kemp provided a summary of the draft Budget proposed for 2022/2023.

Subsequently, Members unanimously **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Council the draft Budget resulting in a required Precept for 2022/2023 of £969,817, a 2.26% increase in the Precept, equivalent to a 2.7% increase on a Band D Equivalent property or £3.47 per annum given the reduction in the Tax Base.

The Chairman thanked the Town Council's Accountant, and the Town Clerk, for the time and attention they had given to the preparation of the draft Budget for 2022/2023.

The Meeting closed at 8.11pm