

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF ASHURST WOOD FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE MEETING** held on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 19:45 at Council's Meeting Room.

**PRESENT:** Cllrs: Margaret Bussell (Chair), Rob Bright, David Loveday, Brian Phillips, Jonathan Samways and Derek Wailes.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Caroline Leet (Clerk)

**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC:** 0

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

135 **Public Questions**

None.

Responsibility of

136. **Apologies for absence**

Cllr Forbes' apologies were received and **resolved; the reasons were accepted.**

137. **To receive Declarations of Interests from Members in respect of any matter on the agenda**

None.

138. **To confirm the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017**

The minutes were **approved as an accurate account of the meeting.**

139. **Clerk's Report**

The Clerk's report was received.

a **To receive bank reconciliations for July, August, September 2017**

Cllr Bussell confirmed that the bank reconciliations for the Unity Trust bank account, Public Sector Deposit Fund and the FairFX pre-paid cards for July, August and September had been checked by Cllr Bright or herself and were in order.

b **To note: The Handyman will be on sick leave for a minimum of six weeks from November (date to be advised)**

Cllr Bussell advised the Handyman would be on sick leave from 31<sup>st</sup> October for about six weeks.

c **To note: Unity Trust now apply bank charges to all of their accounts (and therefore the Council's current account will continue to receive monthly charges regardless of the Council's turnover)**

Noted. There was some discussion to consider researching alternative banks, but it was noted that most banks now charged and that there was not really much the Council could do about bank charges. Unity Trust offered suitable banking facilities.

d **To note: The photocopying contract with KCS completed its 3-year term in August and is currently continuing on the same prices**

Noted. Cllr Bussell referred to the Clerk's report confirming that the Clerk had already looked at other providers and for now the contract was probably the best available.

e **To note: HMRC has issued a penalty fine for late submission of monthly wages RTI returns; this has been appealed and waiting outcome**

Cllr Bussell reported that the HMRC had acknowledged the Clerk's appeal to the penalty charge and had been successful in the appeal.

Clerk

140. **Audit:**

a **To receive the External Auditors report and comments for the Annual Return**

**year end March 2017**

Noted; there were no issues or observations noted.

- b **To note: PKF Littlejohn are expected to continue as the appointed external auditors (new contract led by the Smaller Authorities Appointments Ltd). It is expected that completed Annual Return and associated documents will continue in the usual way**

Noted.

- c **To note: Half-yearly internal audit has been arranged for 2<sup>nd</sup> November**

Noted.

141. **Budget 2017/18**

- a **To review the half-yearly expenditure**

Looking at the Excel spreadsheet dated to 30<sup>th</sup> September, 50% through the year, Cllr Bussell said that the income and expenditure was in line with the predicted budget. There had been some expenditure not included in the budget from projects which had been carried over into the current year. For example, Community equipment (4241) the defibrillator purchased which had been funded by a grant received in the 2016/17 financial year; and Village Centre Developments (4085) where there had been some additional costs for the stores lock and heating issues. However, this had not affected the projected budget. It was also noted that the staffing (4000) was better than in previous years and was on target at 51%.

- b **To review the predicted year-end**

Cllr Bussell reported the carry forward total for the end-of-year, including the reserves, was £49,878 which was slightly better than forecasted.

142. **To review staffing hours**

The Clerk left the meeting: 20:05

The Clerk re-joined the meeting 20:29

Cllr Bussell reported that members had discussed the Clerk's and Assistant Clerk's hours. Members had noted that the Clerk and Assistant Clerk were managing their hours well and it was expected that the salaries budget (4000) would not be exceeded this financial year. Councillors thanked the Clerk and Assistant Clerk for their efforts to restrict overtime as far as possible. It was agreed that members would like to see the hours for events recorded more accurately and to be allocated to a budget code for events to compensate appropriately. The aim being to eliminate the need for budgeted overtime.

143. **To consider a contingency for long-term sick leave and if a budget should be allocated for a locum Clerk**

Cllr Bussell referred to a parish where their Clerk had taken long-term sickness and the parish's reserves had not made provisions for such an event. Cllr Phillips said that he thought that the Council's insurance provided some cover for unforeseeable circumstances and that this should be checked first. Cllr Wailes said that the employer's expectation would usually be to cover six months' salary and national insurance contributions. Members agreed that before considering a reserve for salaries and a locum costs to confirm the insurance provided.

Clerk

144. **Budget 2018/19**

- a **To consider an initial view on proposals for the draft budget 2017/18**

Cllr Bussell referred to the Clerk's report which had suggested the new budget

- should consider increasing the reserves budget. She also mentioned that the full Council had in principle agreed to support the Conservators of the Ashdown Forest with a two-year grant and this should be allocated to its own budget code for transparency. Cllr Phillips suggested the Chair (Cllr Bussell) and Vice-Chairman (Cllr Bright) of the Finance and Administration Committee together with the Clerk should prepare a draft budget to present at the November Committee meeting. Cllr Phillips added that the resurfacing of the Village Centre car park should be included in the budget; it was hoped that the total cost would be shared with the Village Centre trustees and grants may also be applied for.
- b **To consider supporting the Conservators of the Ashdown Forest with a grant for two years (referred by the full Council)**  
Discussed with the initial view of the budget (see above). Clerk/MB/RB
145. **To consider if a specific expenditure has been approved on the budget, does it need to be reapproved at Council meetings:**
- a **This includes specific budgeted expenditure for example, events budget**  
Cllr Bussell asked Members if expenditure which had already been approved/resolved in the budget, did it always need to be referred to the Council for a resolution. Members discussed and agreed that if the expenditure was for a specific item or event, that had already been approved in the budget, it did not need to be reapproved; but if the predicted actual was likely to be exceeded then this would need to be presented for resolution. The Clerk added that safeguarding the Council and the Clerk needed to be maintained and procedures were set out in the Financial Regulations; this included the Clerk's spending limit of up to £100 per item. The Committee **agreed to recommend to the full Council that where expenditure for defined specific items/or events had already been approved in the budget they did not need to be represented to the Council for further resolution, but where the projected actual expenditure could change or was an unknown cost, even though it may have a budget allocation, to have the expenditure resolved at Council /or Public Services Committee meetings.** Clerk
- b **Annual expenditure (currently reapproved at the Annual Meeting of the Council) for example subscriptions**  
Cllr Wailes added that when the budget was set, the expenditure for items such as subscriptions was already considered. Membership of organisations would be considered separately by the Council. Members agreed. The Committee concluded this was the same as the above recommendation.
146. **To set a date for the annual Risk Assessment (last carried out 5<sup>th</sup> October 2016)**  
It was agreed Cllrs Bussell and Bright would carry out the Financial Review; date to be agreed. Clerk/MB/RB
147. **To review the Council's complaints policy and to consider including vexatious/persistent complainers**  
Cllr Bussell invited members' views. Cllr Wailes said that this had been considered previously and it had been agreed not to have a vexatious policy and that each case would be dealt with on an individual basis. He said that Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) had a vexatious policy and kept a list of persistent complainers; MSDC had a need for this as they had a number of regular complainers whereas the Village Council did not. Cllr Wailes added that complaints against councillors should be referred to the Council's Local Association; however, as the Council is

not members they would have to refer the complaint to MSDC. Members **agreed to leave the Council's Complaints policy as it was.**

Clerk

148. **Any Items for reporting or inclusion on future agenda**  
None.

149. **Date of Next Meeting** – Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November  
Cllr Phillips gave his apologies in advance.

Meeting was closed at 20:58

Chairman.....

Date.....