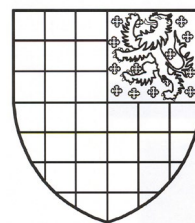


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**LEWES  
TOWN  
COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES**

of the meeting of the **Finance Review Working Party**

held on **Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2011**, in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall**, Lewes at **6:30pm**.

**PRESENT** Cllrs M Chartier; A Dean; R O'Keeffe; R Rudkin; M Turner (*Chairman*), and also present (*not nominated to serve on Working party*): Cllr J Stockdale (*Mayor*) Cllr Catlin (S Wischhusen)

**In attendance:** S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*), Mrs F Garth (*Civic Officer & Asst TC*)

**FWP2011/09**

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs J Daly, who was unwell; S Murray, who was attending her ailing mother; and I Eiloart, due to ill-health.

**FWP2011/10**

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were none

**FWP2011/11**

**QUESTIONS:** (No public or press were present). Cllr Catlin raised a question regarding the costs of hospitality, and in particular any free meals; drinks, or tickets provided to Councillors. The principle of member support for civic events was discussed at some length; and the actual cost to individuals of their public service. Despite this, it was recognized that many Members waived their right to an annual allowance. It was noted that event tickets were normally provided by organizers, and that any meals were usually ancillary to legitimate business of the council. The costs of refreshments following meetings were established as less than £100 per year in total, and this was set against the usefulness of the opportunity it provided for all Members to meet together informally.

**FWP2011/12**

**REMIT OF THE WORKING PARTY:**

The remit of the Working Party was noted as:

*To examine the detail of estimated expenditure and income for the Council's operations, and to agree a budget and level of Council Tax precept for the 2012/13 year, for recommendation to Council.*

**FWP2011/13**

**BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:**

1 Members considered in detail the background information giving rise to draft service budgets, and a provisional figure for the resulting 2012/13 precept requirement (copies in the minute book).

2 Members were particularly concerned to ensure the principles underlying this budget, and any constraints, were clearly identified and discussed, given the context of central government exhortation to parishes to limit their precepts to the current level. It was noted that grants were offered to principal councils, equal to a rise of 2.5%, yet no support was available for parish councils.

3 It was considered important that the Council remain flexible and able to respond to offers of devolution of assets and/or services by the District or County Councils. This would be of growing significance as those tiers of local government responded to economic pressures in the coming year or so; and as the provisions of the recently-confirmed Localism Act 2011 came into effect.

4 It was acknowledged that there was a continuing need to address the proper maintenance of the Council's physical assets and to adequately fund continuing services. It was nonetheless desirable to seek mitigation of unavoidable increases *eg* public utilities; overheads *etc*. Specific areas such as the opportunity to increase income/reduce costs at the Town Hall and All Saints Centre were the subject of

*Continues...*

consideration by other working parties, more familiar with relevant detail, and their recommendations would evolve in due course.

5 The recommended precept was a product of this approach and funded a budget that combined specific amounts for known costs and committed project items with prudent allowances for reserves, and provided for a flexible response to any devolution proposals. This had been achieved without the need for an overall increase. Reserves earmarked for the Council's significant service and project requirements were considered suitably robust and adequate to fulfil their purpose.

6 Members were interested to see figures giving an insight into the Council's "relative efficiency"; conducted within Sussex comparing staffing levels and staff costs of the larger parish councils in proportion to precept and gross budgeted expenditure. It was noted that Lewes Town Council compared favourably in this regard, being ranked in the least-expensive quarter of those parishes surveyed. It was also acknowledged that the proposed budget anticipated no increase in salaries in 2012, the third consecutive year in which staff had not received a pay increase.

7 Also of interest were data analysing the Councils nett expenditure on services over the past nine years, showing individual service costs in proportion to overall expenditure, and to the precept.

8 There was consideration of the effect of raising the precept by 2.5%, as the amount raised would be a desirable offset against unavoidable and externally-imposed cost increases, and the anticipated costs of embracing opportunities arising from new legislation. The effect on a typical Band-D taxpayer would be less than £3 per year, and £19,550 would usefully accrue to the Council. Opinions were divided on this option, and it was eventually discarded.

9 The recommended precept could be analysed as a cost of £48.91 per head of population (no increase) or £119.68 per band-D equivalent property (no increase) The figure of 6,533.82 properties used to calculate this figure was the most recent available and subject to adjustment for 2012; when it was likely to increase slightly, effectively reducing the values given above.

**FWP2011/14**

1 That the budgets for service expenditure and income for the 2012/13 financial year, as recommended and appended to report FC013/2011 (*to be submitted for consideration by Council on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2011 – copies in the minute-book*), be approved.

**FWP2011/15**

2 That the Council Tax precept for the 2012/13 year be set at £782,000.  
The Chairman declared the meeting closed.

*The meeting closed at 8:20pm*

Signed: .....

Date: .....