

Minutes of the **FINANCE and GENERAL PURPOSES** Committee held in the Town Hall,
The Broadway, Crowborough on Tuesday 10th January 2012 at 7.30pm

Present	Councillors	Paul Adams Quentin Burch Peter Cowie (arrived 7.48pm) Elizabeth Fermor (arrived 7.58pm) Philip Fermor (arrived 7.58pm) Beverley Johnstone Kay Moss Sandra Timms Neil Waller	Chairman
Also present		George Moss Antony Quin Caroline Mack Clive Gross Philippa Hewes	Crowborough Town Council Wealden District Council Citizens Advice Bureau Mediation Plus Town Clerk

* *Denotes non attendance*

APOLOGIES

None.

RESIGNATION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

To note the resignation of Cllr Beverley Johnstone as Vice-Chairman and elect a new Vice-Chairman

6359 **RESOLVED** to elect Cllr Quentin Burch as Vice-Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Quentin Burch declared a personal interest in Mediation Plus as a past trustee, treasurer and mediator.

Cllr Kay Moss declared a personal interest in Citizens Advice as the Town Council's representative.

Cllr Kay Moss declared a prejudicial interest as a trustee of Clued-up.Info; she left the meeting during discussion of the Service Level Agreement.

Cllr Sandra Timms declared a prejudicial interest as an employee of Citizens Advice; she left the meeting during discussions on the grant and Service Level Agreement.

MINUTES

Minutes – 8th November 2011

- 6360** **RESOLVED** to confirm the Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 8th November 2011.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Report from Mediation Plus to support request for payment of grant £1050 2011/12

Clive Gross, Service Manager at Mediation Plus, gave a report on the organisation and the measures taken following the staff resignations last March. The organisation is now run by 2 part-time employees and supported by volunteer mediators. The referral rate has increased due to cuts in other service providers; clients from Wealden account for 45-50% of the caseload. The organisation has recently been accredited for training purposes and it is hoped this will create a new funding stream to help compensate for the reduction in grant funding.

Report from Citizens Advice

Caroline Mack, Chief Executive of Wealden Citizens Advice, reported on the recent move to new premises and the continuing work to secure funding. The grant from the Town Council is important in helping to provide a facility for the benefit of the residents of Crowborough. A written report had been circulated with the agenda providing information on the key performance indicators under the existing Service Level Agreement.

GRANTS

To consider request from Mediation Plus for payment of grant £1050 2011/12

- 6361** **RESOLVED** to pay the grant of £1050 to Mediation Plus as approved 2.11.10 (5974).

To consider grant for Citizens Advice 2012/13

- 6362** **RESOLVED** to award Citizens Advice a grant of £19,500.

To agree revised Service Level Agreements for Clued-up.Info and Citizens Advice

Revised Service Level Agreements have been drawn up with updated key performance indicators. The Agreements are on a rolling 3 year basis to provide security of funding and will be reviewed and updated every third year.

- 6363** **RESOLVED** to agree the revised Service Level Agreement for Wealden Citizens Advice.

6364 RESOLVED to agree the revised Service Level Agreement for Clued-up.Info.

BUDGET

To consider draft budget and precept requirements

The Council Tax Base for 2012/13 is 8554.6. The draft budget equates to a 3.78% increase on the previous year. The following options for reducing the budget were considered:

Committee	Cost centre/code	Reduce by £	Items/£	reason
Environment	802/4402 Ghyll	21,500	Quad bike 10,000 Footbridge 5,000 Footpath 2,000 Interpretation board £4,500	Review of access arrangements
C&E	305/4105	4,000	Frank Humphrey	Change to maintenance/storage arrangements

A proposal for a rise of 2% was lost.

6365 RESOLVED to recommend to the Council a reduction of £25,500 in the draft budget, making a revised budget of £1,075,807 to be funded by a precept of the same amount.

FINANCE

Management Reports to 31st October 2011

Management Reports to 30th November 2011

6366 RESOLVED to adopt the Management Accounts to 31st October and 20th November 2011.

Bad debts

The bad debts outstanding were reviewed and noted.

TO REVIEW FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND STANDING ORDERS

The Financial Regulations and Standing Orders were reviewed and noted.

6367 RESOLVED to continue with the existing Financial Regulations and Standing Orders without change.

TO REVIEW INVESTMENTS

Officer's report was reviewed and the following recommendation:

That the Council continues with the existing banking arrangements with National Westminster. A separate deposit should continue to be retained with Lloyds to spread the financial risk. The accounts with HSBC and Barclays should remain open to provide flexibility if required.

6368 **RESOLVED** to accept the recommendation and continue with the existing banking arrangements.

TO REVIEW RISK MANAGEMENT

A report on risk management was reviewed and noted.

All activities are reviewed to assess risk, consider insurance requirements and set up procedures for health and safety inspections. The Local Council Risk System is used to review and score the various functions of the council. All community events organised by the Town Council are subject to individual risk assessments.

A comprehensive review of insurance cover has been undertaken which, together with a long term agreement, has resulted in a considerable reduction in the premium. It was noted that play equipment and street lights are not covered in view of the high premium for these items. An earmarked reserve of £6000 pa is being established for play equipment replacement.

Initial health and safety inspections have been undertaken on council buildings. Contractors have undertaken fire and security reviews and surveyed the council's water systems. A number of items have been identified and these are to be prioritised and reported to the relevant committee.

TO REVIEW LEGAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Accounting support

Officer's report and recommendation:

The Council uses the Omega computerised system from RBS Software Solutions; this provides a full accounting package. As part of the support offered to Crowborough Town Council by RBS Software Solutions, Stuart Wilbur attends the council offices once a month to conduct end of month functions including the production of detailed reports and other financial work/queries as required. Stuart also produces end of year financial information and works with the Operations Manager to maintain the asset register. He has extensive knowledge of the accounting requirements for local government and works with many of the large town/parish councils.

Hilary Lyon is contracted for the Council's payroll services.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the existing arrangements continue as these provide the Council with the benefit of financial expertise at a reasonable cost. Under the Local Government Act 1972 section 151, it is part of the function of the Responsible Financial Officer to ensure the correct administration of the council's financial affairs.

6369 **RESOLVED** to accept the recommendation and continue with existing arrangements for accounting support.

Legal support

Officer's report and recommendation:

The Council engages the services of Hedleys Solicitors for legal support. Hedleys has specialised in town/parish council work for over 30 years and has an extensive understanding of issues facing this sector. The Council's main point of contact is Roger Taylor; he will attend council meetings if required and this facility proved very useful during discussions regarding the Community Centre. The Council has established a good working relationship with Hedleys.

Only one other firm advertises in Local Council publications as specialising in town/parish councils. In the past, the Council has employed the services of local solicitors.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the existing arrangement with Hedleys continues as this provides the Council with the benefit of specialist local government legal advice at a reasonable cost, with immediate action if required and attendance at council meetings.

Members made a number of comments including the need for a solicitor with specialist knowledge of local government procedures/law and how Hedleys had protected the interests of the Council in the Community Centre project. The company had also acted swiftly in a recent land transaction. It was suggested that there may be scope for using local solicitors for some minor legal work.

6370 RESOLVED to accept the recommendation and continue with existing arrangements for legal work.

URGENT MATTERS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR NOTING

None.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm