

Minutes of a meeting of the **FINANCE and GENERAL PURPOSES** Committee held at Council Offices, Pine Grove, Crowborough on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2021 at 7.30pm

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Present	Councillors	Peter Bucklitsch Tracey Lovewell* Kay Moss David Neeves Colin Stocks Matthew Street Neil Waller	Vice - Chairman      Chairman
Also present		Melanie Street Karen Whiley	Assistant Town Clerk Responsible Financial Officer
			0 members of the public
		*Denotes non attendance	

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#### **APOLOGIES**

Cllr Tracey Lovewell

#### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

#### **MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021

**9610 RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021 as confirmed be signed by the Chairman.

#### **FINANCIAL MATTERS**

To note the Finance Report

The current Income and Expenditure was noted. Members discussed the cleaning of various council buildings and agreed it may be prudent for the council to review the level and cost of cleaning services it receives.

The earmarked reserves were noted.

To review current phone/broadband costs

The report was noted, and members considered the current costs and the two quotes supplied. The committee discussed set-up costs, hardware to be provided, the current system and provision, monthly costs, and whether the quotes had been provided based on present usage information.

- 9611 RESOLVED** to accept the quote from Company B (Fluent Communications) to provide phone and broadband services

To review the Annual Investment Strategy

The policy had been amended as the committee had previously agreed that the reference to Moody's credit rating was not achievable. Members discussed how this information may be sourced in the future if not from Moody's and noted that it was often available online or from banks.

- 9612 RESOLVED** to recommend the Annual Investment Strategy to the Full Council with the amendments as specified to 3.7 and 4.1

To review current IT support and back up costs

The report was noted. The committee considered the council's data and document retention requirements. It was noted that there are a number of different backup services available, and that more information would be beneficial before a decision is made. It was agreed that a further report would be provided with more details and multiple quotes.

To review card payment facility costs

The council currently has limited facility for accepting card payments. Three options for card payment terminals were considered. Members queried why a compliance charge was required and it was explained that the council would have to be registered as it would be dealing with personal details whilst handling the payment transactions. It was noted that none of the quotes provided considered the outright purchase of a terminal by the council. Whilst incurring higher transaction fees, this type of terminal which incurs no monthly fee, may be suited to the council offices which do not expect to process many card payments through it. It was agreed to investigate the outright purchase of a portable card reader and for the future report to indicate how many payments are expected via such a terminal.

It was noted that the bank reconciliations and bank statements have been checked by the Chairman up to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

**PROPOSED BUDGETS FOR 2022/23**

To review all the committee budgets and agree a recommendation to Full Council, setting the Precept for 2022/23

Members considered the draft budgets provided by each of the committees. Clarification was sought, and obtained, from the Responsible Financial Officer, regarding the final line of the precept table listed as 1.4 in the agenda report. It was noted that the capital reserve figure of £52,085 which can only be used for capital purchases or against interest payments on council loans would be used to offset some of the costs during 2022/23 to help keep the precept requirement down. The committee discussed the current inflation forecast and how this would affect the proposed draft budget. Two proposals were made; one for a zero% increase and a second for a 2% increase on the current Band D rate.

- 9613** **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Full Council a zero% increase on Band D for 2022/23 together with the budget for 2022/23 and projected budgets for 2023/24 and 2024/25

**URGENT MATTERS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR NOTING AND/OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA**

None

**EXEMPT BUSINESS**

- 9614** **RESOLVED** pursuant to Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reasons of the confidential staffing nature of the business to be transacted.

To note the confidential report on Pine Grove

The report was noted. Members discussed the issues being experienced and potential courses of action. It was agreed that several opportunities had been given for resolution, but the issues are still outstanding.

- 9615** **RESOLVED** to authorise the Responsible Financial Officer to escalate the situation and take all necessary action and advice to recover monies owed

The committee also considered the financial implications of these issues continuing in the future and the impact this may have on financial forward planning for the council.

- 9616** **RESOLVED** to authorise officers to seek legal advice for initial exploration of future strategies

To note the confidential Aged Debt Report

The Aged Debt report was noted.

The Chairman thanked all the members of the committee for their work during the year, and thanked the Responsible Financial Officer and Town Clerk for their help and support this year.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm.