

NOTES of the FINANCE KEY AREA GROUP MEETING held in the Council Chamber on Monday 20 January 2025 at 18.30 hours.

KAG MEMBERS: Graham Fairbairn - Responsible Finance Officer (RFO)
 Cllr Bob Foster
 Cllr Jon Gardner
 Cllr Matthew Goldsmith
 Cllr Janice Henwood
 Cllr Simon Hicks (Deputy Chairman)
 Cllr Cedric De Souza (Chairman)
 Cllr Adam White

*Denotes absence

Also Present:

Cllr Diane Black
Cllr Matthew Cornish
Cllr Robert Eggleston
Cllr Anne Eves
Cllr Matthew Goldsmith
Julie Holden – Chief Executive Officer
Cllr Tofojjul Hussain (arrived 6.50)
Cllr Andy Stowe
Cllr Brenda Williams
Cllr Peter Williams
8 members of the public, including representation from the Burgess Hill Pantry and the Park Centre CIO.

Meeting started 18.35 hrs

68. The Leader of the Council, Peter Williams, was invited by the Chairman of the Finance Key Area Group (KAG) to address meeting.

Councillor Peter Williams raised his concerns in regard to recent social media activity whereby Councillors were the subject of untrue, unfounded and potentially libelous accusations as to the honesty and integrity of Councillors. The Leader stated Councillors worked hard for the benefit of the residents of the town in trying to make Burgess Hill a better place.

69. **Open Forum**

Members unanimously agreed to suspend Standing Order 3.8c for the duration of the meeting to allow public participation in the meeting.

A member of the public raised concerns in regard to the proposed increase of 12.2% in the Precept/Band D for 2025/26 with inflation running at around 2.5%. The Chairman of the meeting replied the reasonings behind the proposed increase would be addressed during the meeting.

A member of the public noted there was a meeting of PCOs in the Help Point this Friday and asked if any senior members of the Police would be in attendance.

This was not known at the time of the meeting.

Subsequent to the meeting it can be confirmed there will be no senior members of the police at the meeting.

70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received

71. SUBSTITUTES

None

72. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Robert Eggleston - agenda item 10, 2nd Draft Revenue Budget, as he had given legal advice to the Burgess Hill Pantry.

Cllr Cedric De Souza - agenda item 11.3, the Park Centre Burgess Hill CIO, as he is a Trustee and the treasurer of that organisation.

Adam White – agenda item 10, 2nd Draft Revenue Budget, as he is a member of the Burgess Bonfire Society.

Janice Henwood and Anne Eves as they are Trustees of the Burgess Hill Community Partnership CIC that rents units to the Burgess Hill Pantry.

Matthew Cornish - agenda item 11.3, the Park Centre Burgess Hill CIO, as he is a Trustee of that organisation.

Simon Hicks – agenda item 9, Pricing for Goods and Services Offered by the Town Council, as he is an allotment holder.

73. NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Attention was brought to Members of a minor text error relating to Minute 65(a) where additional funds towards the events programme (£8k), a gazebo and barriers (£3.1k) would come from the Economic Development Fund, not the Community Development Fund as incorrectly stated.

RESOLVED

The Notes of the previous Finance Key Area Group meeting, dated 13 November 2024, were approved by Members and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

74. INTERNAL AUDIT 2024/25 – 1ST Interim

Members received a report, as set out in agenda item 7, dated 20 January 2025, in regard to the recent 2024/25 interim internal audit undertaken by Mulberry & Co.

The report noted there were two minor points raised by the internal audit relating to a) the requirement to review the town council's financial regulations in light of the recently issued NALC model and b) to implement a process where, on a quarterly basis and at the year end, a Member of the council (not the Finance Chairman) would approve and counter-sign the bank reconciliations.

RESOLVED

- a) To note the contents of the report, and
- b) Refer to agenda item 13 where these points would be addressed.

75. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2024/25

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 8, dated 20 January 2025, appraising Members of the latest forecast Outturn for the 2024/25 financial year.

The Chairman addressed the meeting to give a contextual overview of the current year's financial position and the budget for 2025/26. He highlighted the town council needed to continue to support local community groups, invest in the public realm and continue to provide the high level of services offered by the town council.

During the ensuing discussion, it was noted the majority of the estimated surplus would be reinvested back into the town to provide support for local community organisations, fund public realm maintenance and enhancements, and to update the council's printed material that is available to members of the public.

The Chairman acknowledged that at this time less money was being allocated to the Community Buildings Fund but the council needed to review the viability of the various projects and the overall affordability of such projects.

RESOLVED

Member resolved to allocate from the estimate Surplus:

- a) £5k towards the Alexandra Road Open Space works,
- b) £5k towards the reprint of maps and development of a digital option,
- c) £20k towards tree works, and
- d) Transfer any residual surplus to the General Reserve.

76. PRICING FOR GOODS AND SERVICES OFFERED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 9, dated 20 January 2025, requesting approval to increase the pricing for goods and services offered by the town council by 3%.

RESOLVED

To increase charges levied by the town council for its good and services by 3% or forecast inflation as noted at the end of February 2024 which-ever is the higher, and for these increases to take effect on 1 April 2025.

77. 2nd DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 10, dated 20 January 2025, presenting the 2nd draft Revenue Budget 2025/26.

The report noted the council tax charge levied by the town council would rise by £10.06 to £92.19 per year for a Band D property equating to a 12.2% increase or 84p per month.

During the ensuing discussion, the Chairman reviewed the core items within the budget and highlighted the level of services given by the town council to its residents. It was noted the budget contained considerable help for local community groups such as the Bonfire Society, the Burgess Hill Pantry CIO and the Park Centre CIO.

A representative of the Burgess Hill Pantry CIO thanked the town council for its support towards the new phase of its development as it looks to move into new premises within the coming months which will enable it to offer enhanced services to the residents of the town.

A member of the public queried whether section 106 monies was being sourced to assist with expenditure such as equipment at the Folder Meadow green space. The town council's CEO outlined the Section 106 process and confirmed the town council does apply, where possible, for eligible money and in the particular case of Folders Meadow, the funds had been exhausted.

A member of the public queried, with falling revenues for the About Town magazine, should it be continued. The Chair of the Community Engagement KAG spoke to confirm a review of the viability of the About Town magazine was undertaken some 18 months ago and it was felt there was much greater value of the magazine to the residents of the town than just the monetary aspect. A new review would be undertaken at the end of a 3 year period from when the previous review was done.

RESOLVED:

To recommend to Council -

- a) An annual Pantry grant of up to £15,000 for a 3 year period,
- b) To approve the balance of the 2025/26 budget as presented of £1,183,306, and
- c) To approve a Precept of £1,198,306.

78. RESERVES AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2024

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 11, dated 20 January 2025, providing an update as to the status of the council's reserves.

It was raised by a Member of the Council the residual monies left in the Operation Watershed Fund of £3,814 should be reallocated to the Street Scene/Minor Works Fund. This was agreed by Members of the Finance KAG.

The Chairman of the Meeting, Cllr Cedric De Souza, left the meeting at this point due to a conflict of interest in regard to the Park Centre Burgess Hill CIO agenda item. He was replaced by the Deputy Chairman, Simon Hicks.

The report highlighted the Park Centre Burgess Hill CIO was requesting an additional tranche of funds of up to £56,907 + VAT to progress to the next stage of the build project which would allow the facility to open.

A representative from the Park Centre Burgess Hill CIO spoke to confirm the Park Centre facility should be formally transferred to the CIO within the next few weeks once a number of legal issues had been resolved. It was confirmed that once the legal side had been resolved and the town council were able to assist with the next part of the funding, they would be able to complete the first stage of the works and open the building to community groups.

Cllr Cedric De Souza returned to the meeting.

The report also noted the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had approved a £300k loan to develop phase of the burial ground.

RESOLVED:

- a) To transfer £3,814 from the Operation Watershed Fund to the Street Scene/Minor Works Fund,
- b) To approve the payment of up to £56,907 + VAT to the Park Centre Burgess Hill CIO subject to –
 1. Confirmation the facility has been transferred to the Park Centre Burgess Hill CIO,
 2. An up-to-date project plan to be submitted to the town council,

3. A successful meeting between Trustees of the CIO and Officer of the town council,
 4. Funds provide are ring-fenced by the CIO for the purpose to which the funds are given, and
 5. To supply documentary proof to the town council of the expenditure being incurred where council (public) money is involved,
- c) To approve the Earmarked and General Reserves Schedule, and
- d) To note the contents of the report in regard to the burial ground loan.

79. **BANK RECONCILIATION AND INVESTMENTS**

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 12, dated 20 January 2025, providing a copy of a recent bank statement for Members to review and to highlight the status of the town council's cash and deposit position.

RESOLVED

To note the contents of the report and for the Deputy Chairman to approve and counter-sign the bank reconciliation.

80. **REVIEW OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 13, dated 20 January 2025, detailing a review of the town council's Financial Regulations via a vis the recently issued NALC model.

The review highlighted two areas that needed to be addressed:

1. **Risk Management and Internal Control (2.6)** – for a Member of the Council, other than the Finance KAG Chairman, to approve, on a quarterly basis (to include the final year-end reconciliation), the town council's bank reconciliations.
2. **Budget & Precept 4.8** – Any Member must disclose if they have unpaid Council tax of more than two months and must not be allowed to vote on the Budget and Precept. This is mandatory.

RESOLVED

- a) For the Finance KAG deputy Chairman to approve the bank reconciliations presented to each of the Finance KAG meetings and the final year-end bank reconciliation, and
- b) To be included, as an agenda item, prior to any vote on the Budget and Precept, the opportunity for any Member to declare if they have unpaid council tax of more than two months, and to amend the Financial Regulations accordingly to reflect this regulation.

81. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be held in June 2025 – *date to be confirmed*

Meeting concluded 20.15 hours

DRAFT