

Minutes of a Meeting of Mid Sussex District Council held on 1 March 2017 from 7.00 pm to 7.58 pm.

Present: Councillors:

Peter Reed (Chairman)
Bruce Forbes (Vice-Chairman)

Jonathan Ash-Edwards
Andrew Barrett-Miles
Edward Belsey
John Belsey
Margaret Belsey
Liz Bennett*
Anne Boutrup*
Pete Bradbury
Heidi Brunsdon*
Kevin Burke*
Cherry Catharine
Richard Cherry
Rod Clarke
Phillip Coote
Ruth de Mierre
Tony Dorey*
David Dorking*

Sandy Ellis
Steven Hansford
Ginny Heard
Chris Hersey
Margaret Hersey
Colin Holden
Anne Jones MBE
Chris King
Jim Knight*
Jacqui Landriani
Andrew Lea
Anthea Lea
Andrew MacNaughton
Bob Mainstone
Gordon Marples
Gary Marsh*
Peter Martin*

Edward Matthews*
Norman Mockford
Pru Moore
Howard MUNDIN
Kirsty Page*
Geoff Rawlinson
Robert Salisbury*
Linda Stockwell
Dick Sweatman
Mandy Thomas-Atkin
Colin Trumble
Neville Walker
Garry Wall
Anthony Watts Williams
Norman Webster*
John Wilkinson
Peter Wyan

*Absent

1. OPENING PRAYER

The opening prayer was read by the Vice-Chairman.

2. TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 9

None.

3. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 1 FEBRUARY 2016

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 1 February 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY MATTER ON THE AGENDA

None.

5. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS

None.

6. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman informed Members that a full list of his recent engagements had been published on the Council website.

He reminded Members that the Chairman's Choral Evensong will take place on Sunday 2 April at St Swithen's Church, East Grinstead.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET – 13 FEBRUARY 2017

The recommendations (i) to (vii) from Cabinet held on 13 February 2017 were agreed.

It was agreed that recommendations on the Draft Corporate Plan and Budget for 2017/18 would be taken in item 8.

8. CORPORATE PLAN AND BUDGET FOR 2017/18

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources and Economic Growth introduced the report.

He thanked Members and Officers for their input and underlined that this was a budget moving the Council from austerity to growth. He outlined that the Council was using its position of financial strength to benefit residents through sustaining and improving services.

He highlighted that the central government grant to the Council has been reduced from £6.5m to £100k and in future will be zero.

The Deputy Leader discussed the new Council priorities:

1. Effective and responsive services;
2. Sustainable economic growth;
3. Strong and resilient communities and;
4. Financial independence.

He stated that the proposed 1.99% increase in Council Tax is the lowest increase of any principal authority in Sussex, and is lower in real terms compared to 2010.

A Member began the discussion by highlighting the Capital Programme Summary on page 97 of the Corporate Plan and Budget, and noted the high levels of borrowing in the year 2016/17. He sought assurance that the Council is comfortable with this level of borrowing.

The Deputy Leader replied that every decision is properly financed, and Council agreed the purchase for the Orchards Shopping Centre (the reason for the high borrowing), in a previous meeting of the Council.

Members debated the proposed 1.99% increase in Council Tax, and asked whether a lower increase had been considered.

The Deputy Leader explained that Council Tax has been frozen for five years, which was the right policy during times of economic recession, however this policy cannot continue indefinitely. Base costs have increased such as waste contracts. He reassured Members that the relevant Working Group and Scrutiny Committee has

scrutinised the 1.99% increase and recognised that this is the lowest increase which will sustain the Council financially. He highlighted that the District's most vulnerable residents will still be supported by the Council Tax Support Scheme.

In response to a Member's question about the cost of the District Plan and Planning Appeals, he informed Members that Cabinet recently transferred funds to the District Plan reserve and resources have been set aside. He advised that appeals are dealt with through Budget Management reports.

The Deputy Leader clarified to Members that the Corporate Funds Budget as outlined in page 89 of the Corporate Plan and Budget represents money transferred to the reserve, and is not an increase in the base revenue budget.

A Member raised concern regarding the cost of the roll-out of garden waste. The Deputy Leader advised Members that the income forecasts are for bins already in service, and the Corporate Plan justification related to new customers who may not have been charged.

Another Member asked whether the renovation of the Members Room is included in the Council Chamber Modernisation provision as outlined in the Capital Programme in page 98 of the budget document.

Members referred to page 42 of the Corporate Plan and Budget and the increase in ground and landscapes maintenance. The Deputy Leader explained that the increase is due to a variation in the contract to take account of additional land adoptions.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee for Leader and Service Delivery informed Members that after a detailed debate, the Committee was unanimous in supporting the Budget. Furthermore, he wished to highlight the provision in the budget for the RSG tariff as outlined in page 120 of the Budget document.

After Member queries relating to Council's digitalisation strategy, the Deputy Leader reassured Members that traditional means of contacting the Council will remain in place and the added emphasis on online-contact will lessen the pressure on postal and telephone contact.

The Leader of the Council stated that since 2009, the Council has faced many challenges. There has been clear success in financial planning and facing up to financial challenges. Over £6 million in savings have been achieved since 2009 which have been necessary in the face of a depleting government grant.

Furthermore, the Council's current financial strategy ensures that there is confidence in the future and the Council has not been complacent in maintaining this trajectory. The Council is focused on maintaining the services it delivers and delivering value for money for its residents.

He highlighted that he is proud the Council is able to keep the Council Tax increase low which will provide relief to local residents, and stability to the most vulnerable in the District.

He thanked Members and Officers who have been involved in the process throughout and stated that questions from Members in this meeting demonstrates the degree of understanding and involvement from Members in bringing the Budget forward.

He concluded that this is a budget that all Members can be proud of, as it continues to provide both the value for money, service levels and quality of service the District's residents expect and he was happy to support the recommendation to Members.

The Chairman took Members to a recorded vote in accordance with the budget regulations:

	For	Against	Abstained
Councillor Ash-Edwards	√		
Councillor Barrett-Miles	√		
Councillor E. Belsey	√		
Councillor J. Belsey	√		
Councillor M. Belsey	√		
Councillor Bradbury	√		
Councillor Catharine	√		
Councillor Cherry	√		
Councillor Clarke	√		
Councillor Coote	√		
Councillor de Mierre	√		
Councillor Ellis	√		
Councillor Forbes	√		
Councillor Hansford	√		
Councillor Heard	√		
Councillor C. Hersey	√		
Councillor M. Hersey	√		
Councillor Holden	√		
Councillor Jones	√		
Councillor King	√		
Councillor Landriani	√		
Councillor Andrew Lea	√		
Councillor Anthea Lea	√		
Councillor MacNaughton	√		
Councillor Mainstone	√		
Councillor Marples	√		
Councillor Mockford	√		
Councillor Moore	√		
Councillor Munding	√		
Councillor Rawlinson	√		
Councillor Reed	√		
Councillor Stockwell	√		
Councillor Sweatman	√		
Councillor Thomas-Atkin	√		
Councillor Trumble	√		
Councillor Walker	√		
Councillor Wall	√		
Councillor Watts Williams	√		
Councillor Wilkinson	√		
Councillor Wyan	√		

40 Members voted in support.

RESOLVED

Council resolved to approve the Corporate Plan and Budget for 2017/18 as set out in the report.

9. APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS

Councillor J. Belsey, as Chairman of the Audit Committee proposed Council formally accept the invitation to procure a new auditor as part of the national offer through PSAA Ltd. He informed Members that the advantages of joining are outlined in the report and the Council must make a decision by 9 March.

Councillor DeMierre seconded the motion and reassured Members that local firms were considered, but no local firms met the Council's needs.

RESOLVED

Council resolved to accept the invitation to procure a new auditor as part of the national offer through PSAA Ltd.

The Meeting was closed at 7.58 pm.

Chairman