

NOTES of the FINANCE KEY AREA GROUP MEETING held in the Council Chamber on Monday 13 November 2024 at 18.30 hours.

KAG MEMBERS: Graham Fairbairn - Responsible Finance Officer (RFO)
Cllr Bob Foster (arrived 18.35)
Cllr Jon Gardner
Cllr Matthew Goldsmith
Cllr Janice Henwood
Cllr Simon Hicks (deputy Chairman)
Cllr Cedric De Souza (Chairman)
Cllr Adam White

Also Present:

Cllr Diane Black
Cllr Matthew Cornish (arrived 18.50)
Cllr Robert Eggleston
Cllr Anne Eves
Cllr Matthew Goldsmith
Julie Holden – Chief Executive Officer
Cllr Andy Stowe
Cllr Brenda Williams
8 members of the public, including representation from the Burgess Hill Bonfire Society.

*Denotes absence

Meeting started 18.30 hrs

56. **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 asked whether Key Area Group (KAG) meetings could be live streamed, similar to the Council meetings, so that residents who could not attend could listen to proceedings.

The RFO responded that, at this time, a number of officers who attended meetings required training on the equipment and this was, currently, restrained by staff resourcing. In addition, the current technology being used appeared to be of poor quality and was being looked at to see if it could be improved.

57. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None received

58. **SUBSTITUTES**

None

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Cedric De Souza – in regard to item 11.3(e) Park Centre Burgess Hill CIO, as he is a Trustee and the treasurer of that organisation.

Adam White – in regard to agenda item 9.6 Burgess Hill Pantry, as he is a Trustee of the Burgess Hill Community Partnership CIC that rents units to the Pantry, and in regard to agenda item 10.7 Bonfire Society, as he is a member of that organisation.

Simon Hicks, Janice Henwood and Anne Eves in regard to agenda item 9.6 Burgess Hill Pantry, as they are Trustees of the Burgess Hill Community Partnership CIC that rents units to the Pantry.

60. NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Notes of the previous Finance Key Area Group meeting, dated 24 June 2024, were approved by Members and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

61. EXTERNAL AUDIT – 2023/24

Members received a report, as set out in agenda item 7, dated 13 November 2024, in regard to the external Limited Assurance Review (external audit) for the 2023/24 financial year.

The Chairman read the findings of the report and wished to note the consistently high contribution the RFO and his team deliver each year. The committee noted its thanks.

The report noted there were no areas of concern that needed to be brought to the attention of Members.

RESOLVED

To approve the external Limited Assurance Review.

62. INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT – 2024/25

Members received a report, as set out in agenda item 8, dated 13 November 2024, in regard to the interim Internal Audit for the 2024/25 financial year.

The report noted the internal audit would be undertaken by Mulberry and Company during November 2024 and the results brought before the Finance KAG meeting in January 2025.

RESOLVED

To note the contents of the report.

63. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2024/25

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 9, dated 13 November 2024, appraising Members of latest forecast Outturn for the 2024/25 financial year.

Members were informed the town council would post a surplus in the region of £23k.

During the ensuing discussion, it was noted the interest earned on balances had delivered a significant return due to a strong level of reserves, born from funds being set-aside for future capital projects and advanced receipts, combined with high interest rates.

Burgess Hill Pantry - Funding for an additional location of the Burgess Hill Pantry was discussed at length, with the Chairman of the meeting stating that for the town council's current financial year, the Pantry would require £7k of funding assistance towards fit-out costs, as opposed to the £15k contained with the agenda report, with £13,333 for the following two financial years towards rent and running costs.

It was noted the Pantry would be looking to take possession of the additional premises in January 2025, whilst retaining their current units in the Martlets, at least for the short-term.

Cyprus Hall - In regard to the pigeon netting for the Cyprus Hall facility, a Member raised concerns that netting was not the most suitable deterrent and there were other more bird friendly alternatives available.

RESOLVED

- a) To provide funding to the Burgess Hill Pantry of up to £7k, these funds to come from the 2024/25 surplus,
- b) To defer agreeing to further financial support of £13,333 for the Burgess Hill Pantry to the Finance KAG meeting in January 2025 to allow for more clarity on funding requirements, and
- c) To find a solution to the bird problem at the Cyprus Hall facility with funds of up to £3k coming from the 2024/25 surplus.

64. 1st DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 10, dated 13 November 2024, presenting the first draft Revenue Budget 2025/26. The report gave Members a first view of the financial pressures facing the town council for 2025/26 financial year and acted as a discussion document to provide guidance towards formulating the final Budget to be presented in January 2025.

It was noted the report had been prepared on a status-quo basis to include the standard base line Revenue Budget items with an additional section highlighting costs that had not been included.

During the ensuing discussion, it was highlighted that one of the largest movements related to an increase in staffing costs. It was noted, staff salaries adhered to the National Framework for local authority workers and came under the remit of the Staff and Member KAG. The costs shown included an estimate for the contractual national cost of living rise (yet to be agreed by the National Joint Council for local Government Services), associated pension costs and a significant increase in national insurance costs born from the Government's changes to employers' NI rates and thresholds.

Additional items of expenditure

Burgess Hill Bonfire Society (BHBS) – Additional funding, by way of an annual grant, for the Burgess Hill Bonfire Society was discussed at length with a representative from the BHBS presenting their case for the increase in funds. The additional annual funding of £5.5K was agreed by Members.

Planters, hanging baskets and stone gardens – Funding for additional planters, hanging baskets and work on the stone garden was discussed as part of agenda item 10.7. During the discussion it was noted, at this stage, the exact requirements had yet to be agreed and although there would be a number of one-off, start-up costs, these initial works should be considered the start of an ongoing project to enhance the public realm. The annual funding of £10k was agreed by Members.

Enhance Christmas Light Switch On event – Additional funding of £5k towards the annual Christmas Lights Switch On event was discussed with Members being unclear how this money would be spent and voted not to provide funding.

Burgess Hill Pantry – Application from the Burgess Hill Pantry for the town council to provide funding of circa £13,333 per annum towards rent and running costs for an additional location for financial years 2025/26 and 2026/27.

This item is covered in Minute 63, Resolution b.

Highways works to be undertaken by the town council – Members discussed the potential of taking on works ordinarily undertaken by West Sussex County Council and for the cost of these works to be absorbed by the town council. It was noted this was an item taken from the recent Visioning Day.

The CEO, Julie Holden, stated she would be meeting with West Sussex County Council in due course to discuss opportunities where the town council could be involved in providing highways works around the town. Members did not make a resolution.

Other short-term priorities (from the Visioning Day) – Members did not make a resolution on this item, as, at this stage too little detail was available.

RESOLVED:

- a) To increase the grant paid to the Burgess Hill Bonfire Society by £5.5k and for this to be included within the town council's base-line Revenue Budget for 2025/26 and subsequent years with a review of requirements to take place annually,
- b) To include within the base-line Revenue Budget for 2025/26 and subsequent years, an amount of £10k towards Public Realm enhancements. This was carried by a majority vote of 5 to 2, and
- c) To refuse an additional £5k towards Christmas Lights Switch On event.

65. RESERVES AS AT 31 OCTOBER 2024

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 11, dated 13 November 2024, providing an update as to the status of the council's reserves.

The report detailed a number of requests, received from KAGs and/or had come to the attention of officers, for expenditure outside of the current budget.

Events Programme – Members discussed and agreed to a request from the Community KAG and Strategic KAG to increase the events programme funding by £8k to cover events through to March 2026, and to purchase a branded gazebo for £2k and to purchase some barriers at £1.1k, with the funds coming from the Community Engagement Fund.

Heating and Ventilation System – Members received a report detailing the council's heating and ventilation system that serves the Help Point had failed. The report noted testing was underway to determine the problem but due to the age of the system a replacement may need to be sought at a cost of circa £5k. This was agreed by Members with the funds coming from the surplus in the General Reserve.

External decoration of the town council offices – Members received a report noting the outside of the council offices are showing signs of age with areas of plaster falling off the walls. The report noted a quote was to be sought to ascertain the likely costs which will be brought to the next Finance KAG meeting.

West Park Reserve – Members received a report highlighting a path area at West Park Reserve becomes flooded and impassable during wet weather. An estimate, in the region of £3k, had been given to provide a raised walk-way. This was agreed to by Members with the funds coming from the surplus in the General Reserve.

The Park Centre CIO – *This item was chaired by the Finance KAG Deputy Chairman due to a conflict of interest with the meeting's Chairman, who is a Trustee and the treasurer of the CIO.*

Members received a report and agreed to a request from the Park Centre CIO for additional monies of £21,884 towards the Park Centre Project with the funds coming from the Community Buildings and Projects Fund. The report detailed the type of expenditure to be incurred and noted this application would take the overall town council expenditure for this project to circa £47k.

During the ensuing discussion, it was agreed the money would be advanced on the condition the money would be ring-fenced by the CIO for the purpose for which it was given, and for the CIO to provide proof of expenditure to the town council when requested.

The discussion also noted that a revised expenditure plan was required from the CIO and the CIO treasurer confirmed an updated, phased project plan would be prepared by the CIO and presented to the town council.

RESOLVED:

- a) To increase the events programme funding by £8k to cover events through to March 2026, to purchase a branded gazebo for £2k and to purchase some barriers at £1.1k, with the funds to come from the Community Engagement Fund,

- b) To set-aside up to £5k towards the replacement of the heating and ventilation system with the funds to come from the General Reserve,
- c) For officers to seek a quote for the repair and external decoration of the town council building and to present this to the next available Finance KAG,
- d) To set-aside up to £3k towards the provision of a walkway at West Park Reserve with the funds coming from the General Reserve, and
- e) To provide additional funds to the Park Centre CIO of up to £21,884 on the condition the money would be ring-fenced by the CIO for the purpose for which it was given, and for the CIO to provide proof of expenditure to the town council when requested.

66. BANK RECONCILIATION AND INVESTMENTS

Members received a report as set out in agenda item 12, dated 13 November 2024, 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.

67. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be held in January 2025 – *[the date of Monday 20 January 2025 is stated on the Rota of Meeting].*

Meeting concluded 20.30 hours