

EAST GRINSTEAD TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE – 23 JUNE 2011

Present: Councillor N Webster (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs H Brunsdon (Acting Vice Chairman)
Councillor J Saul (Town Mayor)
Councillor Mrs E Bennett (Deputy Town Mayor)
Councillor Mrs Beckford
Councillors Hodges, O'Brien, Osborne, Whittaker and Wyan

Also present: Councillors Mrs Burns, Favor, Mainstone and Sweatman. Four members of the public and a representative of the press.

Officers present: Town Clerk and Mr Barry Male, Responsible Finance Officer and Mr Paul Hartley, Internal Auditor.

62 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There being no members of the public present Members moved on to the next item of business at 7.45 pm.

63 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors Mrs Belsey and Sillitoe.

In the absence of the Vice-Chairman the Committee proposed Councillor Mrs Brunsdon as acting Vice-Chairman for this meeting only. This was proposed by Councillor O'Brien, seconded by Councillor Sweatman and agreed by Committee.

64 MINUTES

Councillor Mainstone referred to minute 358 of 24th March 2011 and asked whether a letter had been sent. The Town Clerk advised that she believed it had been sent but she would check and report back to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meetings held on 24th March and 16th May 2011 having been previously circulated, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

65 DECLARATIONS OF PREJUDICIAL AND PERSONAL INTEREST

- * Councillor Osborne disclosed a prejudicial interest in item 6 on the agenda as a regular hirer of the Old Court House.
- * Councillors Mrs Bennett, Mrs Brunsdon and O'Brien disclosed personal interests in all matters on the agenda pertaining to Mid Sussex District Council and West Sussex County Council as elected members of those authorities.
- * Councillor Mainstone disclosed a personal interest in agenda item 14 as an employee of West Sussex County Council and elected member of Mid Sussex District Council, and in item 17 as an elected member of Mid Sussex District Council.

- * Councillors Sweatman and Webster disclosed personal interests in all matters on the agenda pertaining to Mid Sussex District Council in their capacity as elected members of that body.
- * Councillors Mrs Bennett, Mrs Brunsdon and Mainstone disclosed personal interests in agenda item 15 as recipients of Council allowances for the past civic year.

66 ACCOUNTS FOR MARCH, APRIL AND MAY 2011 AND SCHEDULE OF CAPITAL PAYMENTS INCURRED DURING 2010/2011 FINANCIAL YEAR (Min 24.3.11)

RESOLVED: (i) That the accounts for the following months as set out in the schedule submitted be approved and confirmed:

	<u>Total</u> <u>Payments</u> £	<u>Imprest</u> £
March 2011	75,222.95	4,287.61
April 2011	462,681.93	916.68
May 2011	57,520.52	5,378.12
	<u>595,425.40</u>	<u>10,582.41</u>

(ii) The payment on the Capital Fund account for 2010/2011 financial year, totalling £53,376.39 exclusive of £9,873.16 VAT, be approved and confirmed.

67 RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES

The Town Clerk circulated a copy of the relevant minutes from the recommendations of previous Committees.

RESOLVED: To agree the recommendations as set out in the minutes of the Amenities and Tourism Committee of 16th June 2011.

68 TOWN COUNCIL FINANCES – POSITION STATEMENT (Min 357 24.3.11)

The Chairman introduced the report and thanked Mr Male for the information. Councillor O'Brien asked whether the balances are as expected at this time of year or whether there was any particular anomaly to be brought to the attention of Members. Mr Male, Responsible Finance Officer, responded that the precept from Mid Sussex District Council is paid half yearly and the balance at this point in the year always reflects that a large payment has been received and that outgoings have been relatively small.

Councillor Mrs Beckford stated that it was pleasing to note the healthy financial position of the Council and wished to record thanks to the previous administration for handing the accounts over in such a way.

Councillor Webster agreed that the accounts were healthy and went on to mention that £150,000 had been transferred into a high interest account in order to achieve the best return. Councillor Mrs Brunsdon asked if the £150,000 would be shown in this item as a separate line in the future. Mr Male replied yes, explaining that the £150,000 was achieving a 3% interest and the money was locked away for an 18 month period. This was to maximise interest and keep the money safe. He confirmed that this money was felt to be above the financial requirement for the year and therefore would not place any strain on budgets.

Cllr Osborne asked if the balances shown were the norm for a Council of this size. Mr Male answered yes, that a six to eight month reserve of expenditure held in the accounts in case of an emergency would be the normal position and explained that due to the recent precept payment the balances were slightly higher but that this would regulate.

There being no further questions the accounts were noted.

69 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS – ANNUAL FINANCIAL RETURN 2010/2011 (Min 83 24.6.10)

The Chairman invited Paul Hartley, the Internal Auditor, to introduce the statement of accounts and highlight anything that he felt was relevant. Mr. Hartley advised there was nothing of concern in the Town Council's accounts, section 4 had been accepted with no problems and he felt it prudent to place on record that East Grinstead Town Council's accounts were well managed with a history of good practice.

Councillor Whittaker asked how long internal audits had been required for town and parish councils. Mr Male advised this had been a requirement since 2002 and that it has to be an independent body and cannot be carried out by an officer or Member of the Town Council. He further explained that the effectiveness of internal audit check is no longer necessary but there is a requirement to be satisfied as to the effectiveness of internal control. In his opinion there was very little difference between the two and Council would carry on meeting assurances.

RECOMMENDED: (i) To approve the Annual Statement of Accounts for 2010/2011 as set out in Section 1 of Appendix A of the F&GP Committee papers;

(ii) To approve the Annual Governance Statement as set out in Section 2 of Appendix A of the F&GP Committee papers and to confirm "yes", to questions 1 to 9 as set out in the Statement and to agree that this now be signed by the Chairman and the Town Clerk,.

70 APPROVAL OF INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN AND ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT (Min 336 & 337 25.3.10)

The Chairman asked Paul Hartley, Internal Auditor, to speak to the Internal Audit papers and thanked him for the briefing on internal audit, which was much appreciated by Council Members.

Mr Hartley highlighted the process of appointing an internal auditor and mentioned that this was an item that was out for consultation at the moment and no clear indication as to the future process was yet known.

Councillor Mainstone made reference to Appendix D, item (b) and stated that during the period of bad weather over the winter of 2010/2011 it had not always been easy for Members to attend the scheduled meetings and that there had been some confusion as to whether a meeting was quorate. He suggested that if this was added to the agenda papers it would resolve that issue.

Councillor Mainstone further mentioned, under item (C) Risk Management that it would be a good idea for the presence of officers attending a meeting to be recorded in the minutes. The Town Clerk responded that she was happy to include

the quorate number on the agenda. She also mentioned that as of this cycle of meetings officers are being included in the list of attendees.

Councillor Saull asked who was responsible for risk management at the Town Council. Mr Male advised that he was the officer with that responsibility.

Councillor Osborne mentioned any other business as an item on an agenda, noting that it was referred to in the internal audit report. He said that he felt this was an important item on an agenda and that urgent issues should be debated, although he had recently attended a course where he had been advised that this was not legally permitted. The Town Clerk advised that the agenda for town and parish councils were derived from statute and there was no allowance for any other business to appear on the agenda, the reason for this being that notice of items to be decided were required to be posted three days in advance of raising items and making decisions under any other business would invalidate those decisions as potentially other Members of the Council, or members of the public, would be unaware that they were being considered and decided upon.

Mr Hartley supported the Town Clerk's comments and added that there was provision under delegated powers for urgent matters to be addressed. Councillor Osborne asked whether or not the Town Council had delegated powers to deal with such items and he was assured that this was the case.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hartley for his report and advised that the Town Clerk and the Responsible Finance Officer had been asked to devise some training notes and possible seminar for further financial awareness for Town Councillors. Councillor Mrs Brunson requested that treasury management should be included in any training.

Councillor Mrs Brunson asked what questions were being put to satisfy compliance as Trustees through the internal audit process. Mr Hartley advised that he was obliged to ensure that accounts had been returned to the Charity Commission and that those accounts had been externally audited. This obligation was satisfied by the Chequer Mead Trust. The Parish halls Trust, being a smaller financial concern, is not required to be externally audited, but is independently audited, and again he confirmed that this has been carried out properly.

The Town Clerk drew Members' attention to the item on the internal audit plan for audit of the internal controls at Chequer Mead. She advised that this would be an item on the next Charities Committee agenda. Mr Hartley confirmed the request for the Chequer Mead audit followed the closing of the Trading account and assured that the new procedures were properly in place.

The Committee thanked Mr Hartley for attending the meeting and Councillor Whittaker specifically thanked him for the robust report and the good interaction and relationship with the Council's officers.

RESOLVED: To formally note and approve the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2010/2011 prepared by the Council's Internal Auditor, Mr Paul Hartley MIOB, together with the schedule of management actions/responses prepared by the Town Clerk and Heads of Service.

RESOLVED: That Mr Richard Curtis be appointed as a Charity Trustee.

72 EAST GRINSTEAD YOUTH COUNCIL (Min 292 27.1.11)

Councillor Webster welcomed the Youth Council representatives, Jack, George and James. The representatives gave a brief history of the Youth Council and highlighted some of the specific events that they had been involved in over the past year. They concluded by stating that they had a new web site showing the work they do, the impact they have had and showcasing their achievements. This can be found at www.eastgrinsteadyouthcouncil.com.

Councillor Mrs Brunsdon asked the Youth Council what barriers they saw in encouraging young people to volunteer. The group replied that public liability insurance cover was easier for the 16 plus group and therefore encouraging volunteers below the age of 16 could sometimes be difficult. In their experience support in schools for volunteering can be patchy. They also mentioned that the pressure on young people to achieve academically was quite a barrier to them finding the time to volunteer within the community.

Councillor Mrs Brunsdon advised that there were several Council Members who were also members of West Sussex County Council and to that end she would be interested to know how the Youth Council felt that councillors could be more engaged with them and how can they support them in meeting their goals. The Youth Council representatives said that they valued meetings with councillors and have liked a conduit so that their views and voices could be heard. They were very pleased with the support they receive from Caroline Halpin but would be keen to have direct contact with councillors.

Councillor Mrs Beckford asked how well advertised the Youth Council was. The representatives explained the formal structure and network of youth service provision but felt that perhaps it could be bettered.

Councillor Mainstone suggested that the Town Council consider making the Youth Council one of its formal outside bodies and appoint two councillor representatives to this. There was agreement from several councillors that they would be keen to be more involved with the development of the Youth Council.

Councillor Whittaker asked whether there were links to the East Grinstead Business Association and representatives replied they were not aware of any.

The Chairman thanked the young people for attending the meeting and told them they would be always be welcome and that reports from Caroline Halpin would continue to be included on the agenda for this Committee and asked the Youth Council to make the dates of their meetings known to the Town Clerk so that she could pass this to Town Councillors to attend meetings where they could.

73 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (Min 362 24.3.11)

Details of Performance Indicators in respect of responsibilities falling under the purview of the Finance and General Purposes Committee March, April and May 2011 were noted.

74 APPOINTMENT OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2011/2012 (Min 89 24.6.20)

The Chairman advised the recommendation for two working groups to be set up.

Councillor Mrs Beckford confirmed her membership of the Neighbourhood Plan working group, which was welcomed by the Chairman. It was

RESOLVED: That the Neighbourhood Plan Working Party and Working Party for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations be set up.

75 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Chairman stated that this was an important matter, which clearly needed to be addressed and recommended the report to the Committee.

Councillor Mainstone advised that many people had been confused as to which Ward they were in and where they should be voting and he fully supported the Town Council making representations. It was

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk should formally approach Mid Sussex District Council to request that the boundary changes be addressed either through the District Council for the Boundary Commission where appropriate.

76 COUNCILLORS' ALLOWANCES (Min 295 27.1.11)

Councillor Mainstone made reference to the allowances being set by Mid Sussex District Council's Independent Panel and felt that if the Town Council was going to follow the District Council's recommendations then allowances that are also paid to Mid Sussex District Councillors should be considered by the Town Council. This could include covering the cost of carers, child minding and mileage.

The Chairman advised that the amounts were set for this year and would be reconsidered in January 2012, as per the report, when consideration can be given to these matters.

Mr Male highlighted that additional expenditures could be claimed against tax through tax returns to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. In answer to a question as to whether receipts were needed, Mr Male suggested that normal tax rules would apply. He further reminded Members that in order to claim a Members Allowance for this year, and to be paid in accordance with the schedule, applications should be received by him by 7th July 2011.

77 COMMUNITY ACTION PLANS

Councillor Mrs Brunson offered to attend any meetings with officers regarding Community Action Plans and it was

RESOLVED: That the Committee wished to explore Community Action Plans further and that the Town Clerk should hold meetings with potential cluster neighbours and advise West Sussex County Council of any proposals.

78 PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

The Chairman introduced the report and highlighted the recommendation that was being asked by the Committee.

Councillor O'Brien stated that the design provides a "Rolls Royce" service and that this would be a fantastic design but he had grave reservations at the cost, which was suggested at being between £20,000 and £30,000 per year.

Councillor Mrs Brunson agreed the design was gold-plated but said this is the plan and proposal that is in front of the Committee. She did highlight that a draft budget had been agreed and therefore the cost was not completely prohibitive.

Councillor Mrs Beckford agreed with the earlier comments, highlighted her concern that the cost was substantial and that the Committee needs to be clear as to how the cost would be met from ongoing budgets.

Councillor Whittaker said he had some issues with the design. Representation had been made to him as to the use of a unisex entrance, particularly from female members of the public who had issues over security and safety.

Councillor Sweatman said the design could be more basic, which would allow the cost element to be reconsidered. He also stated that the charging policy was due to be referred back to the Committee but that he had no problem with a charge being made.

Councillor Mrs Brunson said that the plan had been brought about on the wishes of the previous administration. She asked that if the Town Council did not now agree the plan whether this would mean that the project would then be in jeopardy. She emphasised that she would wish the Town Council to enter into the contract but that the plans should be made subject to agreement.

The Town Clerk advised that the design had been drawn up by Mid Sussex District Council officers, in discussion with Town Council officers. She felt that a delay on the design would not be welcomed by the District Council, however, it would not necessarily terminate negotiations. The Town Clerk did, however, ask for clear instructions from the Committee as to the element of the design that they would wish to change.

Councillor Mainstone stated that this was a pioneering move for East Grinstead Town Council and was an opportunity to bring forward a design to provide this facility for the Town. He supported the charge for using the facility and felt that the presence of an attendant would reduce vandalism and therefore running costs. He was concerned that if the Town Council does not introduce these elements then the cost of repairs could outweigh savings.

Councillor Mrs Brunson agreed that the toilets were very much an asset for the Town and were essential. However, she strongly urged that the designs of other Town's conveniences, such as Lewes and Reigate where there was no attendant, should be considered.

The Chairman summed up that the Town Council was keen to see toilets installed in East Grinstead as soon as possible and that the Town Council had to consider the impact on the public purse, especially in the austere times currently being faced. He hoped that a more simple design could be achieved quickly so as to allow the project to continue without delay. It was

- RESOLVED:
- (1) That the Town Council should enter into the contract with Mid Sussex District Council.
 - (2) That the Town Clerk and Councillor Mrs Brunson will engage in further negotiations with Mid Sussex District Council to consider other design options with a view to reducing building and ongoing costs.

79 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 9.22 p.m.

SIGNED:

CHAIRMAN.