**A Meeting of the Finance, Asset, Community and Environment Committee**

**took place to be held at 7.30pm on Monday 11th December 2023,**

**in the Town Council Offices, the Old Library, Knockhundred Row, Midhurst**

**MINUTES**

**Present**: Cllr D Coote, Cllr D Fraser, Cllr G McAra, Cllr D Merritt, Cllr P Piper, Cllr J Travers (Chairman) and Cllr R Watts.

**In attendance:** S Hurr, Town Clerk, PCSO Nathan Ford and PCSO Abbey Jeffries.

**F/094/23 Chairman’s Announcements:** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, and announced that **item 13** on the agenda, would be taken as the next item, to allow Nathan Ford and Abbey Jeffries to leave promptly to attend an on-going incident.

**F/095/23 Verbal Update Report from Police Community Services Officer (PCSO) Nathan Ford:** Mr Ford began by explaining that he had been a PCSO in the Midhurst area for four years and that Ms Jeffries was currently undergoing training. Over the last twelve weeks reports/calls regarding the following matters had been received:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Reports/Calls** | **Matters** |
| 35 | Anti-social Behaviour |
| 11 | Criminal Damage |
| 5 | Burglaries |
| 83 | Other |
| 5 | Hoax Calls |

Mr Ford reported a rise in break-ins to garden sheds, and incidents around the North Street Bus Station regarding a more aggressive form of ‘Knockdown Ginger’, which was a current Tik Tok trend, and liaison with Midhurst Rother College had been successful in identifying those responsible, who had been required to write apologies to those they had disturbed. Mr Ford further reported that fraud was a significant issue, both on line, by telephone and face-to-face.

Cllr Lambert expressed concerns regarding drug-dealing, and Mr Ford agreed to meet with him separately to discuss this issue further as he confirmed the more information received, the greater the prospect of tackling the matter. Cllr Facer and Cllr Travers also reported issues of drug dealing and drug use at South Pond, and the cut through from June Lane to Petersfield Road.

**Action:** Cllr Lambert to meet with Mr Ford, discuss drug dealing issues.

Mr Ford also confirmed that the Rural Crime Team was based at Midhurst Police Station and that the opening hours were 10am-2pm, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday (closed public and bank holidays). The Police Station yellow external phone was answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Mr Ford reported that ‘Operation Tinsel’ is currently focusing on shop-lifting activity, which includes more time allocated to PCSOs to walk and have a presence in town centre areas. In response to a request from Cllr Fraser for clarification, Mr Ford confirmed that PCSOs do not have power to arrest but can detain and have common laws powers that any citizen would have.

Councillors thanked Mr Ford and Ms Jeffries for their work in the community, and attending the meeting and providing an update.

**F/096/23 Apologies for Absence:** None, all present.

**F/097/23 Declarations of Interest:** None.

*Meeting halted for Public Participation Session*

**F/098/23 Public Participation Session:** None present, and no questions had been received.

*The meeting was reconvened.*

**F/099/23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 13th November 2023:** The minutes were proposed as an accurate record and agreed by all present.

**F/100/23 Matters Arising and Review of Actions from those Minutes:** The Chairman confirmed that the recent litter pick had been positive in that only limited rubbish had been collected from around the town.

**F/101/23 Financial Reports for November 2023:** The financial reports were circulated prior to the meeting.

The following payments in excess of £500 were also noted:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Organisation** | **Details** | **Amount** |
| Design Directive | Lilac Cottage refurbishment consultancy | £2,400.00 |
| Business and Health Consult. | HR Support | £1,290.00 |
| West Sussex County Council | October 2023 Salaries | £8,400.11 |
| Chichester District Council | Uncontested Election | £665.00 |
| Smith Simmonds and Partners | Planning Application preparation for Lilac Cottage | £600.00 |
| SSE | Street Lights | £881.63 |

**F/102/23 Bank Reconciliations**: The bank statements for November 2023 were signed. The Clerk also confirmed that the grant payments to the seven selected organisations had been made. Cllr Watts sought clarification regarding recent expenditure on IT equipment and the Clerk confirmed that these payments will be recorded within the December 2023 finance reports.

**F/103/23 Events** **Update:** The Events officer, Mrs Brown-Fuller had provided notes which were read by the Clerk (please see appendix). Councillors thanked Mrs Brown-Fuller and the Town Council staff for providing a well-received Christmas Street Party.

**F/104/23 Interim Audit:** The Interim Audit report had been circulated prior to the meeting. The Clerk reported that audit had gone well, with the Auditor advising that having the majority of the funds with one bank provided protection up to only £85,00 and that having funds with other banks should be considered, along with the fidelity guarantee with the insurance company (Hiscox via Gallaghers) which was advised as insufficient. The Auditor had also suggested during the audit that a revaluation of assets should also be considered (see F106/23 below).

Cllr Fraser suggested investigating whether Nationwide Building Society, which has a branch within the town, could provide an appropriate account for the Council.

**Action:** The Clerk to investigate if the Nationwide Building Society can provide an account for the Council.

**F/105/23 Draft Budget 2024/25:** The draft budget had been circulated prior to the meeting. Cllr Watts explained that calculations and details of the budget to the Committee. Cllr McAra commended the details and calculations of the budget.

Councillors were requested by Cllr Watts to give further thought to the details, and advised that a final decision would be made at full Council on 2nd January 2024 in preparation for precept request permission on 12th January 2023.

**Action:** All Councillors to give due consideration to the draft Budget in preparation for further discussion at the next meeting of the full Council.

**F/106/23** **Potential Re-evaluation of MTC Property Assets:** Cllr Watts reported that progress is being made and request this matter was carried forward to the next meeting of the Committee.

**F/107/23 Matters of Report:** Cllr Merritt confirmed he was undertaking work to review the ‘Made in Midhurst’ website.

The Clerk confirmed that letters/emails of thanks to the Council had been received from the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal for the Council’s donation, and from the seven organisations who were in receipt of a 2023-24 grant from the Council.

**F/108/23 Date of Next Meeting –** 7.30pm, 11th January 2024

The meeting ended at 8.14pm.

**Signed:…………………………...........…...........…. Date..................................**

**Chairman**

***Appendix***

The Christmas Street Party was well attended and had a lovely atmosphere - a special thank you to all of those that were able to help to make it such a success. The grotto had over 300 children through their doors and the music on the stage was enjoyed all evening, more than in previous years. The children performing on the stage worked very well.

The event came within budget for expenditure and also made £900 in income which was the target for the event.

The Christmas Farmers and Artisan Market the following day was busier than last year, largely due to the inflatable snow globe and the Christmas crafts, but footfall is not as strong as other months, partly due to the conflicting events in Petworth.

January and February markets are always of concern in terms of stallholders and footfall - we are running a special offer for stallholders, if they sign up for January's market, they get a pitch for February for FREE.

If Councillors know of any small/local businesses that may be interested in trading at the markets, to let us know.

We will also be increasing signage for the 2024 markets with feather flags.

**Christmas window competition**

The winners of the Christmas Window Competition will be announced this weekend, the guest judge will be Paul Cox, local comedian. Don't forget to vote online or using QR codes in windows!

**Richard Cobden**

Tim Young (District Councillor) has secured five speakers for the Richard Cobden exhibition and plans to visit the Old Library before the end of the month to work out where the exhibition boards will go (suggested top area of Old Library). The suggested timescale will be installation towards the end of January, running until the end of February/beginning of March. The exhibition boards will not stop the hall from being booked by third parties.

***Jess Brown-Fuller***

***Events Officer***

***11th December 2023***