

Rother Association of Local Councils (RALC)

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2023 at 2.30 pm

(Meeting held at Staplecross Village Hall)

Present: David Young (Chairman), Keith Robertson (Catsfield), David Penfold (Pett), Peter Lamont (Peasmarsch), Les Nottage (Brede), Malcolm Johnston (Rother District Council), Lorna Ford (Rother District Council), Jonathan Vine-Hall (Sedlescombe), Jill Gyngell (Battle), Dianne Mower (Brightling), Tina Langmead (Beckley), Issy Horsley (Fairlight), Sue Prochak (Rother District Council), Oliva Carroll (Sussex Police), Ros Day (Crowhurst).

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcome everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Paulette Barton, Penny Farmer, Karen Ripley, Gillian Brantford, Dale Wheeler, Tracy Dixon, Mark Wey, Martin Holgate.

3. Accuracy of Minutes of Last Meeting

Agreed

4. Rother Matters

Malcolm Johnston provided members with a report.

The draft revenue budget that members should have received is online and Mr Johnston encouraged members to take a look. These are updated plans for a £17 million budget for 23/24.

Half the income Rother receives though council tax collection goes towards the new waste contract. The cost is approximately £1 million more than the previous one. There are much less reports of missed bins.

Council tax will rise in Rother. Rother District Council currently receives £3.72 per week to a Band D property.

In February 2023 there will be a final budget.

There are risks to the budget which some can be controlled and others not. Inflation is the biggest risk.

There is a significance increase in the homelessness budget. Rother will take measures to assist with homelessness such as buying property within Rother. There are no families within Rother currently housed outside of Rother. The Government put forward a fair funding review, now changed to funding review. The result of the review will be crucial going forward.

Overall there are significant challenges ahead and it is difficult to plan ahead more than five years.

The capital budget involves projects such as empty properties within Rother. The Public Loan Board is not subject to fluctuating interest rates.

Looking at the capital projects within Rother, the Town Hall Project is not going ahead, at this time.

Grant Thornton are the external auditors and the budget is a rigorous process and Rother are conscious of spending tax payers' money.

Rother District Council currently have £5 million in useable reserves which they have been taking from. They plan to take money from the reserves next year for 23/24 but plan to look to remove the reliance on the reserves.

Jonathan Vine-Hall commented on how Rother Planning is now coming to grips with their work load and is making good progress in reducing the time taken to attend to planning issues.

Mr Johnston summarised the operating budget and noted that reserves will be needed to balance the budget next year and further savings will be needed. Cllr Robertson noted that the budget as reported was clear but that the Capital projects and the risks accruing to these projects was not clear and could have a significant impact on the operating budget if these do not go to plan.

Cllr Robertson asked Mr Johnston how we can have confidence that Rother District Council can properly manage the risk of these major Capital projects planned. Mr Johnston reported that all projects are being reviewed for risk given the current economic environment and that the governance and risk management is being closely monitored by the Councils Internal Audit team and has been given a positive rating by Grant Thornton. Cllr Robertson stressed the importance of continued and transparent reporting of risk and deliverables on these projects.

Cllr Robertson asked if the targeted saving in operating costs that are necessary to balance the budget without drawing on further reserves in the future have all been identified and "in the bag". Mr Johnston confirmed that the savings were not "in the bag" but he was confident that these will be delivered.

5. Sussex Police Rother

Inspector Olivia Carroll, the district commander, gave a run down of Neighbourhood policing.

She covered the monthly calls the PCSOs are holding with parishes and how popular they are. She covered how policing is changing in the District and reiterated that the Police are becoming data lead to ensure resource is deployed where needed. We basically live in a relatively safe place. Local intelligence is vitally important and we were all encouraged to notify her team of incidents as they are happening and not when we next meet up. Time is of the essence if offenders are to be apprehended.

Olivia will try to attend all RALC meeting if her duties permit. She was warmly thanked.

6. RALC Finances & Budget 2023-24

Cllr Robertson presented the budget for 2023-24 updated as noted from the prior RALC meeting. The 2023-24 budget (see budget attached to these minutes) was agreed by members.

7. Date and Venue of next meeting.

It was agreed by all that Staplecross Village Hall was a good location and resolved to have all future meetings at this location.

The next meeting will be on **12th April stating at 2.30pm**. Teas and Coffee from 2.00 onwards.

The meeting ended at 16.30 with networking continuing. The great advantage of Face-to-Face meetings.