WESTERHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Monday 6th January 2025 at 7 pm in Russell House, Market Square, Westerham

Present: Councillors: Mrs S Sheen (SS) - Chair
Mr E Boyle (EB)
Mr I Breminer (IB)
Mr A Hussain (AJM)
Dr J Lord (JL)

In attendance: Town Clerk: Mrs A Howells (AH)
Finance/Project Officer: Mrs D Marshall (DM)

Item		Action
1.	**Apologies for Absence** None.	
2.	**Declarations of Interest not previously declared** None.	
3.	**Minutes of the Meeting held on 25th November 2024** Minutes of the Meeting held on 25th November were approved at Council on 2nd December.	
4.	**Information items arising from the minutes of the previous meeting not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda** 5.4 Utility Suppliers – it was agreed that a summary of Utility Suppliers showing name of company & corresponding WTC asset would be presented at the next meeting. 5.7 Signatories – The Finance Officer to arrange the paperwork for Cllr Rodgers to become a signatory. 7.2 The Legionella testing had taken place on 19th December. 7.3 Car park maintenance – the work was still to be completed. 7.4 Party Wall – The Town Clerk had emailed Greene King but no response had been received. The Town Clerk to chase again. 7.5 The new light had been fitted outside the front door of Russell House and was on a timer, set for 4pm – 11pm. 7.8 The ceiling of the chamber had been painted.	DM DM AH AH
5.	**Finance** **5.1 Responsible Finance Officer Report (Finance Officer) –** The Report was received with thanks and the following items were noted: -	

WTC CIL report for 2023/24 had been submitted to SDC and was displayed on the website. WTC received £15,722.44 of CIL funds during the year. WTC spent £64,405.25 of the CIL funds held on the creation of the skate park and perimeter path at KGF. WTC was currently holding £91,061.98 of CIL funds in reserves. The oldest of this money was £5,702.60 from 2021/22, which must be spent by end of March 2027.
The Overtime Report was noted.
5.2 Payments and receipts list to 30th November 2024 – Cllr Sheen had no issues to bring to the Committee's attention, minor queries were explained.
The Payment List would be recommended to Council for approval.
5.3 Committee Accounts to 31st December 2024 – The Accounts had been circulated and there were no queries.
In year budget concerns were noted – current financial year: -
<u>F&GP</u>
Rental income: surgery income received vs budgeted income, shortfall of £5,000.
Insurance: £324 over budget.
Business rates: £577 over budget.
Utilities: potential overspend of £1,500 due to huge increase in costs.
Action: F&GP contingency would be used, plus payroll underspend (due to lower pay award) and underspent Council strategy could be used if necessary. Committee bottom line would be maintained.
<u>APFOS</u>
KGF electricity: potential overspend of £1,000 due to huge increase in costs.
Weedkilling: APFOS felt additional treatments in the town centre were necessary, causing the budget to be overspent. Action: APFOS contingency could be used, plus underspend in mowing budgets. Committee bottom line would be maintained.
<u>H&L</u>
A streetlight needed replacing which would cause the repairs budget to be overspent. Action: this would be covered by the H&L reserve. Committee bottom line would be maintained.
<u>Y&C</u>
Nothing to report.
The Committee Accounts would be recommended to Council for approval.
5.4 To receive Internal Auditors Interim Report –
The Finance Officer reported that it had been disappointing to find that during the review/release process the internal auditors' report was changed to raise an issue, stating that WTC internal controls were not as strong as they could be as:
'*Segregation of duties of online banking payments are a key control and are required to comply with updated NALC guidance.*'
The Finance Officer had challenged this, querying the source of NALC guidance referred to and awaited a response, as the only known updated guidance was the updated Financial Regulations, which stated:
'*<u>Wherever possible</u>, more than one person should be involved in any payment, for example by dual online authorisation or dual cheque signing.*'
The Finance Officer had spoken with Santander and confirmed that

	Santander do not offer any accounts that provided for dual authorisation and they currently offered free banking. Following discussion, it was agreed to wait for the response from the Internal Auditor before discussing further. The Finance Officer would investigate other local councils procedures and contact Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) for advice. This would then be discussed at the March meeting. **5.5 To review online banking –** To be reviewed at the March meeting. **5.6 Grant application from West Kent Mediation –** Cllr Sheen had reviewed the Grant Application form and following discussion it was agreed to recommend to Council a grant of £300.	DM
7.	**<u>Precept</u>** **7.1 Draft Budgets 2025/26 -** The draft Committee budgets had been circulated and were noted. **7.2 The RFO Precept Recommendation Report –** This had been circulated, thanks were given to the Finance Officer for the very informative background paper and Precept information. It was noted that there had been a slight increase in the tax base. Following lengthy discussion, it was agreed to recommend to Council an increased precept of £339,785, amounting to an increase of 13 pence per week.	
7.	**<u>Land Issues</u>** **7.1 Doctors Surgery –** Cllr Sheen advised there was no further update following the meeting with the Doctors Surgery. It was agreed that no further action was required. **7.2 Churchill School –** It had been agreed that a meeting be held with the Head Teacher to discuss a new lease that included tree management; to take place before the end of the financial year.	AH/JL
8.	**<u>Russell House</u>** **8.1 Maintenance Plan –** The updated Maintenance Plan was noted. **8.2 Parking Survey –** Council had agreed at the meeting on 2nd December to go ahead with the proposal from Britannia Parking to install an ANPR solution for authorised users. Following discussion it was further agreed: - • To extend the period to 7am to 7pm Monday to Friday for authorised users only, subject to agreement with the Surgery. • To check with the Surgery regarding surgery open hours on Saturday mornings and how often these may be needed. • To investigate whether parking costs outside of the authorised users could be added at a later date. To present to Council on 20th January.	AH
9.	**<u>Local Council Award Scheme</u>** The criteria for the Local Council Award Scheme had changed. Following discussion, it was agreed to set up a Working Group to look at the impact of the changes on WTC and what work might need to be carried out. The Working Group to consist of Cllrs Sheen and Breminer and the Town Clerk. The Working Group to report back to Committee at the March meeting when a further Working Group would be set up to look at a timetable for work	

	needed to be completed to achieve the Gold Award in two years' time.	AH
10.	**HR Committee minutes** The HR minutes for the meeting on 6th December had been circulated and were approved.	
11.	**Health and Safety Committee minutes** The Health and Safety minutes from the meeting on 29th November had been circulated and it was agreed to recommend approval to Council. Cllr Lord reported that he had reviewed the legislation regarding Child Protection and a requirement of evidence that hirers needed to receive Child Protection and reported that the onus was on the hirer; therefore, no action was needed by WTC.	
12.	**Consultations** 12.1 Government Local audit reform: a strategy for overhauling the local audit system in England – Cllr Sheen reported that there were a number of proposed changes due in part to the backlog of audits and a number of councils without robust and transparent practices. Also, audit fees were out of proportion to budget for smaller authorities. Following discussion it was agreed to note the consultation.	
13.	**Policies and Procedures** 13.1 Financial Regulations – It was agreed to circulate the latest Financial Regulations for discussion at the March meeting. 13.2 Internal Controls Policy – The Policy had been circulated and following discussion would be recommended for approval to Council subject to updating the Policy dates within the agreement. 13.3 Investment Policy – The Policy had been circulated and following discussion was approved, subject to minor amendments. **Resolved:** To approve the Investment Policy subject to minor amendments. 13.4 Sexual Harassment Policy and Preventative Risk Assessment – The Policy and Preventative Risk Assessment had been circulated. Following discussion, it was agreed to make some minor changes and circulate to the Committee prior to recommending approval to Council. Thanks were given to the Town Clerk for all her hard work on this issue.	DM DM AH
14.	**ECO Policy Action Plan** The open actions had been circulated and were reviewed, minor amendments were made and approved.	
15.	**Correspondence** None.	
16.	**Reports from Councillors** None.	
17.	**TN16, Crockham Hill Village newsletter and Website** None.	

18.	**<u>Matters for District and County Councillors</u>** None.	
19.	**<u>Further Matters for Consideration at the next meeting</u>** Local Council Award Scheme	
20.	**<u>Date of next meeting</u>** Monday 10th March 2025	

The meeting was concluded at 9.20 pm.

Minutes confirmed as a correct record:

Chairman