

**MINUTES
OF A
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL
HELD IN THE ARUN CIVIC CENTRE
ON 23 February 2022 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Councillors Brooks (Chair), Mrs Staniforth (Vice-Chair), Batley, Bicknell, Blanchard-Cooper, Bower, Caffyn, Chapman, Chace, Charles, Clayden, Mrs Cooper, Cooper, Coster, Daniells, Dendle, Edwards, Elkins, Goodheart, Gunner, Hamilton, Mrs Haywood, Hughes, Huntley, Kelly, Lury, Needs, Northeast, Oliver-Redgate, Oppler, Pendleton, Purchase, Rhodes, Roberts, Stanley, Tilbrook, Thurston, Dr Walsh, Warr, Worne and Yeates.

672. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Councillors, representatives of the public, press and Officers to this Special Meeting of the Council.

673. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Bennett, Buckland, Catterson, Dixon, Mrs English, English, Gregory, Jones, Seex and Smith and from Honorary Aldermen Mrs Stinchcombe and Mr Dingemans.

674. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Northeast declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 9 [Arun District Council Budget 2022/23] as his wife was a member of staff. Councillor Northeast confirmed that he would not take part in the vote on this item.

The Declaration of Interest Sheet set out below confirms those Members who had made a declaration of their personal interest as a Member of a Town or Parish Councillor or a West Sussex County Councillor, as confirmed in their Register of Interest as these declarations could apply to any of the issues to be discussed at the meeting.

Name	Town or Parish Council or West Sussex County Council [WSCC]
Councillor Tracy Baker	Littlehampton
Councillor Kenton Batley	Bognor Regis
Councillor Jamie Bennett	Rustington
Councillor Paul Bicknell	Angmering
Councillor Billy Blanchard-Cooper	Littlehampton
Councillor Jim Brooks	Bognor Regis
Councillor Ian Buckland	Littlehampton and WSCC
Councillor David Chace	Littlehampton

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Councillor Mike Clayden	Rustington
Councillor Andy Cooper	Rustington
Councillor Alison Cooper	Rustington and WSCC
Councillor Sandra Daniells	Bognor Regis
Councillor Roger Elkins	Ferring and WSCC
Councillor Paul English	Felpham
Councillor Steve Goodheart	Bognor Regis
Councillor Pauline Gregory	Rustington
Councillor June Hamilton	Pagham
Councillor Shirley Haywood	Middleton-on-Sea
Councillor David Huntley	Pagham
Councillor Henry Jones	Bognor Regis
Councillor Martin Lury	Bersted
Councillor Claire Needs	Bognor Regis
Councillor Mike Northeast	Littlehampton
Councillor Francis Oppler	WSCC
Councillor Jacky Pendleton	Middleton-on-Sea and WSCC
Councillor Vicky Rhodes	Littlehampton
Councillor Emily Seex	Littlehampton
Councillor Martin Smith	Aldwick
Councillor Samantha Staniforth	Bognor Regis
Councillor Matt Stanley	Bognor Regis
Councillor Isabel Thurston	Barnham & Eastergate
Councillor Will Tilbrook	Littlehampton
Councillor James Walsh	Littlehampton and WSCC
Councillor Jeanette Warr	Bognor Regis
Councillor Amanda Worne	Yapton
Councillor Gillian Yeates	Bersted

675. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that no questions had been submitted for this meeting.

676. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS WITH PECUNIARY/PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS

There were no Questions from Members with prejudicial/pecuniary interests.

677. PETITIONS

The Chair confirmed that no petitions had been received.

678. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 26 January 2022 were approved by the Council as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at the end of the meeting, subject to the Apologies for Absence announced at the meeting being recorded, these being Councillors Baker, Batley, Bennett, Catterson, Chace, Charles, Haywood, Huntley, Jones, Needs, Purchase, Rhodes and Seex.

679. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair confirmed that he had no communications to announce.

680. URGENT MATTERS

There were no items for this meeting.

681. ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL BUDGET 2022/23

The Chair confirmed that this Special Meeting of the Council had been called to consider the Budget for 2022/23 and to set the Council Tax for the Arun District Council. Members needed to be advised that West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) had had to postpone its precept setting meeting due to be held on 18 February 2022 due to a red weather warning having been issued for the area due to storm Eunice. As a result, this council had not been notified of WSSCC's precept. The Chair confirmed that without the precept this council could not set the aggregate Council Tax but could continue to proceed in discussing the Arun Council Tax Calculation and Budget for 2022/23.

The Council had 11 recommendations to consider but in the absence of the precept from WSSCC, recommendation 9 would have to be withdrawn from tonight's meeting. Recommendation 9 with the supporting documents would be circulated after 28 February 2022, when WSSCC was scheduled to meet, to decide its precept. The Chair confirmed that he would adjourn the meeting at the appropriate point to 3 March 2022 when it would be possible for the council to formally pass the statutory resolutions.

An extract from the Minutes from the meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee [Minute 651] held on 10 February 2022 had been emailed to Members; uploaded to the Council's web pages; and circulated to the meeting. These minutes set out the recommendations for Council to consider as outlined in the Officer report.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gunner, opened his Budget Statement confirming that this was the first budget of the council's new administration. Councillor Gunner confirmed that he wished to start by thanking Council staff for all they had done in going above and beyond in continuing to deliver services for the district's residents during the pandemic. Now that restrictions were coming to an end, this was the time to be looking to the future.

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The Council's Budget for 2022/23 was a positive and forward-looking budget representing delivery showing support for the district's high streets; businesses; the environment and most importantly support for the district's people. Residents and businesses could be safe in the knowledge that never had this council been doing so much as it was right now in working on so many positive projects in the district.

Councillor Gunner stated that when he had become Leader, he had stated that local businesses and the economy were the driving force of the Council. He was therefore proposing to increase the size of the Economy Team by 20% to ensure the continued delivery of projects like the Jobs Fair held last week. This real and practical work included £2,000 shopfront grants; the new £150,000 high street fund; and the one to one retail support to assist high street businesses. The aim was for Arun to be an even greater tourism destination, and the £250,000 in the budget for a range of events was a testament to the council's determination to get people visiting and spending money in towns and villages. Money would also be spent on digital marketing to put the district on the map, as well as investing in works to the roof at the Windmill Theatre, in Littlehampton; works to revitalise The Arcade in Bognor Regis; £3.5m for Littlehampton High Street and the £19.4m received from the Government as part of the Levelling-Up agenda which would see work to the seafront and greens at Littlehampton and a transformation of the Alexandra Theatre in Bognor Regis.

As a result of a favourable financial settlement to the council from the Government, it had been possible to propose the lowest change in Council Tax for 7 years and at half the rate of inflation. Councillor Gunner praised the Government's decision to grant a £150 rebate to bands A-D which would assist households in the district. WSCC would be providing an additional £150 as part of the Local Hardship Fund to assist further. Joint work with WSCC included the Arun Growth Deal to provide further improvements in Bognor Regis and Littlehampton as well as work on dualling the A259, the realignment of the A29, the Lyminster Bypass, and the A27 Arundel Bypass highlighting the level of investment in roads and infrastructure in Arun.

In addition to this, the council was working to protect the environment with £79,000 for sea defences in Middleton and £180,000 in the Community Flood Fund for areas such as Pagham and Climping. Further inland, the £225,000 designated for play areas had provided a new playground in Lashmar Road, East Preston and a new play area in Aldwick. This was in addition to the 33,000 trees that the council was already starting to plant to include 100 in every single parish as a contribution to the Queen's Green Canopy. There was £320,000 in the capital budget for the Bersted Brooks Country Park which would enhance Arun's open spaces to assist in improving people's health and wellbeing.

In conclusion and in formally proposing the budget recommendations, Councillor Gunner confirmed that this was a budget for the future; for the people and the businesses of Arun

The recommendations were then seconded by Councillor Pendleton.

In line with the procedure for debates at Special Meetings, the Chair confirmed that he would now invite questions from Members to Officers.

A range of questions were asked including:

- The £1m set aside for the Arun Leisure refurbishment works. £700k of this would be funded from Section 106 monies and so was this funding guaranteed?
- Why the new Officer post to assist the Sustainability Manager was being funded from the climate change budget?
- The Beach Access Working Party – when would the first meeting be held and what funding had been allocated to this project?
- The need to have significant funding for sheltered accommodation to make it accessible for everyone
- The need to ensure that all playgrounds, especially new ones, were accessible for all
- Concerns over the lack of detailed plans for the Bersted Brooks Country Park
- The number of changing places facilities that would be provided

The Chair then invited Councillor Walsh to respond to the Budget as the Leader of the Opposition and Liberal Democrat Group. He firstly thanked Officers for their hard work in putting together the budget. Councillor Walsh confirmed that the success of this budget had been a result of the previous two budgets and that a range of the projects now being delivered had commenced under the previous administration.

Councillor Walsh referred to the windfall of £822k received from New Homes Bonus and the favourable extra £1.2 m for the GF caused by slippage and a prudent budget set last year. He confirmed that he supported the Section 151 Officer's recommendation to have balances of £5m to be kept in the GF and that he supported any surplus being transferred to the funding resilience reserve.

What was of concern was the impact for residents because of the cost of living rises such as national insurance, income tax and energy prices which represented cuts in real wages as inflation was way above pay rises. Councillor Walsh believed that the council should be doing all it could to ease the burden on hard pressed pensioners and lower income earners. Councillor Walsh confirmed that he therefore wished to propose an amendment to the budget proposals which he explained. The amendment was that "This Council does not increase council tax for this coming year" and effectively this would be funded by a transfer from the windfall surpluses being transferred to the funding resilience reserve. The GF reserve would remain at £5m and the funding resilience reserve would still, as of 31 March, be at £8.97 m and the balances in a year's time would be around £8.15 m way above the £6.6 m that it was this time last year. This was responsible, prudent and sensible and went some way to protect the most financially vulnerable in local communities.

This amendment was then seconded by Councillor Coster.

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The Chair confirmed that he would consider the detail of this amendment once all remaining Group Leaders had made their statements.

The Chair then invited Councillor Coster to respond to the Budget on behalf of the Independent Group. He also praised Officers for their work in preparing the Budget in very difficult circumstances. Councillor Coster's concern was that the proposed Budget was not protecting the council's financial position. He could not agree with what had been spent in the past on major projects that could cost more in the future. He questioned where this funding would be coming from and expressed concern that the council's reserves could not be continually drained. With reduced Government funding each year, there were significant risks to consider, highlighting the need for the Council to become more self-sufficient. Disposing of valuable assets such as the London Road Coach/Lorry Park and raising fees and charges was not the solution. The public were facing an unprecedented higher cost of living and it was felt that this Budget was ignoring the plight of hard pressed families. The solution was to introduce commercial activities that would provide revenue to support residents instead of introducing cost increases. On this basis, Councillor Coster confirmed that the Budget could not be supported.

The Chair invited Councillor Goodheart to respond to the Budget on behalf of the Arun Independent Group. He outlined that he saw this Budget as being a way of providing an exciting and very vibrant future for the district, he therefore fully supported the budget.

The Chair then invited Councillor Thurston to respond on behalf of the Green Group. She extended her Group's thanks to the Officer team for their hard work in producing a budget through the new Committee system and for producing a balanced budget. She noted the good news at the unexpected New Homes Bonus payment but highlighted that this was just a one-off for this year. The Council was in a better position than it was in last year and this should have been good reason not to increase Council Tax for this year when many residents were facing a tough year ahead. The Council needed to think about people's real needs. Climate change and the environment were her Group's priorities and so the Council needed to be doing all it could in tackling these issues. This included enhancing alternative transport methods; providing warm insulated homes; and places to exercise in the fresh air, to benefit the health and wellbeing of the district. She welcomed additional staffing to assist the Council's Sustainability Manager and associated work but could not agree to this being funded from the Climate Change budget. This money needed to be spent on additional green projects. She had supported the Bersted Brooks project but was concerned over the lack of detailed information provided to Members considering the cost of the project. Money could have been spent exploring other green projects. More work needed to be undertaken in tackling the climate emergency.

The Chair then referred to the amendment proposed by Councillor Walsh earlier in the meeting, seconded by Councillor Coster.

This read as set out below [with additions shown in **bold** and deletions shown using ~~strikethrough~~]

Recommendation (2) - Arun's Band D Council Tax for 2022/23 is set at ~~£196.47~~ **£191.52** an ~~no~~ increase of ~~2.58%~~ over 2021/22;

Recommendation (3) - Arun's Council Tax Requirement for 2022/23, based on a Band D Council Tax of ~~£196.47~~ **£191.52** is set at ~~£12,379,711~~ **£11,955,000** plus parish precepts as demanded to be transferred to the General Fund in accordance with statutory requirements.

The Chair invited the Interim Group Head of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer to provide advice on the validity of the amendment. He drew Members' attention to the Council Procedure Rules in the Constitution at Section 1, 17.7 [Amendments to Motions] referring to what constituted a valid amendment. The Constitution provided that an amendment should not have the effect of negating the motion before the council. The motion before the council was to increase Council Tax. The amendment proposed to not increase Council Tax, negating the motion and so the amendment proposed was not in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 17.7.

The Chair accepted the advice and announced that this was not therefore an amendment that could be accepted.

Councillor Walsh was invited to amend his amendment. In response he confirmed that he wished to amend Recommendation (2) further that the Council Tax for 2022/23 be set at £191.53, an increase by 1p which would not negate the original recommendation.

The opinion of the Interim Group Head of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer was that the original proposal was to increase the Council Tax to £196.47, the revised amendment was still negating this.

The Chair then invited debate on the recommendations. Comments were made relating to much needed council housing and that this provision seemed to have fallen off the budget agenda at a time when need for council homes and affordable housing, that was affordable, was at its greatest, this needed to form an integral part of the levelling-up agenda. Concerns were expressed over the £100k earmarked to produce vision documents for the district's principal towns. A plea was made to not waste money on consultants but to work on relevant information that the Council already had.

Councillors speaking against the budget expressed frustration that valid amendments had not been permitted and the Leader's Budget Statement had not been circulated in advance of the meeting, which had always been the case in previous years. Comments were made that it was pleasing that projects started by the previous administration were being taken forward for the benefit of the district. Although support was expressed towards the Bertsed Brooks park project, there was concern over lack of consultation with the friends of the park; the Parish Council and Ward Members. It was hoped that detailed plans would be forthcoming soon. Turning to the unexpected

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windfalls that the Council had received, it was strongly felt that these should be passed onto the public by way of a freeze on Council Tax at a time when inflation was at a high and residents were facing a cost of living crisis. Concerns were expressed over equality and diversity and the need to ensure that play parks and sheltered housing schemes were accessible for everyone. This was why it was essential for the work on an accessible beach to commence urgently and to be seen as a major priority over and above other schemes such as the refurbishment of the Fitzleet Car Park.

Some Councillors spoke in support of the budget confirming that it was a budget for the future; was well considered and would deliver for the people and businesses of Arun. Responding to the comments made about equality and diversity, reference was made to changing places toilets; the work already underway and the bid that had been submitted to the Government for more facilities around the district. On beach access, it had not been possible to allocate a budget at this time until the Working Party had commenced and concluded its work. In response to the concerns expressed over the proposed Council Tax increase, Members were reminded that neighbouring Town and Parish Councils had increased their Council Tax at a higher rate than what was being proposed by Arun.

Some Councillors took the view that the budget was well thought out; financially sound and was deliverable to ensure that the projects mentioned would happen. That it delivered the statutory services of the Council whilst at the same time would provide significant investment in the district. That there was a wonderful opportunity with the Levelling-Up Fund projects which would attract more people to the seafront and parks. Funding had been allocated to address flooding which was of vital importance to those communities living close to the coast. Investment in the changing rooms at the Arun Leisure Centre would result in more visitors and residents wanting to visit the area. Public realm was now being delivered in Littlehampton showing that more and more projects were coming forward but being delivered.

The Chair then invited Councillor Pendleton, as seconder to speak. She commended the Budget stating that it laid the foundation for residents and businesses. She stated that she had requested a full review of sheltered accommodation and with her Service Committee had budgeted accordingly as these residents were the most vulnerable in the community. Councillor Pendleton confirmed that this Budget delivered funding for the district's daily needs; it developed community facilities which had been overdue for a number of years. The budget worked for residents, and it would deliver for them. It demanded action and Councillor Pendleton asked Councillors to support it as presented.

Councillor Gunner, as the proposer, responded to some of the points made in the debate specifically over the increase in Council Tax and the budget for Disabled Facilities Grants. He stated that more Council Housing would be provided and that further information on this would be coming to the appropriate Committee in due course. He confirmed that this budget delivered and in thanking Officers for their work in producing it, urged Councillors to support it.

In line with Council Procedure Rule 20.6 – the voting on the recommendations recorded, it being noted that Recommendation (9) would be deferred to 3 March 2022.

Those voting for it were Councillors Bicknell, Bower, Caffyn, Chace, Chapman, Charles, Clayden, Mrs Cooper, Cooper, Daniells, Dendle, Edwards, Elkins, Goodheart, Gunner, Hughes, Kelly, Oliver-Redgate, Pendleton, Rhodes, Roberts and Staniforth (22). Those against were Councillors Batley, Blanchard-Cooper, Coster, Hamilton, Haywood, Huntley, Lury, Needs, Oppler, Purchase, Stanley, Tilbrook, Thurston, Walsh, Warr, Worne and Yeates (17). Councillors Brooks and Northeast abstained from voting.

The Council

RESOLVED – That

- (1) The General Fund Revenue Budget as set out in Appendix 1 is approved;
- (2) Arun's Band D Council Tax for 2022/23 is set at £196.47, an increase of 2.58% over 2021/22;
- (3) Arun's Council Tax Requirement for 2022/23, based on a Band D Council Tax of £196.47 is set at £12,379,771 plus parish precepts as demanded, to be transferred to the General Fund in accordance with statutory requirements;
- (4) The Council's General Fund Revenue Account Balance be set at £5m. Any balance above this to be transferred to the Funding resilience reserve to allow future budgets to be balanced;
- (5) The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget as set out in appendix 2 is approved;
- (6) HRA rents for 2022/23 are increased by 4.1% (CPI plus 1.0%) in accordance with the provisions of the rent standard;
- (7) HRA garage rents are increased by 5% to give a standard charge of £13.58 per week (excluding VAT) and heating and water/sewerage charges increased on a scheme by scheme basis, with a view a view to balancing costs with income;
- (8) The Capital Budget as set out in Appendix 3 is approved;
- (9) **[deferred to 3 March 2022]**
- (10) It be noted that the Interim Group Head of Corporate Support, in consultation with the Leader of the Council has approved:
 - i) a Council Tax base of 63,011 for 2022/23; and

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ii) the submission of the Council's NNDR1 return (the estimate of the Council's Business Rate income for 2022/23) to the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC); and

(11) It be resolved that for 2022/23 any expenses incurred by the Authority in performing in part of its area a function performed elsewhere in its area by Parish/Town Council of the Chairman of a Parish Meeting shall not be treated as Special Expenses for the purposes of Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(During the course of the debate, the following Declarations of Personal Interests were made by :

Councillor Walsh as a Member of Littlehampton Town Council

Councillor Elkins as a Member of West Sussex County Council and as this Council's outside body representative on the Local Government Association's Coastal Special Interest Group).

682. MOTIONS

The Chair confirmed that no Motions had been submitted for this meeting.

683. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gunner, confirmed the membership for the Staff Appeals Panel, which was:

Councillors Blanchard-Cooper, Chace, Chapman, Daniells, Gregory, Pendleton and Staniforth. It was confirmed that there was an Independent seat left vacant to fill.

The Council then noted the membership for the Staff Appeals Panel.

The Chair then adjourned the meeting to allow the recorded vote on Agenda Item 9, Recommendation 9 to be conducted on 3 March 2022.

684. ADJOURNED RECOMMENDATION 9 FROM THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 23 FEBRUARY 2022 [STATUTORY RESOLUTIONS]

The Chair confirmed that at the Special Meeting of the Council held on 23 February 2022, the Council approved its Budget for 2022/23 and set its Council Tax for Arun District Council. As West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) had to postpone its precept meeting scheduled for 18 February 2022, due to storm Eunice, this meant that at the Special Meeting of the Council on 23 February 2022, the council could not publish the County Council's precept. Without the precept, Arun could not set its

aggregate Council Tax, but it had been able to determine its Arun Council tax and budget for 2022/23.

The meeting on 23 February 2022 had been adjourned to 3 March 2022 to allow this council to formally pass the statutory resolutions. WSCC had met on 28 February 2022 and its statutory resolutions had been emailed to Members and would be uploaded to the Full Council web pages.

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council, Councillor Gunner, to formally propose Recommendation (9) deferred from the Special Council meeting on 23 February which read as follows:

“The Statutory Resolutions required by the Council in agreeing its Budget for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 4, are approved”.

Councillor Gunner then formally proposed this recommendation which was then seconded by Councillor Pendleton.

In line with Council Procedure Rule 20.6 – the voting on the recommendation was recorded.

Those voting for it were Councillors Bicknell, Bower, Caffyn, Chace, Clayden, Mrs Cooper, Cooper, Dendle, Edwards, Elkins, Mrs English, English, Gunner, Hughes, Madeley, Oliver-Redgate, Pendleton, Rhodes, Roberts, Stainton and Staniforth (21). Those voting against were Councillors Blanchard-Cooper, Gregory, Jones, Lury, Needs, Oppler, Stanley, Walsh, Worne and Yeates (10). Councillors Brooks, Buckland, Catterson, Coster, Dixon, Haywood, Northeast and Thurston abstained from voting (8).

The Council

RESOLVED

That the Statutory Resolutions required by the Council in agreeing its Budget for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 4, are approved.

(The adjourned part of this meeting concluded at 6.10 pm)