

Present:

Simon Hughes	MSDC, Director of People and Commercial Services
Lucy Corrie	MSDC, Assistant Director Communities
Rachel Jarvis	MSDC, Assistant Director Corporate Resources (S151 Officer)
Kevin Toogood	MSDC, Assistant Director Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Rob Anderton	MSDC, Assistant Director Commercial Services and Contracts
Adam Trathan	MSDC, Chief Accountant and Systems Lead
Paul Collard	MSDC,
Terry Doyle	Glendale
Emma Gearing	MSDC, Executive Office Manager
Aidan Gaff	MSDC, Electoral Services Manager
Debbie Thomas	Bolney Parish Council
Steve Cridland	Burgess Hill Town Council
Julie Holden	East Grinstead Town Council
Trevor Parsons	Fulking Parish Council
Ian Cumberworth	Hassocks Parish Council
Sarah Groom	Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common Parish Council
Steve Trice	Haywards Heath Town Council
Andrew Funnell	Lindfield Parish Council
Sally McClean	Slaugham Parish Council
Leanne Bannister	Turners Hill Parish Council
Leanne Andrews	West Hoathly Parish Council

Apologies Received from:

Louise Duffield	MSDC, Director of Resources and Organisational Development
Dawn Langston	Pyecombe Parish Council & Twineham Parish Council
Charlotte Jim	Balcombe Parish Council
Lee Dunkley	Ardingly Parish Council
Liz Bennett	Ansty and Staplefield Parish Council
Michaela Frost	Horsted Keynes Parish Council
Christine Marsh	Turners Hill Parish Council

Items Covered

The Group covered the following topics:

- Green Spaces Contract Update – Introduction to Glendale
- Planning Portal Access Issues Update
- Budget Setting and Council Tax
- Elections and Polling Places Update
- CCTV

Key Points and Actions

Green Spaces Contract Update – Introduction to Glendale

Simon Hughes introduced Terry Boyle to the meeting, Glendale's Managing Director for the South.

Rob reminded the group of the stages undertaken to date which has led the council to this exciting point.

The most notable change to this contract is that, in addition to traditional grounds maintenance services, it covers other aspects including trees and countryside management, playground inspection and maintenance. It also includes customer management and innovation which has not been done before.

The current focus since mobilisation on 2 January 2024 has been on priority areas such as litter collection and trash screen clearance, with a marked improvement noticed already.

Terry Doyle provided further background where further details can be found on their [website](#). He explained that there will be a 5 person team who will be involved in community development of the contract and that the annual plan will involve engaging key stakeholders (including towns and parishes)

It was also explained that a live platform was being developed which will enable stakeholders to have access and find out updates on their sites in terms of works planned, completed, etc., and will be a great innovative move which also increases transparency of the contract.

In response to a question, Rob confirmed that all enquiries should still be sent to the parks and open spaces email (parksandopenspaces@midsussex.gov.uk) for the time being and that these would be handled and directed as appropriate.

In response to a question as to whether Glendale would be prepared to attend parish council meetings. Rob advised that this would be possible, however any arrangement would need to go through the council as the client.

Planning Portal Access Issues

Simon Hughes updated the group on how the planning portal system worked in the background. It was explained that the online register is not a single system and was made of multiple systems that come together from different suppliers. One hosts the planning material and another one stores key documents. All have to interact together and then all are updated separately and this is where sometimes the issues happen. These systems need to interact with other line of business systems such as Development Control, Land Charges and Street Naming and Numbering. Finally, as with all systems that support public access, cyber security is a critical mitigation of risks associated with attacks as the council receives over 1.3m attacks to these systems a day. When attacks are at their most frequent this can slow access. Officers were now putting together a way of moving the 2 suppliers together into one supplier and further updates will be provided in due course.

Budget Setting and Council Tax

With Rachel Jarvis and Adam Trathan

Rachel Jarvis updated the group on the Budget Setting Process and introduced Adam as the key contact going forward relating to any enquiries on Tax Base (see email address below).

It was explained that the draft Corporate Plan and Budget had been published ahead of Scrutiny on 24 January. Towns and Parishes can read the draft budget on the council's [website](#).

The draft Corporate Plan and Budget has been developed with significant Officer and Cross-Party Member input with a very robust process for Member Scrutiny in place. This involved a 6-week consultation period which is due to end on 24 January 2024 where Members can submit comments and questions. Once Scrutiny has reviewed the draft at its meeting, it will then be reviewed by Cabinet at its meeting on 5 February 2024 whereby if endorsed they will be asked to recommend that it is proposed to Council.

Regarding the Tax Base, the group were advised that this is prescribed by regulation and calculated in November of each year. It was noted that Mid Sussex has a very stable and good collection rate. Discounts are factored in also as well as new properties. Further information can be found on the [website](#) in regard to completion notices.

The group were advised that statute requires the Council, between 1 December through to 31 January, to advise the Town and Parishes on the Tax Base, with 1st March (so just 1 month is allowed by statute) set as the deadline for Town and Parish Councils to advise the council of their precept. This does not work for meeting deadlines, the council therefore endeavours to try and give towns and parishes the taxbase as soon as possible as precepts are required by 31st January.

Julie Holden asked if there were any specific hot topics that clerks should take note of. RJ responded that the draft budget published following work by the cross-party working group included looking at Fees and Charges which proposes uplifts..

In response to a question from Sarah Groom on free parking discs, Simon Hughes advised that there will be a review on this matter over the year which will involve consulting the Towns and Parishes, but no outcome will be decided until this exercise is complete.

Adam Trathan email address: adam.trathan@midsussex.gov.uk

Elections, Polling Places and Member Services

With Kevin Toogood and Aidan Gaff.

PCC Election 2024

The following key points were raised:

- PCC Elections are to take place on 2 May 2024
- The Count will be held on Sunday 5 May (which will cover the whole Mid Sussex Area)
- Area Returning Officer is Brighton and Hove. Candidates will go there, and this council will follow their instructions.
- For this election the voting system has changed and will be first past the post (which is the UK standard approach)
- Election staff recruitment drive has now begun, and Town and Parishes are asked to refer people to the [website](#) should they be interested in working in the Election.
- There is no date given for the General Election and must be called before January 2025. The Government should they choose to call an Election must give the local authorities up to 25 working days' notice. However, following the Prime Minister's recent statement it is envisaged it may be called later in the year of 2024. Plans are being developed by officers to cover both scenarios.

Polling Places Review

The following key points were raised:

- There are no plans to change any stations following that review, The Electoral Services Team would be in contact with those venues to confirm bookings.
- The Main changes are the polling district boundaries (East Grinstead, Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath) where some districts have merged.
- Slight change to Lucastes and Bolnore, which will see a slight change in that electors will be asked to vote at the Dolphin. This will affect around 400 electors.

Election Act Changes

The following key points were raised:

- Voter ID was introduced in 2023. Mid Sussex only had a low number of cases where people had to be turned away because of no ID (35 people turned away of which 17 returned) This number was the lowest of anyone else in the South East.

- Online absent vote applications. In October 2023 there are changes in the way people can apply for postal or proxy vote. They can now do this online and requires them to supply their NI number.
- Postal vote handling rules will be enforced in the May 2024 Election. This rule stops agents and candidates from handling postal votes. A person can only hand in 5 postal votes and then their own. Then on receipt, they will be required to complete a form.
- The Removal of the 15-year rule for overseas electors is now in effect (parliamentary only)

Member Services

Applause Awards – It was explained that serving councillors cannot be nominated however, Staff in towns and parishes, volunteers for the council and retired councillors will be eligible. A recent Press Release has been circulated.

Recruitment – a recruitment campaign is due to be launched imminently for independent panel members for Standards or as Members of the Allowances Panel

The following questions were raised:

Election costs – Group Members raised queries over the increase in Election costs. Aidan Gaff explained that costs for the 2023 Election had increased including but not limited to:

- Cost of hiring venues
- Increase in multi-member counts;
- Increase in National Living Wage for election workers.

Aidan confirmed that he would respond to the questions he had received as soon as possible. It was also confirmed that advanced notice would be given as soon as possible in terms of approximate costs for the clerks to build these costs into their budgets.

Member Allowance Scheme – further to conversations during the meeting regarding uncertainty and confusion over local allowance schemes, Kevin Toogood confirmed that he would be reviewing the matters raised and would bring this to the next meeting.

CCTV Update

With Lucy Corrie and Paul Collard

Lucy Corrie introduced the item and advised that the purpose was to give clerks an update on the public-facing CCTV. It was explained that changes were to be made following a significant increase from BT to run the analogue system and Sussex Police's announcement that it would be closing its CCTV centre and handing the responsibility back to local authorities.

As a result, there was an opportunity to modernise and move away from analogue. It was confirmed that the deadline to switch was 31 March 2024 with Mid Sussex being one of the first authorities to make the switch and could go live on 1 April 2024.

Offers were to undertake a full review of the CCTV estate and the Towns and parishes will be consulted. It was confirmed that Towns and Parishes would receive one last bill for Q4, but with the new digital scheme generating savings, this would be passed down to the Towns and Parishes. It was made clear to the clerks that any criminal matters would still be a police matter.

It was also confirmed that there is no change to provision and that all that would change was transferring the cameras to the new system.

Any Other Business

Graffiti - (Raised by Sarah Groom) – Following a request to remove the incorrect information on the website. Rob Anderton advised that the confusion has arisen as three town councils currently perform graffiti removal on behalf of MSDC, but the Parish Councils don't. However, from 1 April 2024, this function will be fulfilled in its entirety by Glendale, the new Green Spaces Contractor and neither the town nor parish councils need to do anything further. Arrangements were being made for the website to be amended in the meantime and post-April when the formal change has come into effect.

Dog Bins - Dog Bins, additional bins and replacement bins - (Raised by Sally McClean) In response to a question as to whether the council were looking to increase the number of dog bins, Rob Anderton responded that the issue was not just regarding budget, the council does not have the capacity for the crews to service any more additional bins. MSDC currently services over 400 bins across the district with 2 crews. Any increase would cost an extra £200k to put together a 3rd crew. Officers were currently keeping a record of additional bins requested and where they are required and confirmed that where possible, areas could be tweaked. It was also explained that a decision on whether dog waste should be collected separately was being considered but would not be formally reviewed until the Serco contract renewal was up in 2028.

Environment Act and Food Waste – Rob Anderton explained that other draws on council resources and capacity was the recent announcement from government which will see food waste collection being mandated; meaning that anyone who doesn't provide one must do so by 2026. He also explained that Green bins were an important revenue source for local authorities and that providing free bins would cause significant issues, as a result, it appeared that the government was no longer planning on implementing free garden waste collections.

Regarding the food waste trial, Rob Anderton explained that this had proved a big success. Food waste collection was tried and tested method across the country, but 1-2-3 was more innovative. It has proved to be very popular with residents with recycling rates upwards of 65%. Through the Corporate Plan, the council would be looking to continue to provide that service.

Date of next meeting.

The date of the next meeting will be held on 18th July 2024.

Towns and Parishes to email comms@midsussex.gov.uk with any items. Towns and Parishes are asked to share agenda items in advance rather than as AOB so full responses and information can be provided. Items can be suggested at any time.