FINANCE WORKING GROUP MEETING 13th January 2026, Parish Office
Notes of Meeting

Present: Karen Ripley (Clerk/RFO); Cllr Nick Brown; Cllr Sean O'Hara; Cllr David Todd

1. **Bank Reconciliations** – the Clerk / RFO confirmed that:
   - reconciliations have been completed to 31/12/25 for account 1 (Unity Trust Current account, and account 2 (deposit account), and to 30/4/25 for account 5, Cambridge & Counties Bank.
   - Reconciliation Reports and bank statements have been reviewed by a FWG Member (DT) up to 30/11/25 for accounts 1 and 30/9/25 for account 2, and up to 30/4/25 for account 5, Cambridge & Counties Bank.

2. **Matters Arising from previous meetings**
   - **Review of Financial Regulations –** DT will complete this within the current quarter.
   - **Review of Effectiveness of Internal Controls 25/26 –** scheduled to be carried out January / February 2026.
   - **Asset Inventory –** in progress but Compliance / Website /Data Protection Toolkit has taken priority (on basis that current register is compliant).

3. **Budget Monitoring 25/26 – to end December (month 9) 2025 –** Members considered the detailed Income and Expenditure Report, Earmarked Reserves, and Working Contingency details. Members were satisfied with the current position and no budget virements were necessary at the current time. The following specific items were explained / discussed:

1	**101/4021**	**Office Rent**	Prepaid full year
2	**201/4030**	**Lighting power supply**	Likely to be a saving at year-end. New charging system for non-metered supplies works in our favour, so savings from change to LED even more beneficial.
3	**201/4031**	**Lights maintenance**	Paid in two instalments over year, so 25/26 already paid in full.
4	**307/4070**	**Working Contingency**	£2,230 spent to date (see detail in FWG Notes 11/11/25) has been vired to other cost centres (which reduces the Current Budget figure and does not show as expenditure). 25/26 figures are: £5,000 precept + £13,890 b/f = £18,890 - £2,230 = £16,660 balance.
5	**101/4027** **101/4028**	**PWLB LOAN Capital & Interest**	One instalment paid – one further instalment due January 2025
6	**307/4092**	**S137 payments (no specific power to spend)**	Summer Event debrief event (from EMR Events); Refreshments Annual Assembly; Traffic Management Remembrance
7	**315/1156** **315/4072**	**Events**	Sponsorship 24/25+25/26 = £8,825 LESS Expenditure 24/25+25/26 = £7,895 = £930 LESS £200 from 307/4092 (debrief) = £730 profit R800

8	**EMR 353**	**EMR Events**	£1,000 originally allocated to R800 (EMR) but not used, moved to Amenities EMR. After re-allocation of £1,000, balance left in EMR Events is: £730 final surplus R800 + £1,011 pre-existing balance = total EMR Events £1,741
9	**401/1153**	**Capital Schemes Misc. Income**	£895 is the donation from village family for new defib in High Street – offsets overspend in 4145 New Defibs
10	**Earmarked Reserves**		Funds to cover the new website, CCTV at Station Road car park, and a storage container are held in EMR.

1. **Budget 26/27 –** this was considered. Key areas of additional expenditure and other items were discussed and agreed as shown below:

    - **Legal Costs for Asset Devolution –** three areas are under negotiation: the freehold of already leased Station Road car park/toilets and Bishops Meadow, and the grass play area at Heathfield Gardens. It was agreed that £1,000 per asset should be allocated, however, we have some funds in EMR for the car park that can cover this, so an additional £2,000 added to the precept.

    - **Heathfield Gardens grass play area –** Members felt it would be prudent to include an allocation towards extra costs if the asset is devolved, such as grass cutting, maintenance, hedge cutting etc. Also, towards any fencing required or provision of benches / picnic tables to enhance. £2,000 was added to the precept.

    - **Cemetery improvements –** funds need to be built up for two longer term projects; purchase of additional land to extend the Cemetery when it becomes full, and replacement of the aging store/shelter. Members agreed that £5,000 per year for each of the next four years, should be added to the precept and moved to an Earmarked Reserve, to build a fund for the future.

    - **Christmas Lighting –** our current lamp post motifs are aging; they have been checked and all working when taken down, so should be fine for next year, but we need to build some funds for replacements when required. £1,000 was added.

    - **Staff Salaries –** the pay settlement for 26/27 is still under negotiation between unions and the National Local Government Employers. Members considered that we should budget for a 5% increase. This is in line with NALC and SLCC advice. Calculations have included a reduction for 26/27 in the Employers element of the pension scheme (LGPS). There have been no changes to Employers National Insurance this year.

    - **National Non-Domestic Rates –** we have to pay rates on the pavilion (we get Small Business Rate Relief on Station Road car park and Lavatories Relief (yes honestly!) on the toilets). The Valuation Office new rateable values result in a small increase £50pa) in the charge on the pavilion.

- **Working Contingency –** Members agreed to include the same level of precept as last year (£5,000).

- **Neighbourhood Plan Review -** £5,000 included in precept last year; Members felt this could be carried forward at year-end and no further allocation was needed at this stage.

- **Grit Bin Refilling -** £1,000 included in the precept as the severe weather recently mean the bins already require filling, so there will be less to carry forward at year-end.

- **Urban Verge Cutting –** an increase has been allowed for, due to uncertainty at this stage regarding the costs of self-delivery. This is in line with the increase had we continued with Highways doing the cutting. However, it is hoped to make savings, so any surplus can be reallocated later.

- **Village Steward –** a surplus is anticipated at year-end, due to lower-than-expected hours being carried out. However, some may be used in the current year to pay for any required works that the Steward is unable to do. This will be looked at again at year-end and re-allocated if necessary. It was decided to keep at the same level as last year, in anticipation of the Steward being able to increase his hours.

There is decrease in the tax base from 1031.66 in 25/26 to 1022.32 for 26/27. The precept recommended for 26/27 is £164,274.00, and increase £11,454, or 7.5% on 25/26. This represents and increase of £12.57 per year, or 24p per week, for each council-tax-paying household (Band D).

25/26 £152,820 ÷ 1031.7 = £148.13 per year (Band D) / £12.34 per month / £2.85 per week.

26/27 £164,274 ÷ 1022.3 = £160.69 per year (Band D) / £12.57 per month / £3.09 per week.

2. **East Sussex Pension Fund Funding Strategy Consultation –** The East Sussex Pension Fund (ESPF, the Fund) is required to carry out an actuarial valuation every three years. Key outputs of this valuation are the review of each employers' funding level and the setting of new contribution rates for the Fund's participating employers for the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029. Cllr Todd reviewed the Funding Strategy Statement and reported that he had no concerns regarding the content in relation to SRPC and had therefore submitted a 'nil return.'

3. **Further (third) banking Institution –** From December 2025 the limit of protection offered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) has been increased from £85,000 to £120,000 per institution. Our balances are well below that with each bank (Unity Trust and Cambridge & Counties), so it was felt that a further institution was not necessary at this time. The situation will continue to be monitored.

4. **Internal Auditor for 25/26 accounts at year-end –** new appointment needed; the Clerk will check with other local Clerk's to see who they are using, and with ESALC to see if they hold a list.

5. **Consultation on Proper Practices for Smaller Authorities** – Cllr Todd submitted a response to this.

6. **Recommendations to PCM 19 January 2026**

   - **Budget monitoring 25/26 -** to receive and note the report from the FWG that the budget is on track and no virements are required.

   - **Budget / Precept 26/27 –** to accept the recommended budget allocations and approve submitting a Precept request to Rother District Council for £164,274.00

7. **Date of next FWG Meeting –** TBA (Early March 2026)