

MINUTES of the Meeting of the **BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY 21st JANUARY, 2025** at **6.30pm** at **THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DRAKE ROAD, TAVISTOCK**

PRESENT

Councillor S Hipsey Chairman & Deputy Mayor (ex-officio)
Councillor Mrs A Johnson Vice Chairman

Councillor P Ward Mayor (ex-officio)
Councillors Ms M Ewings, A Hutton*, U Mann, R Poppe.

Ward Members Councillor R Edlmann

*Arrived late at the Meeting

IN ATTENDANCE Town Clerk, General Manager, Financial Administrator (part Meeting).

274. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no Apologies for Absence received.

275. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT the Minutes of the Meeting of the Budget & Policy Committee held on Tuesday 12th November, 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman (Appendix 1).

276. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point in the Meeting, however please see Minute No. 280 below.

ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

277. FINANCE

a) Interim Expenditure Review

The Committee received the Report of the Financial Administrator (Appendix 2) in respect of the above. Arising therefrom it was:

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council acknowledge the potential for overspends on Codes 4041 and 4046 and, subject to ongoing monitoring to restrict further expenditure so far as possible this year, agree that they be funded at year-end from any available underspends in other areas, with a primary focus on the Property Maintenance Budget.

Noted That: in the ensuing discussion particular reference was made to:

- the costs of hiring equipment when storm damage occurred and associated Budget levels going forward, with particular reference to climate related contingencies - the General Manager undertook to add this matter to the mid-year Sustainability Report.
- *Councillor A Hutton arrived during the consideration of this item.

b) Guildhall and Town Hall – Option to Tax and Treatment of VAT

Following consideration of the position and advice taken (and being taken) it was reported that, at this stage:

- It was not recommended to change the VAT status on either the Town Hall or Guildhall given the narrow balance as between the options – an outline of the benefits/drawbacks and associated issues being provided;
- For information the option to Tax for the Guildhall was not considered previously in view of the different occupation arrangements then applying.

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council not opt to Tax the Town Hall or the Guildhall for VAT purposes at the present time, but continue to keep the matter under review as more information becomes available.

c) Guildhall and Town Hall (Fees & Charges)

The Committee received the schedule of proposed Fees & Charges for the Town Hall (Appendix 3), which was based on the current arrangements (see above), including some proposed increases to fees.

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council:

- i. adopt the schedule of Fees & Charges for the Town Hall for 2025-26 as set out in the document;
- ii. with regard to the Guildhall, grant authority to the General Manager, in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, to set a Schedule of Fees and Charges for the use of the Guildhall for 2025-26.

d) Bank Mandate

The Committee received the Briefing Note of the Financial Administrator (Appendix 4).

RECOMMENDED THAT the changes as set out in para 2.1 of the Report be received and adopted.

278. BUDGET PREPARATION & PRECEPT SETTING 2025/26

The Committee considered the Report of the Town Clerk (Appendix 5) in connection with the above. Reference was made, in particular, to the challenging financial environment, the reasons why the Town Council was affected more than other local Councils, and related matters. It was noted it was likely that the 2026-27 Budget Setting Round would apply significantly increased pressure on funding.

In response to questions the Committee was advised:

- following substantial re-working, it had been possible to bring any proposed Precept increase from an initial 20%+ to a baseline 4.82% increase (subject to how National Insurance increases were treated);
- the Government's recent changes to Employers' National Insurance Liabilities would have a significant impact on the Council's finances (representing an additional 2.5% equivalent on the Precept);
- the budget for 2026/2027 would need to be disciplined, as there was little scope for surplus or underspend unless the economy (and related commercial income) recovered.

During the ensuing discussion, particular reference was made to:

- how best to accommodate the National Insurance increase;
- acknowledgement reserves could not be indefinitely depleted without replenishment. Likewise, the scope to deal with unforeseen impacts was reduced;
- adopting a prudent approach it was reasonable to anticipate that pressure on commercial income streams would continue;
- that the Council should not have to (and in practice could not sustainably) absorb the increase of 2.5% on National Insurance contributions. In contrast to Principal Authorities, Town and Parish Councils did not receive additional support from Government in this regard.

Having considered the pressures on the Budget in detail, and the need to set a balanced and sustainable Budget, it was the view of the Committee that the original (unadjusted) figure for the Precept increase be retained at 4.82% (being less than that of other authorities such as the County Council), but necessarily subject to the addition of the costs arising from Government requirements regarding National Insurance (ie the addition of 2.5%). Accordingly, it was:

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council submit a Precept increase of 7.32% equating to a cost of 29.02 pence per week for a Band D equivalent household.

279. ABBEY REMAINS PROJECT

The Committee considered the Briefing Note of the General Manager (Appendix 6), which summarised details of the Project as contained within previous General Manager's Reports

It was further reported that:

- the National Lottery Heritage Fund Grant application had been completed;
- Tavistock Heritage Trust had asked Tavistock Town Council to be the 'Accountable Body' for the Project;
- a high-level partnership agreement would be brought to a future Meeting for the Council to consider;
- a full Report would be brought to a future Council Meeting, setting out progress and 'next steps' and authorising action.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council:-

- a) Endorse the content of the grant application to NLHF for £200,000 and associated supporting documents with a view for the Council to submit the application shortly after Full Council on 4th February 2025.
- b) Agree 'in principle' to a simple partnership agreement being drafted for Full Council on 4th February 2025, which, subject to approval, would be submitted in conjunction with (a) above.
- c) Acknowledge and agree that the content of the future application to Historic England will align with the content of the application to NLHF, and therefore it approve in principle, subject to commonality, the submission by the Council of a Grant Application for £250,000 to Historic England at the time the application is prepared, without requiring separate endorsement by Council at a later date.
- d) That Council agrees to fulfil the role of accountable body for the project.
- e) That, subject to the grant applications being successful, a full report be brought before a future meeting of Council to review and determine next steps including procurement, contractual, delivery and other matters.
- f) That in liaison with Tavistock Heritage Trust the Town Clerk and General Manager, in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy

Mayor, be authorised to undertake such changes, corrections or other submissions of an administrative/non-substantive nature, as are consistent with the grant applications, and as may be necessary to expedite successful achievement of same.

280. GOOSE FAIR 2024

The Committee received the Briefing Note of the Town Clerk (Appendix 7), together with a Goose Fair Income and Expenditure Report.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council award £ 2,000 to Tavistock Lions Club, in recognition of the organisation's contribution to the successful delivery of Goose Fair 2024.

Noted That the following Declarations of Interest were made:

- Councillor A Hutton by virtue of being a member of the Lions Club;
- Councillors Mrs A Johnson and U Mann, by virtue of family members being involved with the Lions Club.

281. MARKET ROAD COTTAGES (OCCUPANCY CONDITIONS)

The Committee considered the Briefing Note of the Assistant to the Town Clerk (Appendix 8), which set out to seek agreement on the definitions of 'key worker' and 'local connection' to be used by SeaMoor Lettings when advertising for, and vetting, potential tenants for the Market Road Cottages.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council agree the regional, sector and national definitions as set out in para's 2.1-2.3 of the report.

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

282. DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER

The Committee received the Briefing Note of the Town Clerk (Appendix 9) in respect of the English Devolution White Paper.

In the discussion arising particular reference was made to:

- that it was currently unclear how Town and Parish Councils would be affected, and that might vary from area to area;
- it should be known later in the same week whether or not Devon County Council's Elections would proceed in May 2025;
- whether Tavistock Town Council should set up a Steering or Working Group in an effort to start planning ahead to help inform and shape services, assets and activities in the town, not least in view of the potential impact of anticipated Local Government Reorganisation at the principal tier;
- if the previously agreed topics for consideration by the Town Council (Communication & Engagement and Children and Young People)

should be deferred/included in a wider strategic workstream in order that this time-critical matter could take priority.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council designate a Working Group, comprised of Members of the Budget and Policy Committee meeting on an informal basis, to consider the implications of and preparation for the future impacts of the implementation of the White Paper, with particular regard to the reorganisation of local government in Devon and how best to represent the interests of the ratepayers and community of the Town.

Noted That formal reporting would be to Council via this Committee meeting formally with the normal facilities for attendance by other Members.

283. MULTI-USE WHEELED SPORTS AREA (MUWSA)

The Committee received the Briefing Note of the General Manager (Appendix 10).

In the discussion arising it was reported that the following arrangements were without prejudice to any final decision of the Council whether to proceed with the project pending formal report and agreement by it in due course:

- a) Tenders had been issued on 20th January, 2025;
- b) the deadline for the return of Tenders was 28th February, 2025;
- c) no formal agreement would be entered in to, until a report had been brought to Council;
- d) the successful Tenderer would undertake works costing in the region of £50,000 - £60,000 on an 'at risk' basis until such time as all Planning requirements had been met, and Grant Funding identified;
- e) Two Councillors were required to attend the Tender Opening on 28th February, 2025.

Noted That Councillors R Poppe and P Ward (Mayor) volunteered to attend the Tender Opening and review the Tenders received.

284. BOUNDARY TREES & RELATED MATTERS

The General Manager provided an oral update on various tree-related matters:

- Plymouth Road – a Planning Application had been submitted by a third party to allow for works to a tree in the Cemetery on Council land. The Town Council's position had been made clear to the resident who had raised the issue;

- Church Lea – it had been reported that an issue had arisen with a tree on a boundary hedge at Whitchurch Play Park. Works required were being considered;
- Hazel Road – A site meeting had been undertaken with local residents regarding views in connection with a tree on Town Council land although it had been identified that other trees were in the ownership of West Devon Borough Council. Discussions were ongoing.

285. HERITAGE

The Committee received and noted;

- a) The Notes of the Meeting of the Heritage Alliance held on 11th November, 2024 (Appendix 11);
- b) The Notes of the Meeting of the Heritage Quarter held on 26th November, 2024 (Appendix 12).

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

286. PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960

Pursuant to Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 and having regard to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted it was: -

RESOLVED THAT the Press and Public be excluded from the Meeting for the following items of business.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS INFORMATION ONLY

287. TENANCY MATTERS

(**CONFIDENTIAL** – by virtue of relating to matters relating to legal, financial, staffing or a contractual nature and/or affecting persons other than the Council)

- a) Arbitration – the Committee considered the Briefing Note of the Town Clerk (Appendix 13), together with various Appendices appertaining to the Arbitration process recently undertaken. The provision of relevant information from the tenant was now being progressed.

Noted that – appreciation was expressed to those who had helped bring this longstanding matter to conclusion.

- b) Breach of Lease – the Committee was advised of advice received regarding various aspects, the progress of claims for non-payment of monies due, next steps for the premises, the status of communications from other parties and related matters.

Noted That there was a consensus that, in the circumstances, the extent to which certain communications might be classed as vexatious be kept under review.

288. MARKET ROAD PROPERTIES

(**CONFIDENTIAL** - by virtue of relating to matters relating to legal, financial, staffing or a contractual nature and/or affecting persons other than the Council) or affecting persons other than the Council)

It was reported that the refurbishment works to these properties were on track to be completed by the previously agreed deadline of 31st March, 2025.

The Meeting closed at 8.35pm.

Signed:

Dated:

CHAIRMAN