

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE
11th July 2017**

BRIEFING NOTE

ORGANISATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT & CAPACITY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Committee will recall discussing, at the last Council Meeting, the above matters with particular regard to Section 6 of the Corporate Service Plan. This included 3 areas (C1, C2 and C3) where material increases had been attributed to risks associated with increasing costs and reductions in income, infrastructure maintenance and partnership working effectiveness.
- 1.2 In the ensuing discussion particular reference was made to risk C8 (capacity) which continued at the level identified in the previous year of 16 (constituting likelihood and weighting of 4X4 respectively).
- 1.3 As requested this Briefing Note provides an outline of the current situation with regard to that risk pursuant to the deliberations of Council and the course of action included in para 4.2 is recommended.

2. CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 The current definition of risk C8 is that;
"the risk is that the Council will fail to recognise the extent of demands placed upon the organisation to deliver major projects/initiatives alongside "business as usual" leading to failures to deliver". The associated action details are;
"a realistic approach combined with appropriate project planning" mitigated by *"appropriate phasing of activities linked to skill sets, resources, buying in of necessary skill/resources"*
- 2.2 There is also a strong linkage between this risk and C4 "resourcing capacity and capability/corporate leadership".
- 2.3 As Members will be aware Tavistock Town Council is undergoing a period of unprecedented challenge. It is responsible for the delivery of a HLF THI Scheme¹, it is developing an ambitious yet challenging 20 year vision for the Guildhall Complex, has recently delivered the Butchers' Hall Capital Project, has Pannier Market and Duke Street capital projects

¹ understood from HLF South West to be possibly the first such undertaking (of a THI 3rd party grant scheme) by a town/parish council in the country

outstanding, together with 3 areas of Public Realm, relocation of Pannier Market traders during works and development of a new themed market offer for the Butchers' Hall.

- 2.4 This is at a time when there are other pressures to develop an integrated Property Maintenance Plan, deliver a range of smaller (but still significant) capital projects, consider the sponsoring of a neighbourhood plan and continue the delivery of key (but resource hungry) initiatives such as Goose Fair and Garden Festival amongst others.
- 2.5 To assist there have been some areas where additional resource has been deployed (for example part-time Support Officer to the General Manager), the re-structuring of Town Hall and Pannier Market teams and a part time temporary Project Manager². However, it remains broadly the case that the major initiatives are being delivered within a resource envelope which is substantially unchanged from that of 10 years ago when the Council's work programme and the operating environment were very different.
- 2.6 As a result it has been necessary to substantially review what we do and how. The Works Administrator and Cemetery Administrator are being utilised more flexibly to support a wider range of corporate goals where possible. It is however the case that the weight of added value/project work is substantially born by a very small number of staff within the organisation (2/3/4) and is necessarily delivered alongside (Project Manager apart) the wider range of "day job" duties.
- 2.7 In consequence the Council is delivering considerably higher output relative to staffing input than would normally be the case notwithstanding the potential for consequential impacts upon ability to carry out the more 'routine' management and other duties associated with key posts.
- 2.8 It should also be noted that this has led to impacts on other posts, most particularly in the area of support services. For example the impact on the finance team of administering the THI scheme to HLF requirements alongside other areas of change such as Auto-Enrolment contribute to a disproportionate reliance upon limited core resource.
- 2.9 Additionally to mitigate impacts across a number of projects the Council has adopted measures to seek to ameliorate some of the staffing impacts. For example most major capital projects are supported by a team overseen by a "project management" type role which undertakes day to day management and oversight on behalf of the Council. Whilst this does not replace the accountability of your Officers it does represent a welcome complementary professional resource. The Council itself has also taken a

² 4 days a week in relation to the THI

more proactive view regarding the prioritisation of projects thereby enabling a move toward a more focussed work programme.

3. NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 The Council and its staff can be commended both for the extent of their ambition for the town and the resource envelope within which it is being delivered. More broadly in large part the delivery of “business as usual” is generally unchanged and there are no material capacity implications yet associated with delivering same for the majority of employees.
- 3.2 However, as the delays to the THI programme associated with recruitment exercises required for the THI Project Manager indicate, there are key areas where staff turnover or similar can disproportionately impact capacity to deliver. Furthermore for those posts at the heart of the strategic work programme there is a level of workload which may or may not be sustainable in the longer term insofar as capacity etc are concerned.
- 3.3 It is submitted these areas need to be addressed. However, it may be premature to do so at this time. This is because the outcome of the Guildhall Project is yet to crystallise, the Council does not yet have in place the Market Development Officer role³ and questions around matters such as a Neighbourhood Development Plan are yet to be answered.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 In the circumstances (and all other factors notwithstanding) there would therefore appear to be merit in Council revisiting this matter later in the year when there will be greater clarity in relation to those points listed in the paragraph above - notwithstanding the need to keep matters under continuing review in the meantime.
- 4.2 This approach would further provide opportunity to look at the associated matters of:-
 - a. How/if to use external resources to cover short term capacity gaps (and the situations in which such an approach worked and where not)
 - b. The extent to which (post THI and Guildhall) high level construction related skills would continue to be necessary at the current level
 - c. Council had previously considered and discounted the benefits of a resource specifically to support corporate, policy and organisational initiatives. There might be merit in considering whether to re-visit this option if partnership and community working was seen as continuing at significant levels.

³ to develop the Butchers’ Hall offer

- d. An opportunity to look at how effective internal support arrangements were on a post by post basis and associated contingencies both by way of support and in extremis
 - e. A consensus as to the extent to which current workload on strategic/organisational initiatives was expected to either:
 - i. Continue for the foreseeable future; and/or
 - ii. Discontinue/fall off as projects were completed and work took the form of a "maintenance" cycle
 - f. Any consequential impacts to be addressed through the budget setting process.
- 4.3 This is necessarily a challenging and exciting time for the Council where it is demonstrating an appetite to make a difference on behalf of the community it serves. There are few Councils that the author is aware of within the country who are achieving so much with minimal additional resource which is to be commended.
- 4.4 However, such demands are not without risk either at the organisational level, or that of the individuals who are engaged on a day to day basis with delivery. Whilst your senior Officers consider the present situation to be extremely challenging they do consider it achievable in the near term. Albeit necessarily subject to the view it would be prudent to keep the matter under ongoing review and bring a further report to back when the outcome of the Guildhall Project is known⁴.
- 4.5 In the meantime your Managers will continue to seek to grow capacity and resilience together with support for key posts where possible and appropriate including regular attention at management team meetings. Most especially to ensure that the welfare of staff is not adversely affected.

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JULY 2017

⁴ Or before if circumstances should change