

AGENDA ITEM No. 6

MINUTES of the Meeting of **BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY 27th FEBRUARY, 2024** at **6.30pm** in **THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DRAKE ROAD, TAVISTOCK**

PRESENT

Councillor P Ward (Chairman)

Councillors Ms M Ewings, A Hutton, Mrs A Johnson

Councillors S Hipsey, P Squire (Ward Members)

IN ATTENDANCE Town Clerk, General Manager, Assistant to the Town Clerk

326. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor U Mann (Vice Chairman).

327. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT the Minutes of the Meeting of the Budget & Policy Committee held on Tuesday 16th January, 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman (Appendix 1).

328. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The were no Declarations of Interest made.

ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

329. DEVOLUTION DEAL FOR DEVON & TORBAY (CONSULTATION)

The Committee considered the Briefing Note of the Town Clerk (Appendix 2) together with a copy of the Consultation document, in connection with the above. The Committee reviewed whether or not the Council should respond to the Consultation, and if so, how.

During the ensuing discussion particular reference was made to:

- The Government's approach in promoting various forms/levels of 'devolution', which included Combined County Authorities (CCAs);
- Plymouth City Council had chosen to withdraw from being part of the proposal, thereby leaving it to be administered by Devon County and Torbay Unitary Councils;
- how the Council voting options would operate (with Devon CC and Torbay having 3 votes each and the facility, should they so choose,

to allocate an additional two votes to rotating representatives of the Districts (ie 6+2));

- whilst the proposal would not technically create another 'tier' of Local Government, the new CCA would have tasked responsibilities. As such it would represent another level of local administration within the County;
- it was not anticipated that the creation of CCA's would directly affect Town and Parish Councils (unlike those parts of the country where reorganisation had occurred), as the services affected sat primarily at the strategic level. Consequential impacts remained a possibility;
- the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) was expected to have a seat on the CCA's Overview & Scrutiny Committee, but it was unclear, at this time, if it would have voting rights;
- certain housing and socio-economic matters which might benefit from the creation of the new Authority;
- that it was anticipated there would be a Transport Group created, which would need to have a Devon Transport Plan. Torbay would have its own Transport Plan;
- Team Devon, which would include DALC and the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) would need to be formalised, with a Constitution being drafted and implemented and operating as a Joint Committee under the provisions of the 1972 Act;
- DALC had been working hard to keep the Town and Parish Councils in Devon involved and informed;
- it was understood by Members in attendance, that all responses received to the Consultation would be taken into consideration.

However, there were significant concerns as to the detail and timing of the proposal, not least:

- the voting arrangements – Torbay (which was of similar size to Teignbridge DC or Exeter CC), would have the same number of votes as Devon County Council (3). In the alternative all the Districts combined would have a maximum of only 2 representatives on the Authority. It would then be for the Authority to decide if those two districts had any voting rights (ie one vote each), or none. As such the voting arrangements lacked democratic accountability, were unrepresentative and not fit for purpose;
- the timing of the proposal – shortly before County Council elections (2025) and Parliamentary elections, and the potential uncertainties that might arise;
- how the adult education sector would work and associated reservations regarding the extent to which the monies allocated were actually new, or otherwise already hypothecated;

- that Town and Parish Councils were not being invited to become part of, or represented on the CCA. Accordingly it was difficult to see how the interests of identity, locality and place at the local level would be effectively represented;
- that, given the constituents, the proposed CAA was likely to be east/central Devon biased;
- lack of confidence regarding future funding;
- the absence of Plymouth, the largest city and Council (DCC apart) in the County represented a major weakness which, given the high level of collaboration between it and WD/South Hams, was likely to be disadvantageous to those particular districts and their communities;
- where future funding for the CCA would come from and the extent to which that would/would not match responsibilities;
- that the draft proposal was excessively modest in its aspirations and vague in form;
- the small overall financial value of the proposal in relation to extant already strained local authority capacity and budgets. Linking to that the possibility that the monies accompanying the new responsibilities would be insufficient to fully fund them thereby increasing financial pressure on the partners;
- that new responsibilities could distract and/or detract from effectively delivering existing services;
- lack of meaningful involvement for the districts and the risk, in certain areas that they/their communities could be actively disadvantaged by the proposal;
- that, in an area where the public often found working with three tiers of local government challenging, the addition of another level could be more confusing still.

In the circumstances, and for the reasons outlined, it was difficult to respond to the consultation from a Town or parish perspective. However, if the Town Council did wish to respond in more general terms it was:

RECOMMENDED THAT the Town Council respond to the Consultation, based on the comments above, and with particular regard to the inadequacy of proposed voting arrangements and underrepresentation of the Districts on the prospective Devon and Torbay Combined Authority.

Noted That a Member undertook to provide the slides from a recent presentation for circulation to all Members of the Council.

330. BUS SERVICE PROVISION IN TAVISTOCK

The Committee considered and noted copy e-mail correspondence (Appendix 3) from West Devon Borough Council received in response to the letter sent from the Town Council on 10th January, 2024, which was accompanied by a general conversation on the recent position.

331. PROPOSED CHARGING FOR ON-STREET PARKING

The Committee received and considered copy correspondence from the Council's Solicitor to Devon County Council (Appendix 4) in connection with the above.

The Town Council's BID representative reported:

- arrangements for a public meeting scheduled to take place in The Bedford Hotel on Wednesday 28th February, 2024 at 6pm to which the County Councillor had been invited;
- efforts made to communicate with the other affected communities;
- a public demonstration which was planned on Bedford Square on Saturday 9th March 2024 - details to be advised;
- plans were in hand for protesters to attend at County Hall in Exeter on 13th March 2024, when the County Council Cabinet Meeting would take place to discuss the proposal.

The work undertaken in opposition to the proposed scheme was welcomed, also that the Council might wish to add to the position if/as appropriate.

332. LISTING OF HERITAGE ASSETS IN COUNCIL OWNERSHIP

The Committee received the Briefing Note of the Town Clerk, together with copy correspondence from the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group (Appendix 5), setting out a request for the Listing of Heritage Assets in the ownership of Tavistock Town Council.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council support the Heritage Listing of:

- The Jubilee Arch; and
- The Bandstand in The Meadows

Noted That it was understood Abbey Walk was not intended to be included in the listing.

333. STRATEGIC PLAN

The Committee received and considered the Report of the Town Clerk, (Appendix 6) in connection with the most recently undertaken Strategic Plan Workshop.

Two main themes had been brought forward:

- Community Engagement/Communications; and
- Young People/Children.

It had been suggested during the Workshop that two Working Groups be formed to progress the themes above, as set out in Section 3.10 of the Report. The outcomes could then feed into the applicable service delivery plan(s).

In the ensuing discussion reference was made to potential resourcing capacity – both Member and Officer and that, accordingly, it would be appropriate to avoid concurrent running of the two topic areas. Council might therefore wish to identify which to deliver first.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council:

- a) Endorse the extant Tavistock Town Council Strategic Plan for the period 2024-27; subject to future inclusion of a suitable reference to the anticipated impact of devolution and/or formation of the Devon and Torbay Combined Authority (as/when more information became available later in 2024);
- b) In accordance with the outcome of the recent Member workshop sessions – Council endorse that the areas of young people, and of communications/community engagement; be identified as the two priority areas for review at this time;
- c) Pursuant to (b) above, the Town Council agree to establish up to two working groups (one for each topic), comprising 3-5 Members to review current arrangements and identify and recommend improvements/ initiatives/projects in accordance with the approach set out in para 3.10 of the report;
- d) Identify (only applicable if both groups are appointed at this time) which of the two identified topic areas is to be delivered first.

Noted that reference was further made to:

- The Borough Council working more closely with Plymouth City Council, which had been one of the topics raised during the Workshop;
- the General Manager would be bringing forward a report on Community Engagement/Communications which the Town Council

was already undertaking to the next meeting of the Committee, to help inform discussions;

- the possibility of discussions with stakeholder organisations by any children's/young people working group to identify a 'baseline' situation.

334. COUNCIL FINANCIAL POLICIES & PROCEDURES

The Committee received and considered the Briefing Note of the Town Clerk & RFO, together with sub-appendices I & 1-5 (Appendix 7)

RECOMMENDED THAT the following be adopted and endorsed as applicable, together with any consequential administrative amendments, and the revised documents/arrangements to come into effect (where applicable) from 1st April 2024.

A Tavistock Town Council Financial Regulations

- a) Para 5.2 – addition of references to 5.2.4 Merchant Account and 5.2.5 Works Department Incidental Spend Account;
- b) Para 6.6 insertion of 'etc' to follow 'supplies' and 'eg' to precede 'energy' to reflect that variable direct debit may be used in other areas such as bar supplies and photocopier leases etc;
- c) Para 6.8 – the addition of 'or faster payment' to follow the first reference to 'Bankers Standing Order' to reflect changing payment practices;

B Other Periodic Reviews

- a) Section 5.10 – Note the List of Existing Suppliers (Appendix i refers) – for information;
- b) Section 6.6 – Approve the continuation of use of a variable Direct Debit for utility and equivalent services (a schedule of current providers is enclosed for information);
- c) Section 6.7 – Approve the facility for use of a faster payment or Bankers Standing Order principally for the payment of salaries if required (this is a model standing order - please note currently such payments are made by BACS);
- d) Section 6.8 – Approve the use of BACS or CHAPS for appropriate payments.

C Tavistock Town Council System of Internal Control

Tavistock Town Council System of Internal Control - as appended.

D Tavistock Town Council Treasury & Investment Policy

- a) Tavistock Town Council Treasury & Investment Policy, the submitted document as appended;

- b) endorse, pending availability of suitable other providers, and in the interests of receiving a fair return on cash deposits, the continuing operation of an exception to the (para 5.2 refers) 60% provision beyond the stated 3 months to be reviewed prior to the end of the next financial year.

Noted That reference was made to the Treasury Management Policy of West Devon Borough Council.

E Tavistock Town Council Members Scheme of Basic Allowance and the Travelling and Subsistence Allowance Scheme

the submitted documents as appended.

F Tavistock Town Council Pension Discretions Policy

the submitted document as appended.

335. INTERNAL AUDIT

The Committee received and noted the Interim Audit Report 2023-24 for Tavistock Town Council (Appendix 8).

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

336. CO-OPTIONS TO THE COUNCIL

Members were reminded that the closing date for applications for Co-option to Tavistock Town Council was Thursday 29th February, 2024.

Should any Member be aware of anyone considering applying, they were encouraged to advise them of the deadline.

337. HERITAGE MEETINGS

The Committee received and noted the:

- a) Notes of the Heritage Alliance Meeting held on 10th January, 2024 (Appendix 9);
- b) Notes of the Heritage Quarter Meeting held on 19th January, 2024 (Appendix 10).

URGENT BUSINESS BROUGHT FORWARD AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN

The following three items of business were brought forward at the discretion of the Chairman in view of the timeframes involved.

338. TAVISTOCK HOSPITAL – X RAY FACILITIES

A Member had reported that that the X-Ray machine at Tavistock Hospital was inoperative and it was unclear if there were plans to replace it.

The service was highly valued, reducing the need to travel to Derriford with associated time/costs/pressure on central services, affording an accessible service for those suffering transport deprivation including the elderly. It provided a timely and efficient service whilst reducing the carbon footprint of hospital care.

Clarification had been sought from the Plymouth NHS Trust seeking clarification on the current situation, and future plans. An update would be provided, when available.

339. VIREMENT – MARQUEE PURCHASE

The General Manager reported that consideration was being given to the purchase of two new 'branded' marquees, at a cost of iro £800 each. It was proposed the funding would be taken from the current £9,000 balance in the Advertising Budget (as opposed to from 'Equipment Purchase' - which would necessitate drawdown from multiple cost centres). In response to a question, arrangements for the allocation of monies to advertising initiatives were outlined.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council approve the virement of £1,600 from the Advertising Budget (4031) to enable the purchase.

Noted That in a discussion arising reference was variously made to how public services might be, in part, 'future proofed' and associated operating options.

340. WALKING & CYCLING (LCWIP) PROJECT UPDATE

This had been received and distributed earlier in the day, and therefore there had been insufficient time to receive consideration by Members. In the circumstances it was:

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council invite the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group to advise of it's views.

Noted That consideration of the remaining matters of an urgent nature brought be deferred until the 'Confidential' part of the Meeting in view of the subject matter.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

341. 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 CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY URGENT BUSINESS BROUGHT FORWARD AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN - CONT'D

The following two items of business were brought forward at the discretion of the Chairman in view of the timeframes involved.

(Minute No. 338 above and Minute No's 342-343 below refer).

342. COMMUNITY/SPORTS TENANCY – REQUEST TO ASSIGN LEASE

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

Pursuant to the above (previously reported), the Committee was advised that negotiations in connection with terms appropriate to safeguard the interests of the parties were in hand.

343. COMMERCIAL TENANCY – REQUEST TO SURRENDER LEASE

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

A request had been received from a commercial tenant, who was presently subject to action for non-compliance with the terms of their lease (previously reported), for the Council to accept a surrender. It was noted that, notwithstanding the extant proceedings for non-compliance (and the need for special circumstances to justify such a course of action), the necessary preconditions for a surrender to be considered (whether or not granted), would appropriately include, inter alia, the tenant meeting the extant obligations under the lease, meeting the landlords reasonable legal expenses, and a suitable notice period to secure a new tenant. Updates would be provided as available.

344. CAPITAL PROJECTS FINAL ACCOUNT VALUES

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

The Committee received and considered the Briefing Note of the General Manager in accordance with the recommendations of the Interim Auditor (Minute No. 335 above refers) (Appendix 11).

- a) Market Road Retaining Wall;
- b) Museum Emergency Works;
- c) Town Hall Enveloping Works.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council receive and accept the Briefing Note and the accompanying final contract values for the foregoing contracts as set out in para's 2.1-2.3 of the Report.

Noted That in response to a question, it was confirmed that damp/water ingress issues which had been experienced in the Museum were of a routine nature for premises of its age, aspect and construction.

The Meeting closed at 7.48pm.

Signed:

Dated:

CHAIRMAN