

MINUTES of the Meeting of **BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE** held on Tuesday 12th January, 2021 at 5pm conducted remotely via Zoom and YouTube

PRESENT

Councillor A Hutton (Chairman - Deputy Mayor)
Councillor Mrs G Parker (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Mrs A Johnson (Mayor)
Councillors Ms L Crawford, J Ellis, Mrs M Ewings*, Mrs U Mann, H Smith, P Williamson*.

Ward Members – Councillors A Lewis, G Parker, B Smith, P Ward
(observers)

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

*arrived late to the Meeting

199. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for late arrival had been received from Councillor Mrs M Ewings.

200. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT The Minutes of the Meeting of the Budget & Policy Committee held on Tuesday 1st December, 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman (Appendix 1).

201. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point in the Meeting.

ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

202. BUDGET PREPARATION & PRECEPT SETTING 2021-22

The Committee considered the Report of the Town Clerk (Appendix 2) in connection with the above, providing an opportunity to consider the emerging draft budget for the 2021/22 financial year. The report included proposed changes to Fees & Charges across the organisation.

In particular reference was made to:

- a) the severe impact of Coronavirus on commercial income streams which had historically been deployed to subsidise community services and ongoing reductions in income that were expected to continue into the next financial year;
- b) a projected in-year shortfall of income of iro £400,000 as set against offsetting government support grants to date of £28,000;
- c) accordingly the Council had undertaken unprecedented measures of saving, mitigation and adjustment to help offset the impact of the loss of income on the Council and protect the position of the ratepayer;
- d) the draft Budget reflected those measures plus additional ones for adoption. Accordingly, (and subject to the assumptions underpinning the budget setting process remaining stable), the draft budget provided a stable base for the next financial year and beyond. To achieve that a Precept increase of 9.02% was required in 2021/22 (equivalent to 28p per week per Band D property). Then, if the assumptions underlying the budget regarding income/pandemic impacts proved correct, it might only be necessary to levy an inflationary increase in 2022/23. That would achieve an average annual increase of 5% over the two-year period which was consistent with the local Council sector nationally and what the Government expected principal (social care) authorities to implement over the same timeframe. The front-loading of the increase being required to offset the financial impacts of Coronavirus;
- e) that the level of suggested increase, much reduced by the extensive measures undertaken over the financial year, reflected the organisational commitment to keep the Precept increase as low as was possible in the circumstances.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council endorse and approve:

- i. the draft Budget and Precept for Tavistock Town Council for 2021/22 incorporating the savings, assumptions and projections as previously submitted to/endorsed by Council plus those as listed in para 3.1 of the Report; and
- ii. the schedule of Fees & Charges as appended to the Report

203. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE: CONSULTATION – STANDARDS MATTER

The Committee considered the Report of the Town Clerk in respect of the above (Appendix 3).

During the ensuing discussion reference was made to;

- The scope of the consultation;

- that when related matters had been reviewed previously (when the emerging Model Code of Conduct was considered), specific reference was made by the Council to weaknesses in the sanctions regime;
- that the standards regime should also properly enable Councils, as employers, to introduce interim protective arrangements in exercise of their duty of care to employees in the most serious cases of bullying or harassment of staff whilst complaints were being considered by the principal authority;
- anticipated supportive views of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the County Association (DALC);
- that in view of recent international events that future arrangements need to be stronger and more robust to help ensure better behaviour in public life

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council endorse the recommendation in the Report and forward the following comments;

- i. the Council reiterate its prior views namely:
Current sanctions for misconduct in Local Government are inadequate to deal with the more serious cases of misconduct and poor behaviour. As such the Government be invited to adopt the provisions as recommended for Government action by the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life in January 2019 'Ethical Standards – a Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life';
- ii. that an independent regulator should be appointed in connection with Standards in Local Government;
- iii. that, in addition, arrangements should be introduced to permit the separation of Councillor(s) accused of bullying/harassment of employees from the alleged victim(s), during the period of consideration of a complaint.

204. SLOW WAYS INITIATIVE

The Committee received a Report, as prepared by a Councillor, in connection with an initiative which sought to link specific towns and villages by the most direct walking routes, where these were not already in place (Appendix 4). They might be footpaths or streets - it was hoped to provide a series of mapped footpaths across the whole country, in as a direct route as possible, so that people could cross the country by walking.

This was a national initiative, which is was hoped could also be promoted locally.

The support of the Council was sought to help encourage local residents to become involved.

During the discussion reference was variously made to;

- The contents of the report, scope and aspiration of the scheme;
- The minimal costs which delivering the initiative would attract initially with the potential to develop areas such as signage in the future;
- Support that the Council's Sustainability & Environment Working Group could consider for the Slow Ways Group in areas such as mapping and fit with the Active Travel initiative;
- Footway maintenance;
- Potential links to/with the BID Co, Tavistock Ramblers, Transition Tavistock and U3A;
- the existing role of the Council's Development Management & Licensing Committee when assessing Planning Applications (the Chairman of same advised such matters already formed part of its consideration of planning applications).

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council supports the Slow Way initiative by:

1. promoting Slow Ways for local residents to walk, review and use the routes;
2. the matter being considered further by the Council's Sustainability & Environment Working Group, at its next Meeting

205. 2021/22 LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT TECHNICAL CONSULTATION

The Committee was advised in connection with the above of one element of long standing relevance to the sector. Namely, the Government's ability, by statutory instrument, to apply referendum principles to the sector to cap the amount of Precept local Councils could raise.

This had been kept under review by Government, on a 3-year rolling basis, and whilst sector increases had been above inflation (at an average of 4%), the Government had decided that referendum principles need not be applied to cap Precept increases.

The Committee was therefore invited to reiterate the Council's support:

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council respond to the Consultation, accordingly that:

- referendum principles not be applied to the sector; and
- the Government's attention be drawn to the specific circumstances of Coronavirus, and that some Town and Parish Councils (including Tavistock Town Council which historically had used commercial income to keep the Precept down), had been disproportionately adversely affected financially by the pandemic.

Note – the consultation deadline for responses meant a provisional response would need be made to the consultation, as above, prior to formal consideration by Council.

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

206. CORONAVIRUS - LOCKDOWN

The Committee received an oral update from the General Manager in respect of the current situation with particular regard to:

- meetings with staff undertaken with regard to the current lockdown;
- Coronavirus Risk Assessment reviews, staff meetings and associated welfare matters;
- necessary closure of the Pannier Market and Butchers' Hall and the extent of discussions with prospective 'essential' traders regarding continuing trading opportunities (Bedford Square) and the upcoming meeting of the Consultative Group;
- potential, if requested by the BID Co, to provide a 'click and collect' venue;
- COVID measures – signage (including some vandalism), securing of some areas from usage at the request of the Police and monitoring of Government guidance;
- Potential discussions with the BID Co and statutory stakeholders in due course regarding arrangements for the reopening of the Town Centre when circumstances permitted.

207. PANNIER MARKET UPDATE

The Committee received and noted the report of the Market Reeve, some of which had been covered by the General Manager in his oral update above (Appendix 5).

The level of income which had been derived during the 7-day per week operation of the Pannier Market during December was commended.

Thanks were also expressed to staff involved in the delivery of this function.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

208. 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.

The Meeting then temporarily adjourned at 5.46pm.

The Meeting reconvened at 6.01pm attendance by Councillors and authorised Officers at the Confidential reconvened part of the Meeting was accessed via Zoom.

PRESENT

Councillor A Hutton (Chairman – Deputy Mayor)

Councillor Mrs G Parker (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Ms L Crawford, J Ellis, Mrs M Ewings*, Mrs A Johnson, Mrs U Mann, H Smith, P Williamson.

Ward Members:-

Councillors A Lewis, G Parker, B Smith, P Ward (Observers)

*arrived late at the Meeting

IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk, General Manager, Assistant to the Town Clerk.

DECLARATION on entering the Confidential section - each Councillor present was asked to declare to the Chairman that there were no other persons present, nor would be present, who were not entitled to be (hearing or seeing), and/or recording the Meeting. All Members made a positive Declaration.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

*Noted That Councillor Mrs M Ewings joined the Meeting during consideration of the following item.

209. TENANCY MATTER

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

The Committee considered the Report of the Town Clerk (Appendix 6) in connection with the above and was further advised of progress in connection with the various matters listed and options available regarding the request made.

RECOMMENDED THAT, by way of a good will gesture, should the tenant choose to renew their lease, the Council offer a revised rent for the first year of the tenancy in the sum as listed in paragraph 3.2 of the report.

Noted That in connection with other premises the meeting was advised, for information only, of discussions taking place with a tenant who wished to move properties and associated requirements/ obligations on the parties.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

210. CAPITAL WORKS PROGRESS REPORT

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

The Committee received an oral update from the General Manager with regard the current capital works, it being recognised that, at this point, the implications of the current lockdown were not known fully.

Guildhall Public Realm works:

- timelines anticipated for completion and associated critical paths/dependencies/risks;
- proposals to maintain the grassed area and aspirations around car park opening;
- the need for a new ticket machine (cost in the order of £ 3,000);
- confirmation that the works were still within the (revised) budget.

Guildhall Gateway Centre;

- issues and challenges facing the contractor arising from Coronavirus and next steps regarding interpretation;
- timetabling for various upcoming works including gas supply and lift installation;

- previously identified damp issues which were being attended to;
- delay to the laying of flooring in some areas until such times as the damp issues had been fully resolved.

Noted That in the discussion arising from consideration of the above a Member drew attention to matters relating to the local Category 1 Responder response to Coronavirus issues including test/vaccine arrangements and anticipated grants for pandemic impacted businesses.

The Meeting closed at 6.32pm

Signed:

Dated:
CHAIRMAN