

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting of the **BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY 14th JULY, 2020 at 5.00pm** conducted remotely via Zoom and Youtube

PRESENT

Councillor A Hutton (Chairman)
Councillor P Williamson (Vice Chairman)

Councillors Ms L Crawford, Mrs M Ewings,
Mrs A Johnson, H Smith and P Ward (immediate
past Mayor).

Ward Members - Councillors J Ellis, A Lewis,
Mrs U Mann, J Moody, G Parker, B Smith, P Squire
(Observers)

IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk, General Manager, Assistant to the
Town Clerk, Market Reeve, Town Hall & Events
Manager

443. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence, all Members of the Committee were present.

444. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT the Minutes (Appendix 1) of the Meeting of the Budget & Policy Committee held on Tuesday 2nd June, 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

445. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

446. CORPORATE SERVICE PLAN

The Committee considered the Draft 2020/21 Corporate Service Plan and Organisational Risk Register (Appendix 2).

The Corporate Service Plan and accompanying organisational Risk Register had been significantly amended to take account of the Coronavirus pandemic. Attention was drawn, in particular, to the

challenging financial situation of the Town Council, which had been due to several factors, including:

- that whilst Government had provided substantial support to businesses by way of Coronavirus grants, loans, lost income relief and rate relief these were not available to local Councils;
- the sudden, and dramatic loss of commercial income (which constituted 2/3rds all Council income) since the start of the lockdown due to the necessary closing of facilities such as the Pannier Market, Town Hall and Butchers' Hall; together with
- the loss of commercial rental income received, due to the deferred rent scheme the Council had made available to support its commercial tenants. Combined these meant the Council was losing up to in the order of £250,000 per quarter which was not sustainable;
- the Council was nearing the end of a 7 year Town Centre regeneration capital programme, as such capital reserves were fully committed;
- Councils were prevented, by law, from borrowing money to meet revenue commitments, they were similarly prevented from using any proceeds from the sale of assets for such purposes;
- that decisions would need to be taken on which projects could proceed, which might not proceed, and which would proceed in a different way to previously anticipated.

In the absence of either Government intervention (such as had been introduced to support principal Councils) and/or a prompt and material increase in economic activity/reduction in pandemic risk, it was difficult to anticipate how/if the Council could meet all its obligations in year. If it did succeed, it was still anticipated that it would enter the next financial year in a position unacceptable to the External Auditor (by virtue of the deployment of the General Reserve (£400,000)) and to contracted funding partners by virtue of repurposing agreed sinking funds (i.e. £150,000).

Consequently, and notwithstanding the ongoing approach of the Council to maintain prudent financial management practices, the unexpected and existential nature of the Coronavirus pandemic now necessitated reliance on external factors, aligned to an

unprecedented in-year programme of savings and cutbacks. Officers were working on proposals to maximise savings (also identify potential revenue generation opportunities) which would be brought before the Committee shortly.

The Service Plan therefore also represented the start of a process to remove, reduce or defer some prior initiatives and reprioritise all activities to focus on financial resilience for the foreseeable future. It was also acknowledged that the operation of the Council, 6 posts short of the full establishment (to make savings), also meant both organisational capacity and some staff were under considerable pressure.

With regard to the organisational Risk Register concern was expressed that, in normal circumstances, a scoring (after mitigation) of 12 would be considered likely the highest that could be 'accepted' for any length of time. However, the Council presently had 1 risk at 20, 4 at 16 and 2 at 12. These represented a major and unacceptable level of risk, and the measures outlined in the Service Plan were a necessary beginning to addressing the continually developing issues occasioned by the pandemic.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council;

- i. Endorse and adopt the Corporate Service Plan as the basis for the delivery of related Council Services 2020-2021, and the accompanying remedial measures to address the impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic;
- ii. Endorse and adopt the Tavistock Town Council Organisational Risk Register as submitted;
- iii. Write to the principal authorities (WDBC & DCC) outlining the difficult and dangerous situation in which the Council found itself, and seeking the pass through of some of the Coronavirus support provided by Government to them to support local services to the Community.

Noted That:- Section C7 of the Risk Register required a correction as it should show 4, (not 3 as currently) for 'severity', therefore the score had changed from 12 to 16.

447. CAPITAL FINANCE

The Committee considered the report (Appendix 3 plus Rolling Capital programme (Appendix 4)) of the Town Clerk in connection with the above which represented a scoping/holding report pending greater clarity on capital project progress and also the revenue position (above).

A revised programme for the Guildhall works was to be issued shortly in view of the reduction of social distancing to 1m and the criticality of delivery to time/budget for both that and the public realm project were stressed.

Arising from consideration of the above reference was made, in particular, to:

- The difficulties of preparing robust financial statements at a time of dynamic and unpredictable change, nationally and locally, across capital and revenue income and expenditure;
- The focus of the Rolling Capital Programme was now necessarily on the two projects in hand;
- The limitations on Council funding imposed by Government;
- Areas where savings might/might not be made and the challenges of managing a (at best) likely 'no reserve' scenario;
- The critical paths of Council income – not least September quarter day when third quarter rents became due; and March 2021 when deferred rents became due;
- the options available for reducing expenditure across the organisation;
- further reports being made on an ongoing basis regarding the financial position.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council:

- a) note the current situation and receive further reports on the financial status of the organisation to inform financial planning;
- b) in the circumstances commission its Accountant to provide ongoing review and reporting of the financial position of the Council for the remainder of the financial year.

448. PANNIER MARKET: TOWN/BUTCHERS' HALL & EVENTS

The Committee received and considered the following status reports, in connection with the operation of the respective services, and associated potential financial impacts:-

- a) Market Reeve (Appendix 5);
Appreciation was expressed to the team for the work undertaken to achieve the re-opening of the Market. The report set out, in particular, the loss of income projected by the Markets Team - anticipated to be iro £250,000 over the course of the financial year.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council;

- endorse the interim proposed charging structure – a rent free two week period from reopening on 2nd July, then half rent for 4 weeks with a full review after the second week of half rent;
- instruct the Market Reeve to undertake an extensive review, after a six week trading period, to ascertain the next phase of re-opening on the basis outlined;
- following the above review (ie as at 6 weeks) the Reeve ascertain trade/footfall and determine timescales for returning to full rent and whether there is a case for an increase in trading days, and whether other Council assets can be utilised to facilitate the next stage of returning traders.

- b) Town Hall & Events Manager (Appendix 6)
In response to a question, reference was made, in particular, to the location and availability, of welfare facilities for the various departmental staff.

RECOMMENDED THAT authority be delegated to the Town Hall & Events Manager with regard to the operation of the re-opening of the Town Hall and Butchers' Hall conditional it was undertaken in line with Government guidance and Council Policy.

449. BEDFORD SQUARE TRADING & THE FARMERS' MARKET

The Committee considered the report of the Market Reeve (Appendix 7) in connection with the above.

Previous arrangements were outlined, with particular reference to the Farmers' Market and its historic trading pattern and arrangements. Following consultation with the Market organisers agreement had been reached, in principle, that the next two markets would be without charge. Thereafter on/from Saturday 22nd August, 2020 a reduced (from normal commercial rates) fee of £250 would be applied and Council staff would erect/dismantle marquees to assist offsetting the fee proposed.

There was consensus the Farmers Market represented a valued service and that the provisionally agreed arrangement (see above) represented a proportionate and fair approach to both parties.

RECOMMENDED THAT the phased introduction of charging for the Farmers' Market on Bedford Square be endorsed on the basis outlined above.

Noted That reference was also made to:-

- the need for Tavistock Town Council to generate income, in view of discussions earlier in the Meeting, particularly on prime trading days;
- that the arrangements would increase flexibility regarding other traders seeking to use Bedford Square, on a more commercial basis;
- that the usage of The Meadows as a trading area was also being considered as an alternative to Bedford Square and Butchers' Hall;
- that trading in the Pannier Market perimeter was not a realistic option, due to issues with social distancing;
- the work undertaken by two councillors in sourcing a 'video' of the Market reopening which was commended.

450. TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE PUBLIC REALM

The Committee considered the report of the General Manager (Appendix 8) in connection with the above. It was confirmed that a meeting with the contractors had taken place that day, with no changes identified.

The General Manager, and contractor, were commended on the value engineering that had been undertaken and the main changes made were outlined.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council approve a virement not exceeding £ 10,000 from the Property Maintenance Budget, should it be necessary to complete the revised works on the Public Realm.

Noted That in response to a question the location of cycle racks in the town was outlined.

451. GUILDHALL COURTROOM

The Committee received and noted an oral update from the General Manager in connection with the options and revised costings following preparatory work in the Courtroom.

In the ensuing discussion, reference was made, in particular, to the challenges which had been encountered with regard to;

- the plasterwork in the Courtroom, which had been much thicker than anticipated, and had increased costs potentially by up to iro £45,000;
- the discovery of an historic fireplace which had caused delays to progress, in addition to the delays caused by the COVID pandemic. A solution for this had been agreed with the Conservation Officer, however the costs would have an impact on contingency funding;
- an application to VIRIDOR for a grant towards the costs of the fit out of the shop, it was unclear whether it might be successful;
- that due to cost constraints some items had had to be stripped out of the specification, such as the Audio Visual (AV) facility, although this could potentially be added in at a later date when budgets allowed (the infrastructure being in place);
- that whilst finances were very tight currently, the contract needed to progress to budget;
- that it was anticipated that a contingency fund of between £ 30,000 - £ 50,000 would be left which was extremely modest in relation to a project of this scale/stage of delivery;
- reference by a Member to the possibility of s106 monies being available – the General Manager undertook to contact Tavistock Heritage Trust in connection with same.

Noted That - following a query raised with regard to potential available funding from S106 funds, the General Manager undertook to contact Tavistock Heritage Trust.

452. ANNUAL AUDIT 2019-20

The Committee received, considered and noted report of the Town Clerk (Appendix 9) and accompanying report of the Internal Auditor to the Council (Appendix 10).

The Internal Auditor was generally satisfied with the Council's performance and clarification had been provided on each of the routine issues which had been raised. Considering the difficult circumstances it represented, on balance, a positive report for the past financial year.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council note the findings of the Internal Auditor's Report and endorse the consequential actions.

453. MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CONSULTATION

The Committee received the report of the Town Clerk (Appendix 11) in connection with the LGA Consultation on a Model Code of Conduct. It was confirmed that whilst the new Code would be introduced to principal Councils, if adopted it would then likely apply also to Town/Parish Councils.

In the discussion arising reference was made, variously, to areas where representations might be made regarding:

- the desirability or otherwise of a separate Code (or section of the Code) for social media usage, in view of the increased use of such platforms in recent years;
- whether the sanctions proposed were sufficient;
- the lack of definition of the term 'bringing the Council into disrepute';
- that the Code should be written in plain English, and have phrasing such as "A Councillor must" or "A Councillor must not", for the avoidance of doubt.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council welcome the consultation on a draft Model Member Code of Conduct from the Local Government Association, whilst responding commenting:

- a) the recommended sanctions for serious misconduct were inadequate to deal with the more serious cases of misconduct and poor behaviour. As such the LGA be invited to canvass Government to adopt the provisions as recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life;

- b) In response to the questions listed in the Executive Summary the Council respond as follows;
- Q1 To a great extent
 - Q3 Passive tense
 - Q4 To a great extent' for all 12 obligations
 - Q6 Each specific obligation followed by its relevant guidance'
 - Q10 No
 - Q10a Separate code
- c) And furthermore, copy its response to the sector body, the National Association of Local Councils and Devon Association of same.

454. HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

This item had been included on the agenda following the recent meeting of Council which indicated that up to 3 Councillors might be nominated to feed the views of residents of the Town into the composition of an interpretation board/plaque for the Statue of Sir Francis Drake.

It was reported that the local school population had been surveyed to ascertain what they knew about Sir Francis Drake, colonialisation and related matters. A Member further requested permission to publish an on-line questionnaire to the wider population of Tavistock, to ascertain views. This would involve one-off costs iro £90 for a one-month survey which would allow up to 500 responses that would be collated by the nominated representatives.

RECOMMENDED THAT:

- the three Councillors, who had previously volunteered to feed in the views of Tavistock residents to Tavistock Heritage Trust on prospective content for the composition of the interpretation board/plaque, be nominated, namely Councillors Ms L Crawford, Mrs U Mann, Mrs G Parker;
- that the purchase of Survey Monkey by the Council, for a period of one month, to enable the conduct of the Survey be approved.

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

455. REOPENING THE PANNIER MARKET & TOWN CENTRE

The Committee received an oral update from the General Manager as the Organisational Health & Safety Lead. Attention was drawn, in particular, to the collaboration between Borough Council, BID Co and Town Council, at extreme short notice, to put in place social distancing and other protective measures to support the safe reopening of retail in the Town Centre.

It was reported it had been agreed Tavistock BID Company would leave the current parking restrictions in place for a 2-week period from 4th July, with a review due to take place on either the 17th or 20th July. 'Next steps' would be discussed at the review meeting, mentioned above.

Appreciation was expressed by a nominated Member of the BID Co to the General Manager, and Town Council staff, for their support of BID at short notice and the extent of support and engagement.

456. PUBLIC WORKS LOAN BOARD

It was confirmed that the anticipated drawn down, and receipt date, for the Loan would be Thursday 16th July, 2020.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

457. 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 6.17pm.

The Meeting reconvened at 6.26pm attendance by Councillors and authorised Officers at the Confidential reconvened part of the Meeting was accessed via Zoom.

PRESENT

Councillor A Hutton (Chairman)

Councillor P Williamson (Vice Chairman)

Councillors Ms L Crawford, Mrs M Ewings, Mrs A Johnson, H Smith,

P Ward (immediate past Mayor).

Ward Members:-

Councillors J Ellis, Mrs U Mann, J Moody, G Parker, B Smith, P Squire (Observers).

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 ITEM **FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL**

458. COMMERCIAL LICENCE MATTERS

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

The Committee received an oral report outlining the current position in relation to certain Licence holders of the Council, arising from which it was:-

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council endorse the temporary charging arrangements for the two licensees concerned namely:

- i) Licensee (a) – a review by Officers of the operation of the license in early August;
- ii) Licensee (b) – continuation of the special rate of £20 per day til the end of July based on number of days traded, thereafter a review in anticipation of returning to normal charging (pro rata the period of lockdown).

Noted That pursuant to a query raised at Minute No. 448a the position in relation to a particular business (tenancy) was clarified, the factors comparable to and different from other traders, also that the trader

- had the opportunity to draw down Government financial support;
- had been able to take advantage of the Council's offer of a two-quarter deferred rent scheme;
- was not restricted by the Council regarding opening arrangements in relation to past practice;

- would form part of the upcoming (September/October) review of commercial tenants.

The Meeting closed at 6.36pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....

CHAIRMAN