

MINUTES of the Meeting of the **BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY 2nd SEPTEMBER, 2025 at 6.30pm** at the **COUNCIL CHAMBER, DRAKE ROAD, TAVISTOCK**

PRESENT

Councillor Mrs A Johnson	Chairman & Deputy Mayor (ex-officio)
Councillor J Moody	Vice Chairman

Councillor S Hipsey	Mayor (ex-officio)
Councillors R Poppe, B Smith, P Ward (ex-officio)	

IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk, General Manager, Assistant to the Town Clerk

121. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An Apology for Absence had been received from Councillor Ms M Ewings.

122. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT the Minutes of the Meeting of the Budget & Policy Committee held on Tuesday 22nd July, 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman (Appendix 1).

123. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

124. COMMUNITY ECONOMIC PLAN

The Committee received and considered the Report of the Town Clerk (Appendix 2) in respect of the offer made by West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) to facilitate the drafting of a Community Economic Plan for the Town.

In the discussion arising it was noted that:

- i. similar Plans had been produced/were under way in other towns in the South Hams, with varying approaches to focus. It was stressed that such a Plan for Tavistock should very much centre on the local economy, identifying gaps/needs and initiatives for economic support and improvement;
- ii. a body of evidence would appropriately need to be built with regard to projects and initiatives for the Town;
- iii. WDBC had undertaken to provide administrative, co-ordinating and organisational support, as well as providing support for social media and consultations etc. The Town Council would be expected to actively participate at and contribute to meetings and, in due

course, become the Plan 'owner', albeit delivery would be shared according to initiative type and allocation;

- iv. This was understood to be the first such Plan in West Devon and, subject to timings, could help support the Tavistock BID Company's quest for renewal in 2026 alongside town centre resilience and economic revitalisation;
- v. it could be helpful if previous benchmarking exercises undertaken by WDBC were re-visited/re-instated for the Town, to help provide qualitative, quantitative and comparator evidence over time;
- vi. there could be a significant commitment by those involved, most especially in the early stages;
- vii. the recruitment/appointment selection arrangements for participants would be undertaken by WDBC following consultation;
- viii. the importance of linking to the range of businesses within the Town and wider parish – large and small, both inside and outwith the Town Centre, was emphasised.

The Committee welcomed the proposal, expressed appreciation for the input of WDBC, and stressed the importance of a rigorous evidence led Economic Plan for the Town to provide a basis for future economic initiatives over the short, medium and long terms.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council:

- a) endorse in principle the approach as set out in the Report, with particular regard to the criteria set out in para 1.6;
- b) a presentation to an informal Meeting of the Committee (at which all Councillors would be invited to attend with representatives of the BID Co) be arranged to receive a presentation from representatives of the SH/WD Economic Development Team outlining the process and next steps.

125. BUDGET PREPARATION & PRECEPT SETTING 2026/27

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk (Appendix 3) in connection with the above. It was reported that more detailed information would be brought forward after the half-year (end September) mark.

In the discussion arising particular reference was made, inter alia, to:

- i. The challenges set out in para 3.6 of the Report including:
 - o that the annual Rolling Capital Programme (RCP) contribution had been reduced by 90% the prior year to mitigate precept increases, however this was neither sustainable nor safe on an ongoing basis;
 - o that the General Manager had previously referenced in the relevant Service Plan significant maintenance/repair (and similar) costs that were anticipated in the short/medium term;
 - o the extent to which prudence suggested the Council should appropriately start setting aside funds to allow for the impact of Local Government Reorganisation and to 'future proof' the needs of the Town;
 - o that, in the prevailing circumstances, the Council would need, in line with previous decisions, to continue prioritising projects and identifying funding for same. Risks attaching to current schemes such as the Multi Use Wheeled Sports Facility were noted.
- ii. that a 1% pa increase in the Precept typically generated £10,000 in income for the Council;
- iii. the significant impact of recent factors such as Employer National Insurance and National Living Wage uplifts on cost base;
- iv. changing financial circumstances, not least:
 - o declining commercial income (and consequential impact upon General Reserve funding), the extent to which same was temporary and/or structural;
 - o pursuant to the above, the limited scope - due to low General Reserve and EMR (none) reserve levels, to address either current inflationary pressures, or any new calls on resources, without increasing income after a protracted period of savings, mitigations and similar.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council receive the Report and endorse it as a basis for the development of the draft Tavistock Town Council Budget 2026-27.

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

126. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION & DEVOLUTION

It was reported that a Meeting had been held in the Town Hall the previous week, as facilitated by West Devon Borough Council (WDBC).

At the Meeting it was noted that:

- Bids/proposals were anticipated, as a minimum, from the Districts (a collective Bid but not supported by Exeter CC), Exeter City Council and DCC respectively which were outlined;
- the submission date for proposals to the Government was 28th November;
- as a consequence of any successful Bid it was anticipated that Councillor numbers across South Hams and West Devon (and throughout the County) would decrease significantly.

It was further reported that the scheduled Meeting between Tavistock Town Council and West Devon Borough Council would likely be postponed by WDBC until the end of the year ie after the 28th November submission date. Any meetings of the Town Council's LGR Working Party might be affected accordingly.

127. URGENT MATTER BROUGHT FORWARD AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN

No matters were brought forward at this time.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

128. 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 FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

129. MOLLY OWEN 'HOUSE'/CENTRE & RELATED MATTERS

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

The Committee considered and endorsed the Briefing Note of the General Manager (Appendix 4) in respect of current and future usage of The Molly Owen Centre and the house within the grounds.

Reference was made, in particular, to the:

- Methodology adopted, factors taken into consideration and those not, as set out in the report including functional considerations over usage, present and potential future needs, site security and finance;
- previous views raised with regard to the perceived under-utilisation of parts of the 'main' building;

- lack of available funding to make significant changes and upgrades to the premises;
- proposed visits for Councillors in November 2025, followed by a further visit in April 2026, in order to provide a fuller understanding of what was currently being delivered from the premises, and the potential for other part uses. This would allow for a consistent view from all Councillors and Officers for the use of the property over the next 3–5 years;
- that a further report would be brought forward, following the 2nd visit in April 2026;
- that TaviHelps currently needed to utilise only the ground floor of the 'house' for which there was written confirmation.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council approve the sequencing of activities/arrangements as described below:

- a) Officers to facilitate two site meetings in November 2025 so Members can familiarise themselves with the MOC footprint, which will provide Officers the opportunity to explain the rationale around the existing Depot functionality, whilst also describing the planned short term modifications and what provision needs to be made for medium term property maintenance.
- b) Officers to implement works to modify the space highlighted in Fig. 3, relating to security and removal of the jacuzzi and to undertake significant clearance and reinstatement works to the outside space as shown in figure 4. (Note: to be actioned between the period of Dec 25-March 26, utilising inhouse resource and property/ground maintenance budgets)
- c) Officers to arrange a site meeting in April 26 for Members to view the space post the works outlined in b).
- d) Submit a report post c) regarding next steps appertaining to utilisation of space.
- e) To extend the licence of TaviHelps until the end of July 26 pursuant to the further report as listed in d) above ensuring such areas as effective communication, ventilation and liability for NNDR are addressed.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

130. TENANCY OR STAFFING MATTER(S)

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

- a) **Tavistock Museum** – it was reported that a response had been received from the Museum Trustees following consultation, and confirming acceptance of the revised wording, as requested by the

Council following correspondence, for the new Lease which was being drafted. In the circumstances a break clause was not now required.

The Town Council's Solicitors would now progress the drafting of the new Lease.

- b) **Staffing** – it was reported that various staffing matters had recently arisen, as follows:
- i. the recruitment exercise for a new Town Hall & Events Manager, Office and Finance Manager and Administration and Democratic Services Assistant;
 - ii. that one of the Town Hall & Markets team would be taking maternity leave shortly;
 - iii. that there had been a change in the working pattern for another member of staff in the Works/Guildhall team;
 - iv. that a member of staff from the Admin Team was now on long-term sick leave (potentially 6 – 8 weeks minimum).

In an effort to alleviate the pressure in the admin office it had been agreed that:

- the office opening hours would change to 9am – 12 noon Monday to Friday for the foreseeable future;
- outside of these periods there would be an answerphone service only, with messages being responded to at the earliest opportunity

It was hoped that the measures above would help take pressure off the remaining 2 members of staff.

- c) **Duke Street Premises: Proceedings** – it was reported that in the absence of a reasonable or fair offer from the debtor, the final stage of proceedings, as previously reported, had been issued - a Court date remained to be set.
- d) **East End Stores Premises** - it was reported that a request had been received to end the Lease, which had been due to expire in 2030, due to a change in personal circumstances. Liaison was taking place with the tenant to see if another tenant could be found, or a buyer for the business, alongside an offer of support in the normal way. Reference was further made to the history of the current lease.
- e) **Insurance/Staffing matter** – following a query raised, reference was made to progress in connection with the above.

131. MULTI-USE WHEELED SPORTS AREA

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

It was reported that:

- i. a number of consultations had taken place and, subject to other factors, a revision to the original design was being drafted by Canvass Spaces;
- ii. concerns continued with regard to the extent contract deadlines were/were not being met alongside what appeared likely to be a significant shortfall in projected partner and other funding sources with potential associated implications for deliverability. An outline was given of how alternative funds might be raised, but this better case scenario would still leave a likely shortfall of not less than (possibly significantly more) £60,000;
- iii. in a 'worse case' scenario it was estimated that the current skate park could still have 3–4 years working life with the support of stakeholders and users;
- iv. Taviskate was now a CIC;
- v. it was hoped that any new multi-use wheeled sports facility, if fundable, could be built by 2027 with the 2026 original target being now most likely unachievable.

The Meeting closed at 7.48pm

Signed:

Dated:

CHAIRMAN