

AGENDA ITEM No 2

MINUTES of the Meeting of the **BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY 13th January, 2026 at 6.30pm** at the **COUNCIL CHAMBER, DRAKE ROAD, TAVISTOCK**

PRESENT

Councillor Mrs A Johnson
Councillor J Moody

Chairman & Deputy Mayor (ex-officio)
Vice Chairman

Councillor S Hipsey
Councillor P Ward

Mayor (ex-officio)
Immediate past Mayor (ex-officio)

Councillor B Smith.

Ward Member(s): Councillor A Hutton.

IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk, General Manager, Office and Finance Manager, Administration and Democratic Support Officer.

254. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor Ms M Ewings.

255. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT the Minutes of the Meeting of the Budget & Policy Committee held on Tuesday 2nd December, 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman (Appendix 1).

256. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

257. BUDGET PREPARATION & PRECEPT SETTING 2026-2027

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk in connection with the above (Appendix 2) which had been prepared in line with the previous directions of the Committee and Council.

In the ensuing discussion reference was made, in particular, to the challenges posed by revenue and capital costs - most particularly those associated with taking on the Guildhall Public Conveniences which comprised the majority of the Precept uplift. It was noted that the decision to take on responsibility for these premises had followed

notification of intended closure by the Borough previously and a subsequent Town Council resident survey which identified the Guildhall facility as priority for transfer and retention by the community. The importance of setting aside adequate funds to protect and maintain important heritage buildings in the Town Centre through the Rolling Capital Programme was acknowledged, including the allocation of funds toward the Abbey Remains Project and match funding for play equipment in the Meadows.

A press release regarding the taking on of the public conveniences in Guildhall Square would be issued when details had been finalised.

RECOMMENDED THAT: Tavistock Town Council adopt the Budget and Precept 2026-27 as set out, incorporating the schedule of fees and charges previously circulated and agreed.

258. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) – ASSERTION 10

The Committee received and considered the report of the Office and Finance Manager in connection with work consequential upon new requirements attaching to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025-26 and beyond (Appendix 3).

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council approve;

- a) the preparatory work as necessary to secure compliance with the requirements of the new Assertion 10 as listed above and, in particular, endorse use of the NALC Template Information Technology (IT) Policy for the Council at this time,
- b) A further report being brought before the next round of meetings, including a Draft IT Policy for consideration, in order that the Council may determine final arrangements.

Noted That: it was agreed a proportionate approach be applied to the population of the discretionary/choice elements of the IT Policy.

259. DEVON LIBRARY SERVICE - CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the Report of the Town Clerk in connection with the above (Appendix 4).

In the discussion arising reference was made, variously to the importance of as many residents as possible participating in the online survey. The importance of the Library Service was stressed, not only for the lending of books, but also the health and wellbeing of the community its contribution to education and a range of other benefits.

A Member had made some suggestions regarding the content of a letter which could be submitted by way of Town Council response arising from which it was:

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council respond to Devon County Council in the following terms:

Tavistock Town Council strongly supports the continued operation of Tavistock Library at its current level of service. The library is a vital civic asset serving both the town and a wide rural hinterland, providing access not only to books but also to digital services, education, cultural activity, and professional support for residents of all ages.

The library plays a key role in supporting wellbeing, reducing social isolation, promoting lifelong learning, and providing access to essential services for those without reliable internet access at home. For many rural residents, it represents their primary point of access to information and support.

As Tavistock continues to grow through new housing development, a fully functioning, well-staffed library is increasingly important in helping new residents integrate, engage with the community, and develop a sense of belonging. The library therefore contributes directly to social cohesion and community resilience.

While acknowledging the financial pressures faced by Devon County Council, Tavistock Town Council is concerned about proposals that could lead to reduced staffed opening hours, increased reliance on volunteers or unstaffed access, or a shift towards community managed models without secure long-term funding. Evidence and sector guidance suggest such approaches risk reducing accessibility and weakening support for vulnerable and digitally excluded users.

The Council places particular emphasis on the library's role in supporting children and families. Regular access to books and reading in supported settings is widely recognised as essential to early child development, literacy, concentration, and social skills. Trained staff play a crucial role in delivering these benefits.

Tavistock Town Council therefore urges Devon County Council to maintain current staffed opening hours, preserve professional staffing, recognise the library's wider social value, and continue meaningful engagement with local councils and communities beyond the current consultation process.

Noted That: Councillor S Hipsey left the Meeting at this point

260. INTERNAL AUDIT/AUDITOR

The Committee received and considered the Report of the Town Clerk in connection with obligations arising in connection with the requirements of the Practitioners Guide and related matters (Appendix 5).

RECOMMENDED THAT

a) in view of the independence of IAC from the Council and related bodies, professionally, personally and financially in accordance with applicable definitions, alongside demonstrable competence within the sector (including holding office on the sector led Internal Audit Forum and relevant professional qualifications and experience); and

b) subject to:

i) adoption of the programme of work/audit programme as listed in the Report;

ii) agreeing the enclosed letter of engagement;

iii) confirmation of continuing professional indemnity insurance;

c) the retention of Internal Audit services be treated as a specialist service for the purposes of procurement; and the services of IAC Audit and Consultancy be retained by Tavistock Town Council for a further 3 years for the period 2026-2029, and a letter of re-engagement by the Council be issued accordingly.

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

261. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN DEVON

There was no significant new information arising in connection with the Devon wide submissions for the reorganisation of Local Government in Devon, which were presently under consideration by Government. A preliminary meeting had been held with West Devon Borough Council with a view to seeking agreement to protect critical transport, cultural and leisure/recreation infrastructure in the Town that had been identified by the Town Council. A further report would be made when a response to the points raised had been received.

262. TAVISTOCK HERITAGE ALLIANCE

The Committee considered and noted the Notes of the Meeting of the Tavistock Heritage Alliance (Appendix 6) held on 5th November, 2025

263. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN

No matters were brought forward at this time.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

264. 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

265. ASSETS/PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

(**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 an oral update from the General Manager in connection with the above with particular regard to timing of the transfer, one outstanding point requiring clarification from the other party and prospective future operating arrangements. The Borough Council had indicated it was committed to retaining and operating the other sets of public conveniences open in the Town for the next financial year.

The General Manager was thanked for his diligence in progressing the matter toward conclusion.

The Meeting closed at 7.20pm

Signed:

Dated:
CHAIRMAN