

AGENDA ITEM No 6

MINUTES of the Meeting of **BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY 12th JULY, 2022** at **5.30pm** in **THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DRAKE ROAD, TAVISTOCK**

PRESENT

Councillor J Ellis **Chairman**
Councillor H Smith **Vice Chairman**

Councillor P Ward (Mayor)
Councillors Ms M Ewings, Mrs A Johnson, B Smith.

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

108. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor A Hutton.

109. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT the Minutes of the Meeting of the Budget & Policy Committee held on Tuesday 14th June, 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman (Appendix 1).

110. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point in the Meeting.
Note - Councillor Ms M Ewings made subsequent Declarations of Interest at Minute Nos. 112 and 117 below.

ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

111. BANKING

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk. (Appendix 2) in connection with the above, following the announcement of the closure of the Tavistock Barclays Bank plc branch scheduled for 23rd September 2022.

The Report detailed 3 questions, as provided by Barclays Bank in its e-mail of the 16th June 2022, as follows;

- i. What do you believe will be the biggest impact of the closure of the Tavistock branch on the local community?
- ii. What do you believe will be the biggest impact of the closure of the Tavistock branch on customers of the branch?

- iii. What alternative ways to bank do you believe need to be provided to help customers and the community adapt to this change?

Concerns and comments were made in connection with the above including:

- the impact the closure would have on various members of the community who were unable to either use online banking services, or travel to the nearest Branches (in Liskeard or Plymouth whilst they still subsisted) – adverse effects on the digitally excluded, the vulnerable, those with disabilities and/or who lacked access to affordable transport etc, which could lead to financial exclusion;
- the anticipated (in)ability of the Post Office in Tavistock to cope with this additional workload in view of continuing performance issues and unscheduled closures etc at the branch over an extended period of time;
- lack of clarity regarding
 - the arrangements Barclays had put in place to monitor post office service standards through their preferred agent (post office);
 - the contingencies should the agency service prove unsatisfactory.
- The number/extent of transactions being dealt with by the branch overall (as opposed to the limited number of people cited who solely used it);
- the added pressure the closure would have on small businesses and shops in the town, especially those which had high levels of cash transactions both in terms of depositing funds, but also accessing change for tills etc;
- the detrimental impact of, and short sightedness associated with, the loss of cash handling and personal banking services, also the loss of a free cash dispensing service;
- disappointment that Barclays were not prepared to work toward a hub service to protect customers long term interests;
- anecdotally the number of parking tickets being issued to those utilising the car park to the rear of the Post Office in Tavistock, due to customers' extended time spent queueing for service (maximum time allowed 20 minutes);
- the unsustainability (and for some impracticality) of customers choosing to travel to other Post Offices in the area (eg Mary Tavy, Whitchurch and Princetown) to avoid the long queues and service levels encountered in the Tavistock branch;

- the uncertainty of whether or not the Post Office branch itself in Tavistock would remain, especially in view of the foregoing and the large number of Post Office closures in the area.

The Committee proceeded to note the discussions being undertaken to provide an 'information' desk by Barclays in the Pannier Market, to provide limited personal banking (but not cash or cheque) legacy services to customers for an unspecified period.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council:

- a) Respond to the 3 questions, as raised by Barclays Bank and set out in para 3.2 of the Report as otherwise outlined above;
- b) Endorse a Council commitment in principle to support both ongoing cash provision and a future banking hub facility for the Town, should the need arise, and incorporate same within the Council Strategic Plan 2017 – 23;
- c) Note the work being undertaken by its Officers in connection with services to the Council itself.

Noted That the Town Clerk undertook to write to the business operating the car park to the rear of the Post Office in Tavistock to request that the allowed stay time be increased from 20 minutes, to minimise the number of customers receiving a parking ticket.

112. TAVISTOCK TO PLYMOUTH RAILWAY

The Committee considered a request received from Devon County Council for the Town Council to support the re-opening of the Tavistock to Plymouth Railway (Appendix 3).

In the discussion arising particular reference was made to:

- how effective, or not, the Tavistock to Plymouth line would be as a standalone link;
- that the initial focus would be on re-opening of the Tavistock to Plymouth line and once this was achieved, then plans would be put in place for the re-opening of the Tavistock to Okehampton line;
- that a meeting was planned in September 2022 between the Tavi Rail Group, the 3 Plymouth MPs and the local MP, together with invited guests to announce the plans.

RECOMMENDED THAT Tavistock Town Council provide a letter of support for the re-opening of the Tavistock to Plymouth Railway line, as requested, aligned to the 5 bullet points contained within the request.

Noted that Councillor Ms M Ewings Declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in this matter by virtue of being West Devon Borough Council's representative on the Tavi Rail Group.

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

113. MARKET ROAD UPDATE

The Committee received an oral update from the General Manager in respect of the ongoing arrangements for the Market Road works, with particular reference being made to professional consultancy services, project timings/dependencies and consequential operational and related safety matters. More information would be available through the normal reporting to Council.

114. TENNIS CLUB WORKS UPDATE

The Committee an oral update from the General Manager in respect of the ongoing works being undertaken at the Tennis Club which were nearing completion. More information would be made available through the normal reporting to Council.

Noted That a press release, and social media posts, would be issued by the Works Department to publicise the Town Council's contribution to the refurbishment of the Tennis Courts, on completion.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

115. 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 RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

116. GUILDHALL GATEWAY CENTRE ADVISORY FORUM

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

The Committee received the Notes of the Meeting of the Guildhall Gateway Centre Advisory Forum held on 21st June, 2022 (Appendix 4).

In the ensuing discussion particular reference was made to;

- the mutually agreed need for more relevant and detailed financial information to be provided to allow for meaningful budgeting to be

undertaken later in the year, and the plans being put in place to make this information available in the correct format;

- a request for an additional £ 2,500 to allow for recruitment of paid staff to cover for the Centre Manager's absences;
- regularisation of the Centre's opening hours in accordance with the governing agreements between the parties.

RECOMMENDED THAT:-

- a) (Note this recommendation is from the Forum to both the Council and Tavistock Heritage Trust (THT) (GCA 4 refers))
 - a financial sub-Group be established comprising two members each of Tavistock Heritage Trust and Tavistock Town Council to meet at an early opportunity (and as necessary thereafter) to review financial reporting formats and necessary management information together with the availability of software, or other options to support the financial management of the Trust;
 - enquiries be made by the Town Clerk to identify options which might support the foregoing;
 - Both parties finalise their financial information and cost projections for the current financial year by end September at the latest to enable proper budgeting for the next financial year (and greater certainty over the current year);
 - THT liaise with the General Manager to ensure that, as between the parties, full insurance cover was in place;

- b) the Council agree to the making available of an additional £2,500 to meet the costs of engaging casual cover staff for the Gateway Centre strictly contingent on THT using its best endeavours to recover that cost by other means (GCA 6 refers).

- c) The Council endorse core opening for the Guildhall Gateway Centre of Tuesday-Saturday 10am-4.00pm subject to THT advising at the earliest opportunity should it be necessary for any changes to be considered/submitted (GCA 7 refers).

The Committee was further advised of related recent (previously circulated) communications from THT that had been received subsequent to the Meeting of the Forum/preparation of the Committee agenda, in connection with:-

A Town Marketing

Pursuant to Minute No 309 (2021-22) a request had been received from THT. Namely, Town Council consent was sought to the temporary utilisation of 'unrestricted funds' held by THT in accordance with the agreement between the parties, in order to defray expenses (in connection with the above) pending drawdown of a grant.

It was understood that a private party had warranted any other cash flow issues in the interim and this was therefore a short term measure to facilitate cash flow, pending receipt of a grant payment from Devon County Council.

In the ensuing discussion it was noted that 'unrestricted funds' held by THT were in practice funds specifically hypothecated, through the agreement, to be applied to the Guildhall Project (hence the requirement for Council consent to any other use in view of the implications to the tax payer).

In view of the safeguards outlined by THT it was:

RECOMMENDED THAT, on this occasion, Tavistock Town Council consent to the use by THT of Guildhall project funds designated as 'unrestricted' (under the agreement between the parties) on a temporary basis in view of:

- the assurances received;
- and subject to THT undertaking to provide written confirmation to the Council when repatriation of the monies took place.

Noted That the sum at hand was in the order of £21,400.

B Guildhall Gateway Centre Staffing

A request had been received from THT, in view of it not currently holding sufficient funds to cover the cost, to renew an employment contract for a further 12 month term.

In the ensuing discussion particular reference was made to:

- The extent of the Councils allocated overall project support budget (£35,000);
- The background and history to the project;
- The commitment recently received from the partner to fully involve the Council in all decisions of a financial nature on a full disclosure basis;

- The shared commitment between the partners to have fully transparent financial reporting in place by September, 2022.

It was therefore

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council accede to the request on the following basis, namely subject to THT confirming/agreeing to:

- i) The rate of pay, duties, role profile, terms and conditions of the post and related matters are unchanged from when the post was first advertised;
- ii) There will be no variations to the foregoing ((i) refers) without Council approval in writing;
- iii) A representative of the Council being involved in the appraisal and target setting/work programming processes for the post holder;
- iv) That any involvement by the postholder in any evening (or other functions) which do not take place during the agreed daytime opening hours of the Gateway Centre:
 - shall only occur either with the consent of the Council, or
 - where it is possible to evidence that the event makes a sufficient surplus (the quantum of which shall be agreed with the Council) over all costs, including staffing;
 - and no overtime or extra time payments or similar shall be incurred without the consent of the Council*.

* Note - in view of the financial implications to the Council and reflecting a need for greater clarity around prospective project income streams.

117. STAFFING

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

The Committee considered the case for recognising the contribution made by staff to support the Council's community activities during a period of under resourcing (due to a tight labour market) post Covid, and whilst seeking to deliver 'business as usual' including events such as the Garden Festival, Jubilee, Goose Fair and Dickensian, also during a time of economic pressure.

In the circumstances it was:

RECOMMENDED THAT, on a without prejudice basis in recognition of the contribution of its staff Tavistock Town Council offer all staff who have been in situ for not less than 2 months as at 25th December 2022 either:

- a) 1 additional days leave to be used by 31st march, 2023; or
- b) A non-consolidated payment equating to the equivalent of one days pay.

Noted That Councillor Ms M Ewings Declared an Interest in the following item by virtue of a personal relationship, and left the Meeting during the consideration of this matter.

118. TENANCY MATTERS

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

The Town Clerk confirmed that a meeting planned for that day with one of the Council's tenants had not taken place due to the incapacity, by virtue of ill health, of the tenant. An alternative date would be put in place in the coming weeks.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

119. STAFFING

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

It was reported that the following appointments had been made - Financial Administrator post (commencing August), Town Hall & Events Manager post (in situ). Recruitment was in hand for the Duty officer and Support Officer (General Manager) vacancies.

It was acknowledged that, in the context of significant inflation (RPI being 11.7% in May, 2022), both recruitment and retention represented potential risk areas in public services.

120. UTILITY TENDER UPDATE

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

The Committee received an oral update from the General Manager with regard to the letting of the Gas contract (on a 3-year, not 2-year basis), and the challenges being encountered in the letting of the Electricity contract. More information would be made available through the normal reporting to Council.

The Meeting closed at 7.36pm

Signed:

Dated:

CHAIRMAN