

MINUTES of the Meeting of **BUDGET & POLICY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY 16th JULY, 2024** at **6.30pm** in **THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DRAKE ROAD, TAVISTOCK**

PRESENT

Councillor S Hipsey **Chairman & Deputy Mayor ex-officio**
Councillor Mrs A Johnson **Vice Chairman**

Councillor P Ward **Mayor ex-officio**
Councillor A Hutton **Immediate Past Mayor ex-officio**

Councillors Ms M Ewings*, U Mann, R Poppe.

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

*Arrived late at the Meeting

77. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No Apologies for Absence had been received.

78. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT the Minutes of the Meeting of the Budget & Policy Committee held on Tuesday 28th May, 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman (Appendix 1).

79. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The were no Declarations of Interest made at this point in the Meeting.
Note - please see Minute No. 86(d) below.

ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

80. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MOWING OF COUNCIL LAND

The Committee considered the Briefing Note of the Works Manager in connection with the above (Appendix 2).

During the discussion arising, reference was made, in particular, to:

- current arrangements for seasonal cutting/not cutting various areas in Council cemeteries and elsewhere;
- recent wet weather conditions, together with capacity issues, which had extended the usual non-cutting period, thereby resulting in a heavier sward than usual;

- the increased difficulty of carrying out a first cut, following the extended non-cutting period (above refers);
- the differences between wildflower areas and re-wilding areas;
- the value attached to appropriate signage to inform the public of why /how grassed areas were managed. It was hoped that this would provide context to any public concern that cemeteries or other areas were being neglected by providing information explaining the policy and associated environmental principles;
- that it was important that the cut grass was collected, and not left lying on graves/paths etc;
- that any Grass Cutting Policy which the Council might adopt in the future would exclude Whitchurch Down which was subject to it's own Management Plan arrangements.

RECOMMENDED THAT subject to any feedback from the Council, the Works Manager prepare a report setting out - along the lines listed above, potential arrangements in connection for the management by way of cutting of its green open spaces, verges and cemeteries.

*Noted That Councillor Ms M Ewings arrived during consideration of the foregoing item.

ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

81. HEMLOCK WATER DROPWORT

The Committee considered and received the Briefing Note of the Works Manager in respect of the above (Appendix 3).

82. PANNIER MARKET

In the absence of the following Reports, which had been marked as 'to follow' on the Agenda and would now be submitted to Council, the General Manager provided an oral update on both matters:

a) Consultation with Market Traders – 18th June 2024

Reference was made to communication arrangements, historic and prospective, a review of various operating procedures, premise heating/energy use, opening hours and future consultation arrangements.

b) Town Hall & Markets Consultative Group Meeting – 26th June 2024

Reference was made to the appointment of office holders, extensive links to/with the Business Improvement District for the Town, including peripatetic co-location, events, charter market re-branding, promotional activities and partnership working.

Noted That the foregoing documents would be brought forward to the Council Meeting scheduled for Tuesday 30th July, 2024.

83. HERITAGE MEETING

The Committee received and considered the Notes of the Meeting of the Heritage Alliance Group held on 29th May, 2024 (Appendix 4).

Reference was made to:

- the requirements that the building be kept sufficiently heated and ventilated to help offset potential damp and wet/dry rot issues and operation of the associated agreement;
- the significant funding that the Council had provided, over many years through preferential terms, together with the costs of the substantial works which had been undertaken to the infrastructure of the property.

URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman agreed to take the following item as a matter of urgency in view of the timelines involved.

84. DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL CHILDREN'S CENTRE CONSULTATION

The Committee was advised of the timeline for response in connection with the above and associated correspondence sent by the Mayor (Appendix 5 refers) which had been sent on a non-formal basis, recognising that it had not been possible to meet the deadline for response through the normal governance processes.

In the ensuing discussion concerns were raised, in particular with regard to:

- the potential loss of the Children's Centre in Tavistock, which could possibly be replaced by a 'hub' which was unlikely to be in the town. A potential move to Newton Abbot would cause major travel implications for those who needed to access the service but who didn't have access to private transport. Direct public transport to Newton Abbot was not readily available;
- that those families in crisis would not have a local facility they could drop in to, when needed;
- that rather than the changes being proposed being to improve the services provided, they might in fact represent a cost cutting measure to save rent on the current facilities;
- that the consultation proposal suggested that:
 - no appointments would be required, it would be a 'drop in' facility;

- that the service would cover all age groups and services, therefore not specifically for children;
- that face to face consultations might not necessarily be available
- that the Consultation which had been undertaken might have little impact on any final decision

Reference was further made to:

- the meeting which had taken place between the Leaders of West Devon Borough and Devon County Councils, together with the CEO of the County Council and Councillor Leadbetter, earlier that day;
- the support that the Borough Council had provided to the County Council with the delivery of, and recovery journey for, it's failing Children's Service, in the previous year;
- the potential offered by the soon to be vacant Alexander Centre;
- that the Borough Council had previously offered space at Kilworthy Park for the delivery of the Tavistock service, which had not been taken up;
- how Tavistock Town Council could support West Devon Borough Council in its endeavours to work with the County Council.

RECOMMENDED THAT the letter, as submitted by the Mayor, be endorsed as representing the formal position of the Town Council.

Noted That thanks were conveyed to The Mayor for the content and quality of the letter sent.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

85. 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

86. TENANCY MATTERS

(**CONFIDENTIAL** – by virtue of relating to matters of a legal and/or financial nature or the business affairs of persons other than the Council)

The following oral updates were provided:

- a) Property (A) – the Committee was reminded of the central issues with regard to the tenancy, together with recent developments, which included legal advice regarding:

- the extent of compliance/non-compliance with the terms of the lease, and basis for the associated issue of s146 Notices;
- options that had been offered by the Council in an attempt to facilitate progress but not taken up, also an offer that had been made by the tenant which was not appropriate for the Council to accede to and had been declined accordingly;
- next steps should agreement not be reached.

RECOMMENDED THAT progress to date be endorsed and authority be delegated to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, to take action to secure compliance with the terms of the lease or the vacant possession of the premises as appropriate subject to legal advice together with any further legal proceedings or action as necessary.

- b) Property (B) – the Committee was advised that a virtual briefing from the Council’s Solicitors for all Members of Council was scheduled for Wednesday 24th July 2024, at 4.30pm prior to the subsequent meeting of Council (30th July).
- c) Council Land – the Committee was reminded of arrangements in connection with the above and provided with an oral update on the technical/legal position regarding next steps.

RECOMMENDED THAT an agreement in connection with the terms of the prospective sale be prepared on the basis outlined and, subject to completion of same, the Council proceed as previously agreed.

- d) Tennis Club – it had previously been reported that the Tennis Club wished to change its legal status. This would usually require the Club to enter into an Authorised Guarantee Agreement (AGA). However, should this be problematic alternative forms of surety could be sought such as:
- Approved levels of public liability insurance;
 - ongoing affiliation to the Lawn Tennis Association;
 - access to the Tennis Courts by the public being maintained;
 - satisfactory evidence of current compliance with the lease terms and the condition of the premises;
 - holding of sufficient earmarked reserves for future dilapidations;
 - such other safeguards as may be recommended by the Council’s property advisors.

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council proceed on the foregoing basis.

Noted That Councillor A Hutton Declared an Interest in the item above by virtue of his membership of the Tennis Club and remained in the room, but did not take part in the discussion or voting thereon.

- e) Filming in Tavistock – it was reported that the Town Council had been approached by a television company to facilitate aspects of filming of an episode of a current tv series to be undertaken in some of its premises.

The opportunity was welcomed, including the potential that it might drive footfall/visits to the Town.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION ONLY

87. OCCUPATION OF COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

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

The Committee received and considered the Briefing Note of the Assistant to the Town Clerk in connection with the above (Appendix 6). In the discussion arising the challenges associated with 'pop up shops' in relation to the particular circumstances associated with the Council's estate were noted.

88. ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

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

The Committee received and considered the Briefing Note of the Market Reeve & Designated Premises Supervisor (Appendix 7) in connection with the above.

In the ensuing discussion it was discussed that there had been a downturn in the number of incidences of anti-social behaviour in the town in recent weeks, which was welcomed. Also the terms of a court order, as currently understood, together with matters to be raised at the next/upcoming West Devon Matters meeting:

- the main perpetrator was believed to be now temporarily banned from relevant areas;
- the issue was being raised at the West Devon Matters Meeting scheduled for 17th July, 2024.

89. GUILDHALL TOILETS

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

An oral update was provided by the General Manager setting out the background to the matter, current and proposed next steps with particular regard to:

- a budget/costs meeting that had taken place with West Devon Borough Council on 29th January, 2024 and subsequent exchanges in connection with same;
- the timeline of exchanges on the matter;
- necessary procurement practice and associated due diligence;
- an anticipated timeline to transfer (subject to works procurement) of not less than 5 months;
- the importance attached to understanding plans/proposals for those facilities retained by the Borough Council;
- issues understood to have arisen with service contract management;
- the need for clarity on ongoing running costs, to include maintenance/repair – both planned and reactive.

The Meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Signed:

Dated:

CHAIRMAN