



**Berwick-upon-Tweed
Town Council**

Minutes of the Town Council Budget and Administration Committee
Meeting held on Monday, 15 January 2024 at 6.00pm in The Meeting
Room, Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council Office, Unit 1, 82 – 88
Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed

PRESENT:

Councillors: R Mackenzie (Chair)
M Greener
L Hawken
J Robertson
T Stewart

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Gareth Davies, Town Clerk
Stephen Cozens, Assistant to the Clerk
Cllr G Smith
Cty Cllr G Hill
0 members of the public

MINUTE NO.	TITLE AND DESCRIPTION OF ITEM	Mover	Seconder	Decision
BA048/23	OPEN SESSION			
	Members of the public may make representations, ask questions and give evidence at a meeting which they are entitled to attend in respect of the business on the agenda. This is for a period of 15 minutes overall and is limited to 3 minutes per person.	N/A	N/A	Cty Cllr G Hill raised concerns regarding the percentage of the precept to be spent on staffing, to which Cllrs J Robertson and T Stewart provided a response.
BA049/23	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE			
	To receive apologies for absence.	N/A	N/A	Apologies for absence were received from Cllr R Driver.
BA050/23	MINUTES			
	To sign as a correct record the minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council Budget and Administration Committee meeting held on Tuesday, 14 November 2023.	TS	MG	Cllr L Hawken raised a query regarding the Financial Regulations to which Officers would investigate. After which, the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 14 November 2023 were agreed and signed as a correct record.
BA051/23	DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS			
	(i) Unless already entered in the Council's Register of Members' interests, members are required to disclose any personal interest, (which includes any disclosable pecuniary	N/A	N/A	i. There were no disclosures of interests.

	<p>interest), they may have in any of the items included on the agenda for the meeting in accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council on 9 July 2012, and are reminded that if they have any personal interests of a prejudicial nature they must not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must leave the room.</p> <p>(ii) To receive and consider requests from members who have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any items on the agenda an application for dispensation under section 33 of the Localism Act 2011 to enable members to participate in discussions and voting.</p>	N/A	N/A	<p>ii. There were no requests for dispensation.</p>
BA052/23	HR & GOVERNANCE SUPPORT			
	To consider whether to recommend that council renew the ongoing support subscription.	Nem con		<p>During the discussion Members raised a number of points including is the annual price subject to inflation, is there a release penalty, confirmation of the calendar year and the contract.</p> <p>After which, the Committee RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To recommend to Council that the subscription for HR Services be deferred to the Staffing and Corporate Resources Committee,

				<p>2. To instruct Officers to seek a response from the provider regarding recent issues, and</p> <p>3. To instruct Officers to test the market for alternative providers.</p>
BA053/23	INSTITUTE OF PLACE MANAGEMENT (IPM)			
	To consider whether to recommend the renewal of the Town Clerk's membership of the IPM to council.	Nem con		The Town Clerk provided an update to Members including the amount of information that can be accessed, continued professional development and that the annual cost of membership is £132. After which, it was RESOLVED to recommend to Council that the Town Clerk's membership of the IPM be renewed.
BA054/23	BUDGET			
	To consider the latest iteration of the Budget Spreadsheet and associated documents and to make such recommendations to council as the committee sees fit.	Nem con		The Town Clerk introduced the report which included that there are two versions of the budget to reflect both a 5% and 8% increase in the precept, the situation is contingent on the staffing review, the draft market report shared with Members and that the precept outcomes have been broken down between the different bands. Members raised a number of points and questions including the reluctance to drop the increase in

				<p>precept to 3%, a communication explaining the precept, a press release and seasonal workers.</p> <p>After which, the Committee RESOLVED to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recommend that council adopts the draft budget that is subject to a 5% increase in the precept, 2. Recommend that council sets a precept requirement of £364,311.15 (£104.22 per Band D household per year), and 3. Recommend that council authorises the Town Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer to sign the requisite form to request the indicated precept requirement.
BA055/23	DIRECT DEBITS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS			
	<p>i. To decide whether to recommend the list of Direct Debit's and Subscriptions circulated as a background paper be accepted by Council.</p>	JR	TS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An updated document was distributed showing costs of subscriptions and the Town Clerk updated Members that Officers are seeking approval of the Direct Debits (DD's) and subscriptions as part of the budget process. Members then asked a number of

	<p>ii. To decide whether to recommend that council authorise that the electricity provider for the Town Council Office be paid by Direct Debit.</p>			<p>questions including on the Northumberland and National Association of Local Councils, CCTV Internet, electronic notice boards and display screens, the Neighbourhood Plan website, the fuel card provider, the water provider for allotments and the telephone headsets. After which, the Committee RESOLVED to recommend to Council approval of the DD's and subscriptions with the amendments regarding the Tourism Officer subscription, electronic notice boards, CCTV Internet plus Cloud working and HR subscriptions.</p> <p>2. The Committee RESOLVED to recommend that council authorise that the electricity provider for the Town Council Office be paid by DD.</p>
BA056/23	NOTIFICATION OF PAYMENTS AND RECEIPTS			
	To note payments and receipts in November and December.	Nem con		The Town Clerk introduced the item and Members asked a number of questions

				including on a meeting of the Christmas Lights Working Group, a payment for Christmas Trees and certification. The Committee then unanimously RESOLVED without division to note the schedule of payments and receipts.
BA057/23	BANK RECONCILIATIONS			
	To note the bank reconciliation processes for November and December.	Nem con		The Chair distributed a document showing a balances overview for the Town Council accounts, after which, it was RESOLVED that the document be used in future. An update was received regarding internal controls and a bank reconciliation was distributed for the Charity Bank account. The Committee unanimously RESOLVED that the Chair sign and receive the bank reconciliations for November and December 2023.
BA058/23	PURCHASE ORDERS			
	To note the purchase orders raised.	Nem con		An update was received that Purchase Order reports could only be sorted by Purchase Order Number or supplier and not by value.

				After which, Members unanimously RESOLVED to note all active Purchase Orders for the previous time-period.
BA059/23	COMMUNICATION STRATEGY			
	To receive an update on the implementation of the Communication Strategy.	Nem con		The Town Clerk provided updates and answered questions on regular meetings with County Councillors / the Town Centre Forum, a new format of press release, the Town Council website, social media, office display screens, communications including consultations and posters and news items. After which, the Committee RESOLVED to note the update including that a report would be provided to Members in March / April.
At this point on the motion of Cllr T Stewart, seconded by Cllr M Greener, it was RESOLVED to suspend standing orders sufficiently to allow the meeting to proceed beyond 8pm.				
BA060/23	PROTOCOL FOR MEETINGS			
	To consider if the policy is still relevant and, if so, whether it be updated.	Nem con		The Town Clerk introduced the item and, after discussion, it was RESOLVED that a Protocol for Meetings be brought to Council and that it include an exert / reference from Standing Orders regarding the 3 day rule, a clear explanation of the 3 day rule, the

				expectation that Officers will strive to exceed the 3 day rule if possible, an exert from the transparency code that sets out the payment lists must be presented for approval and that the report should be an annex to the Communications Strategy.
BA061/23	HABITUAL OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS POLICY			
	To consider if the policy is still relevant and, if so, whether it be updated.	Nem con		It was unanimously RESOLVED that the Habitual or Vexatious Complaints Policy cease to be a Town Council policy.
BA062/23	EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY			
	To consider whether a full review or light touch approach is needed to update the policy.	Nem con		As the incorrect versions of the policy was provided, this item was deferred to the next meeting of this Committee. After which, Members RESOLVED to note the update.
BA063/23	SCHEDULE OF DELEGATIONS			
	To receive an update from the Town Clerk.	Nem con		The Town Clerk updated the meeting that a schedule from another Town Council would be used as a base and this would be presented to either Council or this Committee. After which, Members RESOLVED to note the update.

BA064/23	ACTION PLAN			
	To receive an update.	Nem con		An update was provided regarding the Community Database, IT and the Community Emergency Plan. The Committee then unanimously RESOLVED to note the updates provided by the Town Clerk.
BA065/23	PAYROLL SERVICES			
	To consider the correspondence regarding a pricing structure update and to make recommendations to council as to the way forward.	Nem con		The Town Clerk updated Members that the cost of payroll services is doubling, and that Officers are exploring the options of bringing this in-house or outsourcing to a bureau. After which, the Committee expressed a preference for outsourcing to a bureau with an emphasis for a local provider and RESOLVED to instruct Officers to bring options to Council.
BA066/23	EXPENDITURE VS BUDGET YEAR TO DATE			
	To note the report.	Nem con		Members raised points and asked questions on formatting of financial reports, legal and professional fees, rent for the depot, water quality inspections for the Splash Park and Freedom costs. After which, the Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

BA067/23	PROPOSALS FOR GROWTH AND SAVINGS			
	Members may wish to consider whether there are any areas of the committees work where expenditure should grow or where savings can be made.	Nem con		No new proposals for growth or saving were put forward.
BA068/23	DATE OF NEXT MEETING			
	The date of the next meeting will be Monday 18 March 2024 at 6.00 pm.	N/A	N/A	Noted.
<p>The Committee RESOLVED that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 it was appropriate to exclude the media and public from the discussion of the following items of business on the grounds that public discussion may prejudice the Council's position and/or staffing issues may be discussed.</p>				
BA069/23	STAFFING REVIEW UPDATE			
	To receive an update.			<p>A report and structure were provided to Members, after which, the Committee RESOLVED that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The steps proposed are acceptable, 2. A report be brought to Council recommending the item be deferred to the Staffing and Corporate Resources Committee, and 3. There is still the option to adopt the staffing review of the external provider.