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# MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF COUNCIL MATTERS

# MONDAY 11TH DECEMBER 2023 AT 6.30PM IN THE GUILDHALL

**Present:** Councillors B Piper (Chair), C Beavis, T Bennett, J Chinnock, J Hodgson, D Peters and E Price.

**Apologies:** Cllr Hannam.

**In Attendance:** Members of the public, Cllrs Auletta, Collinson, Cooper, Cummings and Roberts, C Marlton (Town Clerk) and C Bewley (Finance, HR and Lettings Manager).

# 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair read a statement about how the meeting would be conducted and recorded. The apologies were accepted.

*The Committee will adjourn for the following items:*

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

12 members of the public attended from the ‘Hands Up’ charity and expressed their concerns about the conflict between Israel and Gaza. The group called for an emergency meeting to consider a motion calling for an immediate ceasefire. The group explained they had approached the MP to ask for him to table the matter of a ceasefire in parliament but he had refused. Councillors agreed that in the absence of a meeting that the Mayor would urgently action a letter to our MP calling for a ceasefire, getting agreement of fellow Councillors by email. An item will be added to the January Full Council agenda to confirm the corporate position of calling for a ceasefire.

*The Committee will reconvene to consider the following items:*

**2**.  **CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

**To approve the minutes of 13th November 2023 and update on any matters arising.**

The minutes were **AGREED** as an accurate record of the proceedings.

# 3. BUDGET MONITOR

**To consider the Budget Monitor including the reserves projection.**

This was considered and **AGREED**.

**4. DRAFT 2024/25 BUDGET**

# To consider an initial draft budget for financial year 2024/25. Recommendations to Full Council needed on:

# a) Precept for 2024/25

# b) Annual budget for 2024/25

# c) Anticipated spend from Reserve in 2024/25

The draft budget was presented as per the papers.

To **RECOMMEND** to Full Council that (unanimously AGREED):

a) Precept for 2024/25 is set at £656,022 (a 7.5% increase). Using the current tax base as indicative that makes the average Band D £220.62 per annum (£4.24 per week).

b) Budget for 2024/25 is ratified as presented (with the amendment of the updated tax base figures when received from South Hams District Council). These include significant savings on the staffing structure, Visit Totnes work, Civic budget and Mayoral allowance.

c) Anticipated spend from Reserve in 2024/25 is set at about £120,000 (subject to the minor changes relating to the tax base data).

Further work to allocate the detailed breakdown of the Community Development budget will happen after the Strategic Plan is adopted.

**5. CHRISTMAS LIGHTS WASH UP**

**To consider the Christmas Lights project, its outcome and challenges to inform future years’ planning.**

The document was noted, and thanks extended to staff. Further detailed discussion should take place in January regarding the 2024 Christmas lights contract, any changes needed to the second year of the Christmas late night events contract and any changes to the Christmas Light Switch On format.

# 6. COUNCIL ASSETS AND PUBLIC REALM WORKING GROUP

# To note the minutes of the Council Assets and Public Realm Working Group held on 21st November and consider the recommendations (items 3, 7 and 9).

Noted. The Clerk clarified a couple of points in the notes for accuracy:

* The Totnes Museum Risk Assessment is actually a very long document with several action points. The document was reviewed, and 6 points were the responsibility of the Town Council as the freeholder and landlord. There are many other points that have been handed to the Museum Trust for action as they fall under their responsibility under the lease terms.
* The Grounds Maintenance contract runs from April to March annually so if we are retendering it would need to be at the start of 2024 not in the spring. It was not long ago that the contract went out to tender and there is no legal requirement to do this annually.

In terms of the recommendations from the notes:

Item 3, Civic Hall Ramp Access – The issue of wheel clamping at the bottom of the Civic Hall ramp has moved on. SHDC as the landowner are implementing a new system of bollards and demarked areas to ensure that free and clear access is maintained, and illegal parking is prevented.

Item 7, St Mary’s Church Garden of Remembrance Flag Pole – The allocation of 1 day of officer time to upgrade the flagpole/garden of remembrance area was **AGREED**. It was noted that this asset is not owned by the Town Council.

Item 9, Cemetery Grounds Maintenance – It was **AGREED** to contact the existing contractors to ask for a 2024/25 quote. It was suggested that assuming the quote is reasonable that a tender process could be considered in Autumn 2024, by which time possible costings of running some or all the service in house would have been collated. It also allows time to consider biodiversity management of the site.

# 7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

**To note the date of the next meeting of the Council Matters Committee – Monday 15th January 2024 at 6.30pm in the Guildhall.**

Noted.

*The Committee will be asked to* ***RESOLVE*** *to exclude the press and public “by reason of the confidential nature of the business” to be discussed and in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. (CONFIDENTIAL by virtue of relating to legal and/or commercial matters, staffing and/or the financial or business affairs of a person or persons other than the Council)*

# 8. BANK STATEMENTS AND RECONCILIATIONS (Standing Item)

**To consider the bank statements and reconciliations for November (financial).**

These were reviewed and unanimously **AGREED**.

# 9. STAFFING BUDGET

**To consider the staffing budget and information on staff roles (staffing and financial).**

**The staffing budget for 23/24 was noted.**

The proposed staffing budget for 24/25 with the reductions as outlined in the report was unanimously **AGREED**. The reduction of approx. £95,000 of savings against the current staffing model was welcomed. It was noted that the overall budget for 24/25 would need to be ratified by January 2024 Full Council.

# 10. STAFFING UPDATE

**For any general or urgent updates that required confidential sharing with Councillors (staffing).**

None.

The meeting closed at 20.30

Catherine Marlton

Town Clerk

December 2023