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# MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF COUNCIL MATTERS

# MONDAY 11TH MARCH 2024 AT 6.30PM IN THE GUILDHALL

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

**Apologies:** None.

**In Attendance:** Cllr Auletta, 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

There were no members of the public present.

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

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

**To approve the minutes of 12th February 2024 and update on any matters arising.**

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

# 3. BUDGET MONITOR

**To consider the 2023/24 Budget Monitor.**

This was considered and **AGREED** unanimously.

**4. CIVIC BUDGET AND MAYORAL ALLOWANCE POLICY**

# To review the Civic Budget and Mayoral Allowance Policy.

The Civic Budget and Mayoral Allowance Policy was reviewed and **AGREED** unanimously.

**5. DEVON-TORBAY DEVOLUTION DEAL CONSULTATION**

**Under delegated authority from Full Council, to consider a Council response to the Devon and Torbay Devolution Deal consultation (deadline for responses 24th March 2024).**

Cllr Chinnock declared a personal interest. It was **AGREED** by majority (1 abstention) to give the Town Clerk authority to submit the Town Council response to the consultation and send the letter as drafted (see below):

We write to you on behalf of Totnes Town Council to express our concerns regarding the proposed Devon and Torbay Devolution Deal, in its current form.

As the governing body directly elected to represent the interests of Totnes residents, we have significant reservations about an additional layer of governance at a regional level, particularly one with very limited representation of the Town and Parish sector.

It is our position that such a governance model would create an unacceptable democratic deficit. We need more of a voice on policies with profound local impacts, not less. Each town and parish area across Devon has its own unique characteristics that require tailored approaches, staying locally accountable.

Moreover, we question whether the suggested economic benefits of this deal are realistic or will substantively improve circumstances for Totnes. The positive outcomes appear speculative at best, with the allocated £16m being insufficient to undertake implementation County wide. Town and parish councils are already taking on additional responsibilities and services due to cuts at higher tier authorities. We do not believe that this proposal goes far enough in filtering powers and funding down to local communities.

In summary:

* Adding a fourth layer of government administration will over complicate and increase confusion for constituents about who is responsible for what.
* Transfer of key responsibilities away from lower tiers of local government risks distancing policies from communities they impact.
* One-size-fits-all policies may not effectively meet the unique needs of different areas.
* Financial projections and claimed economic benefits appear overstated and speculative, particularly with a backdrop of insufficient funding (and large budget deficits as a result) to all tiers of local government.
* £16m is insufficient and future funding levels are uncertain. This money should be redirected towards statutory services that are already in dire need.
* The extra resources and ongoing costs required for administering this layer after 2027 will draw money away from essential services.
* We are supportive of devolving powers and funding from central to local government, but true devolution should empower more local decision-making, not consolidate powers into a County wide organisation in an area that has such diverse needs and challenges.
* Lack of clarity on meaningful impact or enhanced future opportunities for town/parish councils during a time when they are already taking on additional responsibilities due to funding challenges in higher tier authorities.
* Serious concerns over the democratic deficit created and the lack of sufficient representation of towns and parishes in the governance arrangements.

As Totnes's elected representatives, it is our duty to advocate for our constituents' interests and self-governance at an appropriate level. A combined authority is at odds with the spirit of true devolution to localized decision-making and compromises a core philosophy of empowering – not disempowering – local communities' abilities to shape their futures.

Totnes Town Council agrees with the following statement from the London Mayor, taken from [www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk):

‘The principal lesson to be learnt by the Government from the NO vote in the Northeast region, is that people will only accept changes to the way in which they are governed where those changes represent a clear improvement in the nature of that government, and also result in them being more directly involved in the decisions which will effect their lives. This will require an appropriately wide range of powers being devolved to the new bodies, which they are being invited to elect.’

We will be urging our residents and partners to make their individual thoughts known.

Thank you for your consideration of Totnes Town Council's position on this crucial matter.

# 6. COMMUNITY GRANT REPORT

# To note a report of community organisation’s assessment of their projects which received Community Grant funding in June 2023.

# Noted.

**7. COUNCIL ASSETS AND PUBLIC REALM** **WORKING GROUP**

**To note the minutes of the Council Assets and Public Realm Working Group held on 21st February and consider the recommendations (items 2, 5, 7 and 8).**

# Noted, and the following were agreed unanimously:

* Item 2. Benches at Longmarsh – It was **AGREED** unanimously that the Clerk contacts Berry Pomeroy Parish Council about locating the two Castle Meadow picnic benches at Longmarsh.
* Item 5. Seagull Signs, St Mary’s Churchyard – It was **AGREED** unanimously to fix ‘don’t feed the seagull’ signs to the poles and the sides of the waste bins in the churchyard.
* Item 7. Benches on Coronation Road – It was **AGREED** unanimously to replace the two benches on Coronation Road with ones made from recycled plastic.
* Item 8. Totnes Town Centre Sign - It was **AGREED** not to install the sign topper without match funding being secured - the Clerk will write to the Chamber of Commerce.

# 8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

**To note the date of the next meeting of the Council Matters Committee – Monday 15th April 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)*

# 9. BANK STATEMENTS AND RECONCILIATIONS (Standing Item)

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

These were reviewed and unanimously **AGREED**.

# 10. GREEN ENERGY CLUB

# To consider how to proceed in the 2024/25 financial year given the ending of the indemnity and the price increases (commercial).

The Committee were disappointed to hear that due to technical issues the club is not yet live and expressed support for the club but concerns about the significantly increased costs. It was **AGREED** unanimously to withdraw from the contract on the grounds that the Town Council are bound to seek best value with public funds.

It was **AGREED** unanimously to extend the meeting by 20 minutes.

# 11. CHRISTMAS LIGHTS BUDGET

**To consider the allocation of the Christmas Lights budget for the following:**

**a. Installation (commercial);** It was **AGREED** unanimously to appoint Blachere as the installers for 2024 subject to the resolution of the faulty lights on The Plains.

**b. Cross Street light refurbishment (commercial);** It was **AGREED** by majority to proceed with the cross-street light refurbishment.

**c. Electrical upgrades on The Plains (commercial);** It was **AGREED** unanimously to proceed with the electrical power source upgrades on The Plains.

**d. Contingency for replacement and repair of lights (financial);** The suggested contingency was **AGREED** unanimously; and

**e. Delayed removal of Shady Garden icicle lights (financial).** It was **AGREED** unanimously to leave the Shady Garden tree icicle lights in situ.

# 12.CEMETERY MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

**To consider a one-year extension to the current cemetery maintenance contract (commercial).**

It was **AGREED** unanimously to extend the current cemetery maintenance contract for one year.

# 13. STAFFING UPDATE

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

None.

The meeting closed at 8.35pm

Catherine Marlton

Town Clerk

March 2024