

TOTNES TOWN COUNCIL – INFORMATION FOR NEW COUNCILLORS

This short note aims to provide some basic information about Totnes Town Council (TTC), its work, remit, infrastructure, budget, offices, and support for Councillors.

TTC Remit

TTC acts as a voice for the local community and can draw attention to issues of concern with the authorities or at district level. TTC also has a civic role (performed by the Mayor), provides a civic space in terms of funding the maintenance and running costs for the Civic Hall, and determines its own tourism policy and approach. TTC is consulted by South Hams District Council (SHDC) on planning applications and the Council (through the Planning Committee) provides comments although the final planning decision rests with SHDC. TTC can award grants to community projects or facilities, for example, Caring Town Partnership, Totnes Caring, Citizens Advice.

TTC has responsibility for the maintenance of the following open spaces and memorials:

- Totnes Cemetery
- St Mary's Churchyard
- Castle Meadow
- Coronation Road
- Wills Memorial (on The Plains)
- Jubilee Fountain (on The Plains outside of the Dartmouth Inn)
- Eastgate Clock.

In 2023 the Council had a workshop to set its priorities for the current council term until 2027. This identified three priority areas for TTC focus:

- Our Local Environment
- Our Local Economy
- Our Local Community

TTC Infrastructure

TTC owns the following buildings:

- Guildhall
- Guildhall (Town Council) Offices
- Totnes Museum
- Totnes cemetery chapel
- Guildhall cottage

TTC rents:

- Civic Hall (from South Hams District Council)
- Eastgate Clock (from the Duke of Somerset's Estate, with the rent charge passed on to the users – Totnes Museum, Totnes Image Bank and Totnes and District Amateur Dramatics Society)

TTC Budget

Councillors are responsible for the finances of the council. The precept, collected as part of Council Tax, is the method of raising the resources required for TTC to function. Budgets are approved in

January and take effect in April of the same year. In 2017 TTC introduced Community Budgeting, which is a way for local people to get involved in making choices about how local money is spent. The breakdown of the TTC budget of £779K for financial year 2024/25 for a precept and income of £658K and a £121K from reserves is as follows:

Area	Cost (£K)	Percentage of Budget
Admin	443	56.88%
Civic and Democratic	21	2.70%
Tourism	14	1.80%
Guildhall	51	6.55%
Civic Hall	33	4.24%
Property Maintenance	-4	-0.51%
Cemetery	23	2.95%
Open Spaces	4	0.51%
Community Development	194	24.90%

Other than the community development allocation, many of these costs are largely fixed (for example for salaries, office running costs, rents, insurance, utility bills, care taking and grounds maintenance).

The Work of Totnes Town Council

TTC Standing Orders set out how meetings will be run (for example rules of debate, voting, code of conduct, minutes); details of the terms of reference for each of the committees, link Councillors, working groups, advisory bodies, and the mayor and deputy; extraordinary meetings; financial matters; and absence. The Code of Conduct sets out the general provisions for public duty and private interests.

Full Council is usually held on the first Monday of each month at 7pm in the Guildhall, with a public session starting at 6.30pm.

TTC has three committees which meet:

- Council Matters (meets on the second Monday of each month at 6.30pm)
- Planning (meets on the third Monday of each month at 6.30pm)
- Town Matters (meets on the fourth Monday every other month at 6.30pm)

Three elected committee members are required to form a quorum – without this the committee is unable to sit. Terms for Reference for each of the Committees which sets out the remit of each Committee can be found in Section 26 (page 15) of Standing Orders.

TTC has three working groups that meet as follows:

- Community (meets bi-monthly)
- Economy (meets bi-monthly)
- Environment and Public Realm (meets bi-monthly)

Terms for Reference for each of the Working Groups can be found in Section 28 (page 21) of Standing Orders.

TTC also has an advisory Forum that meets as follows:

- Traffic and Transport (meets twice a year on the last Wednesday (with the Steering Group meeting monthly if required)

Apologies – if you are not able to attend a meeting and need to send apologies please let the office know at least 24 hours in advance (it is accepted that illness may affect attendance at the last minute). This way we can ensure that the Committee will be quorate or if necessary postpone meetings (including notifying your fellow Councillors, the Press and public) in advance.

Absence – if you don't attend any Council meetings for six months without an accepted explanation then your Council term will cease.

Council and Committee Agenda and Papers - agenda and papers are circulated roughly five days in advance. You will be emailed a scanned electronic copy and hard copies are available on request (but will always be provided for the Chair). All agendas and papers (unless Confidential) are available to the public and are posted on the TTC website, with a link put on the TTC Facebook page.

Link Councillors – Section 27 (page 20) of Standing Orders set out the aims and operating principles for Link Councillors. In summary, Link Councillors are appointed annually, and it is for councillors to put themselves forward for election, attending meetings of relevant community groups and/or organisation in the following areas of interest: Arts; Business and Employment; Cultural; Disability; Elderly and Vulnerable People; Environment and Sustainability; Heritage; Open Space, Sports Provision, Leisure; Traffic and Transport; Young People/Youth. Communicating the information that you have learned as a link councillor is important. It is helpful to the Town Clerk if Link Councillors can report back in an email or in writing a few short bullets on the issues arising from these meetings, as this information could help identify future agenda items for the relevant TTC committee and can be shared with fellow Councillors.

Paige Adams Trust – as a Councillor you become a Trustee of the Paige Adams Trust, which holds quarterly meetings before a Full Council meeting. The Paige Adams Trust is a registered charity and is the result of a bequest in the Will of Sidney Paige Adams in 1927. The grant is to be used on objects or in such a manner for the benefit, well being or improvement of Totnes. Income is generated through the hiring out of the Civic Hall and investments. Grant funding is available for community groups or organisations to bid to resource projects, which happens on an annual basis.

Support for Councillors

Training Courses - are available from the Devon Association of Local Councils on topics such as Being a Good Councillor and Being a Successful Chairman. Many are now delivered by Zoom. Any costs incurred for the training course and the travel to get there can be reclaimed.

Allowance – if you have been elected (as oppose to co-opted) you can claim an annual Councillor allowance in recognition of the time, work and costs involved in being a town Councillor which is designed to help cover your costs, for example getting to and from meetings or any postage and stationery used. The current annual limit is £459.37 which is subject to tax. You will be eligible to claim the allowance if you have attended 75 percent of Council and Committee meetings. If you choose to claim the allowance, you should ensure that your claim is submitted by 31 March each year, which is the end of the TTC financial year. Please note that co-opted councillors are not entitled to the allowance - this is national law, not a local decision.

Use of the Guildhall – Councillors can use the Guildhall and its rooms without charge to hold community meetings and events, but they must complete a booking form, be present throughout the event and be prepared to open and lock up if outside of office hours.

Health and Safety – the TTC policy for health and safety and the fire procedures for the Guildhall building can be found in a reference folder next to the pigeon holes. Please make yourself aware of these policies, particularly given the historic nature of the building and the lack of more modern fire doors.

Annual Calendar of Events

Monthly – Full Council meets on the first Monday of each month (except August) at 7pm.

March – provisional election of Mayor and committee members and chairs (but not in an election year).

May – Annual Meeting of the Town Council is the May Full Council meeting, which includes the elections of committees and is a public meeting; mayor making, which is the ceremonial change of Mayor and is not a public meeting; Annual Town Meeting, held in the Civic Hall towards the middle/end of May and is a public meeting (not to be confused with the annual meeting of the Council) .

November – Remembrance Sunday.