

Minutes of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE of
Bridport Town Council held on Monday 15 January 2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: Cllr: Sarah Williams (Chairman)

Cllrs: Sandra Brown Julian Jones
 Karen Hunt Gill Massey

Also in attendance: Cllr Dave Rickard (ex-officio from 7.11pm), Will Austin (Town Clerk), Paul Fuszard (Finance & Office Manager), Daryl Chambers (Town Surveyor, attended virtually), and two members of the public.

PUBLIC FORUM

Two members of the public were present, but neither wished to speak.

47. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Maggie Ray (leave of absence granted), Martin Ray (leave of absence granted), Anne Rickard and for lateness, Dave Rickard.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

49. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 November 2023 be confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Town Clerk advised that following the committee's approval of match funding for a Dorset Town of Culture submission, the submission had been approved by the Arts Development Company.

50. BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Sub Committee held on 5 December 2023 be received and adopted.

The Town Clerk advised that the West Bay Car Boot Fund Grants Panel would meet in early February 2023.

Cllr Dave Rickard joined the meeting at this point, 7.11pm.

51. FINANCIAL ESTIMATES 2023/2024 – 3rd REVISION

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL:3866. The Town Clerk summarized the report, and following member discussion it was

RECOMMENDED: that the 3rd revision of the estimates for the year 2023/2024 be approved.

52. BUDGET AND ESTIMATES 2024/25

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3867. The Chairman thanked the Town Clerk, Finance and Office Manager, and other officers for their work on the report, and reminded members that the budget had been the subject of discussion at four Budget Working Group and one Best Value and Scrutiny Sub-Committee meetings.

The Town Clerk summarised the report, and also thanked the Finance and Office Manager, officers, and the Budget Working Group for their input to the budget process. He also thanked the Parish Clerks of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, and Bradpole, for their assistance.

In considering this item, members noted:

- The position of the current year 2023/24 revenue budget estimates
- The position on the Town Council's finances held in reserves and proposed Capital Budget
- Use of Reserves
- The recommended revenue budget (estimates) for next year (2024/25) with a commentary on recommended significant variations from this year
- The recommended fees and charges for 2024/25
- Comments of the Budget Working Group
- Medium Term Financial Planning
- Carbon Budget
- Summary of Budget Considerations
- Options on the level of precept to fund the budget for 2024/25

The Town Clerk highlighted the considerations for members, which included to:

- present a balanced budget
- cater for the impact of inflation on services, expenditure and income
- maintain and develop existing services provided by the Council
- maintain appropriate levels of reserves, and continue to earmark reserves to support project delivery, including a capital programme
- make provision for salary increases, including an estimated national pay award
- make provision to continue to deliver Town Council Plan projects
- provide continuing support for town events
- maintain grant funding for community projects and support of key organisations through service level agreements – Arts Centre, Museum, Leisure Centre, CAB, Youth & Community Centre, West Bay Discovery Centre, the Indoor Skate Park, the Literary & Scientific Institute and the Lyric Theatre
- allow for the expansion of the Town Council and its boundary from 1 April 2024

The Town Clerk drew members' attention to the options on the precept and advised that whilst the officer recommendation was to set a balanced budget, it was open to members to consider any level of precept. The options put forward were:

- Option 1: increase the precept by £71,535. In total, this would raise £1,022,114 and provide a deficit budget (i.e. funded from general reserves) of £10,000.

- Option 2: increase the precept by £81,535. In total, this would raise £1,032,114 and provide a balanced budget.
- Option 3: increase the precept by £91,535. In total, this would raise £1,042,114 and provide a contribution of £10,000 to general reserves.

The current Band 'D' Town Council charge was £274.53, resulting in the following annual and weekly reductions in Council Tax for a Band 'D' Council Tax Payer:

	<u>Annual</u>	<u>Weekly</u>
Option 1	£87.16	£1.68
Option 2	£85.32	£1.64
Option 3	£83.49	£1.61

A balanced budget would result in the following annual and weekly increased in Council Tax for a Band 'D' Council Tax Payer:

	<u>Annual</u>	<u>Weekly</u>
Allington	£147.33	£2.83
Bothenhampton & Walditch	£139.76	£2.69
Bradpole	£143.67	£2.76

Members discussed the report in detail, including:

- A notional budget increase compared with the current year budgets for the councils affected by the Community Governance Review, which was estimated to be 6.4%;
- A need to review fees and charges for 2025/26 in light of a proposal for no increase in 2024/25;
- The council's carbon budget outturn and a desire to focus on reducing diesel use further;
- The impact of the budget proposals and inflation on the level of Council Tax;
- Difficulties in predicting future inflation in the current unpredictable political and economic environment;
- The possible implications of the ongoing review of community governance, and the work carried out to incorporate these into the draft budget;
- The need for careful management of project priorities, given the pressures on reserves; and
- The challenge of achieving the external income targets set out in the Capital Programme.

Following consideration of the report, it was

RECOMMENDED to Full Council:

- (a) that the draft estimates for 2024/25 be approved as set out in Appendix A.
- (b) that the proposed fees and charges for 2024/25 be approved as set out in Appendix B.
- (c) that the Medium Term Financial Plan be approved as a guide for future years as in Appendix C, noting that each year's budget will be subject to separate approval.

- (d) that the draft capital programme and proposed use of reserves for 2024/25 and future years, as set out in section 4 of the report and at Appendix D.
- (e) that in terms of the precept, Option 2 be approved, as set out above and in section 12 of the report, which would increase the precept to £1,032,114 with a consequent annual Band 'D' charge of £189.21.

53. MEETINGS CALENDAR

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3868.

The Town Clerk summarised a draft calendar of meetings. He noted ongoing discussions about delaying the Mayor Making ceremony, and that Ward Working Group meetings were subject to further consideration after the May elections. He also noted a request to delay the Full Council meeting scheduled for 19 November 2024, to 26 November to allow a longer period between the committee meeting and Full Council, and to consider delaying the Full Council meeting in January 2025 for the same reason.

RESOLVED: that the meetings calendar be approved as tabled, except to move full council from 19 November 2024 to 26 November 2024 and to possibly delay slightly the full council meeting in January 2025.

54. ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk reported that there were no recommendations from the meeting of the committee held on 10 January 2024.

55. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT AND APPOINTMENT OF AN INTERNAL AUDITOR FOR 2024/25

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3869, setting out the arrangements for internal audit, and recommending the retention of the existing auditor, Lightatouch Internal Audit Services.

RECOMMENDED: that the existing internal audit arrangements continue for 2024/25,

And it was further noted that the formal start date for the new town council area will be 1 April 2024 and not 2 May 2024. A reference to the latter had been made in the auditor's last report, and they had subsequently issued a correction.

56. RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT: ANNUAL REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3870.

The report set out the Council's approach to risk management and included a corporate risk assessment covering the major risks applying to the Council.

RECOMMENDED: that the Corporate Risk Assessment, and the management strategy as noted in the report, be approved as tabled.

57. SERVICES ADMINISTERED BY THE TOWN SURVEYOR

The Town Surveyor reported on the following matters:

- WI Hall – a programme of improvements was planned.
- Mountfield – the building was at capacity with tenant occupation, including the recent addition of Epic Print. Further window replacements were planned.
- Bridport Football Club – car park improvement plans were being pursued, and discussions with the Environment Agency regarding flood defences were ongoing.
- St Mary’s Shelter – this was to be refurbished and noticeboards added. A funding application had been made to Dorset Council for this.
- Bridport Cemetery – work was ongoing with grave owners to shore up headstones affected by flooding, and the chapel roof would be replaced.
- Lengthsman – the scheme would not apply to parishes being incorporated into the Town Council area in April 2024, but subject to discussions, support would continue to other parishes and organisations.
- Court Orchard – An effective community group had devised plans for the green, with support from Caroline Pearce and Ken Hussey. Initial works would include new play equipment and tree planting.

RESOLVED: that improvements at Court Orchard Green be pursued at the earliest opportunity.

- West Bay Highway Enhancement Scheme – Dorset Council Highways had been asked to complete this project, as some surface treatment and markings remained to be laid.
- Rope Walks taxi rank – the taxi rank was in place and operating, and the land had transferred to the Town Council. Cllr Sandra Brown asked for assurance that taxis would remain available in West Street, and the Town Surveyor confirmed that the new taxi rank was in place only to prevent an overflow in West Street into the bus layby.
- Events – a brief for a proposed festival event on Asker Meadows was awaited.
- Changing Places toilets – the two installations at the Bus Station and West Bay Road Car Park were complete, and additional signage would be installed to encourage their use.

RESOLVED: that the report of the Town Surveyor be noted, with the thanks of the committee recorded in respect of the hard work carried out.

58. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Town Clerk reported that a meetings with parish councils, and separately with parish clerks had been scheduled.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted

59. WEST BAY DISCOVERY CENTRE

The Town Clerk reported that he had been approached regarding the future governance arrangements of the centre, and a request had been made that the Town Council agree to take on the management of the facility. He summarised a possible approach discussed by officers and representatives of the centre.

After a lengthy discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that the Chairman should meet with representatives of West Bay Discovery Centre, prior to a further report at the next meeting of this committee.

60. REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports.

61. COMMUNICATIONS

The Town Clerk reported that civic events including Commonwealth Day, Mayor Making, the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the 50th anniversary of the Town Council, and a farewell to outgoing councillors would be considered by Full Council, and informal views were sought on the arrangements.

Members indicated that Commonwealth Day and the 80th anniversary of D-Day should be may require particular consideration before proceeding, and that input from schools and community groups would be required.

62. PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Finance & Office Manager presented Payments List 4 of the 2023/24 accounts, in the sum of £316,007.76, which had been authorised for payment since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: that List 4 of the 2023/24 accounts be approved and signed by the Chairman.

63. PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960

RESOLVED: that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.

64. STAFFING MATTERS

No matters were reported.

65. PROPERTY MATTERS

The Town Surveyor reported on one tenancy matter.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted.

The meeting closed at **9.04pm**.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 11 March 2024