

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council Budget and Administration Committee Meeting held on Monday, 11 November 2024 at 6.00pm in The Meeting Room, Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council Office, Unit 1, 82 – 88 Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed.

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

T Stewart (Chair)
R Driver
M Greener
L Hawken
R Mackenzie

IN ATTENDANCE:

Stephen Robinson, Operations Manager
Stephen Cozens, Finance Officer
Cllr J Robertsons
Cllr G Smith
4 members of the public

BA061/24 1. OPEN SESSION

Representative of the Berwick Riders Association (BRA) updated the Committee that only certain companies provide the required services so therefore only 1 quote can be obtained for certain elements of the Riding of the Bounds. This was noted by the Committee.

BA062/24 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

BA063/24 3. MINUTES

On the motion of Cllr R Driver, seconded by Cllr M Greener, the minutes of the meeting held on 09 September 2024 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

BA064/24 4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

- i. There were no disclosures of interest.
- ii. There were no requests for dispensation.

BA065/24 5. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business raised by Members of the Committee.

BA066/24 6. AUDITS

The Finance Officer provided an update on the audit processes. This included that the external auditors are behind schedule, however, a report is awaiting sign-off by the relevant Officer in that organisation before being shared with the Town Council.

Confirmation was provided that Town Council Officers submitted the required information in a timely fashion and subsequently responded to the questions raised.

Officers are also sharing information with the Internal Auditors so that they can carry out their interim report.

Once received, the reports will be shared with Members.

After which, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to note the update.

BA067/24 8. FINANCE QUERIES LOG

- i. There were no queries in addition to those mentioned at points (ii) and (iii) of this item,
- ii. The Operations Manager updated the Committee that costs of the Local Services Team, equipment and premises to facilitate decision making moving forwards would be deferred to the Staffing Committee,
- iii. Cllr R Mackenzie updated the Committee that Town Council bank accounts would be opened with Unity Trust by 31 December 2024 and the signatories would then be set-up following on from this so that the account is live and operational from the start of the new financial year 2025-2026. The account would be run in tandem with the main account currently in operation for a 6-month period until 31 October 2024. After which, if everything is OK, the main account currently in operation would be closed.

After which, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to note and agree the updates.

BA068/24 9. INTERNAL CONTROLS

The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to defer the item until guidance is received from the internal auditor.

BA069/24 10. BUDGET PREPARATIONS

Cllr J Robertson distributed a background paper produced as a starting point draft budget. Councillors were requested to submit comments in time for the meeting of full Council. The Riding of the Bounds was discussed and points raised included the overspend on budget, £7.8k against £7k which are genuine increases. Berwick Ridders Association (BRA) fund raise for a significant proportion of the total event. They will provide information regarding the total spending for the event in 2024. BTC will check the procedures to be followed re funding approval.

The future of the market was also discussed in relation to the budget.

The Committee then noted that Cllr T Stewart would work with Cllr J Robertson on the draft budget document once comments were received.

After which the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note that best value and safety regarding monies paid to BRA is more important than obtaining 3 quotes,
2. Instruct the Operations Manager to ask the advice of the Chief Officer and as a substitute, the Town Councils HR Consultant regarding the procedure for providing money to the BRA, and
3. Instruct the Operations Manager to prepare a report regarding the market for full Council.

BA070/24 15. NOTIFICATION OF PAYMENTS AND RECEIPTS

Members asked a number of questions and raised a number of queries including on skip hire, the premium account and Mayor's Sunday donations.

After which, the Committee then unanimously **RESOLVED** without division to note the schedule of payments and receipts.

BA071/24 16. BANK RECONCILIATIONS

The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** that the Chair sign and receive the bank reconciliations for August and September 2024.

BA072/24 17. PURCHASE ORDERS

The Operations Manager updated the Committee with a proposal to discuss with the Chief Officer that the budget line heading be included with the report.

Members asked a number of questions and raised a number of queries including on moisture traps used for the 2nd van and catering for Mayor's Sunday.

After which, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to note all active Purchase Orders for the previous time-period.

BA073/24 18. PROPOSALS FOR GROWTH AND SAVINGS

The Committee noted that the Mayor had provided an update to the Communities and Local Services Committee.

BA074/24 20. EXPENDITURE VS BUDGET YEAR TO DATE

- i. Headings on the report was discussed with an update that 'Current Annual' should be 'Annual Budget' and 'Actual Year To Date' should be "Spent To Date".

Members raised a number of queries and updates were received on accounting software, litter bins, transport, equipment for the local wardens team, play area equipment and Splash Park maintenance.

After which, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to agree the changes and note the report.

- ii. Points raised during the discussion included an increase in the grant limit to £3k, how applicants report back to the Town Council, that spending has to be exact and can't be spent on other elements and a previous suggestion of using a 3 tier system. Further updates included that the Operations Manager would investigate if spending can be transferred across elements, that discussions of the 3 tier system would be deferred until the new Chief Officer has started, the Operations Manager would investigate implementing a check list and recent previous successful applicants would be contacted for a report.

After which, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to note and agree the updates.

BA075/24 7. SCHEDULE OF POLICIES

- i. Updates included that the process of setting up Working Parties and Task & Finish Groups be added to Terms of Refence with Cllr R Mackenzie to investigate, the wording of policies and risk assessments which are different, the Operations Manager to produce a brief Risk Assessment on Councillors working as staff and that Cllr L Hawken would update the Schedule of Policies and Procedures document which would include a list of HR Policies.

After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** to note and agree the updates.

- ii. Points raised on the Minutes Protocol Policy included that the wording for the 'Disclosure of Interests' item on the agenda does not need to be repeated in the minutes, that future use of live recording be deferred until the new Chief Officer is in place and that the Operations Manager to investigate the need for a named proposer and seconder.

After which, subject to confirmation being sought regarding a named proposer and seconder, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to recommend adoption of the Minutes Protocol Policy to Council,

- iii. Councillor Training Policy. Amendments raised included that training for Chairpersons be within 6 months, the Finance and Governance Committee be changed to the Budget and Administration Committee and that bullet points be changed to either roman numerals or letters. It was also noted that sourcing training be deferred to the new Chief Officer when they are in post.

After which, subject to the changes mentioned, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to recommend adoption of the Councillor Training Policy to Council.

Staff Training Policies. Cllr L Hawken updated Members that the highlighted areas are to be completed by the Town Council.

After which, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** that the Operations Manager, working with Cllr L Hawken, re draft the document including additions to the generic training list and the introduction of a sliding repayment scale for paid-for-training, and the policy be brought to a future meeting of the Staffing Committee.

On the motion of Cllr R Driver, seconded by Cllr L Hawken, it was unanimously **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders sufficiently to allow the meeting to proceed beyond 8pm.

- iv. The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to defer the item to a future meeting to allow the Operations Manager to investigate appropriate charging levels.

BA076/24 11. COMMUNICATION TASK GROUP

Cllr R Mackenzie updated members of a recent meeting with Cllrs L Hawken and P Rowe where the formation of a Communication Task Group was discussed. Points raised during consideration included the different types of marketing and the possibility of working with partners, that the idea be deferred until the new Chief Officer is in place and that an informal report be brought to a meeting of the Councillor Forum.

After which, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council that Cllr L Hawken and P Rowe be the Town Council's representatives to liaise with the Berwick Community Trust's Tourism Officer whilst noting the need to consider which elements of communications go to which Committee so that the Terms of Reference can be updated correctly.

BA077/24 12. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Cllr R Mackenzie updated the meeting that the document was a result of a working party which also included Cllr T Stewart, the Operations Manager and Finance Officer.

After which, on the motion of Cllr R Mackenzie, seconded by Cllr R Driver, the Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council, adoption of the revised Financial Regulations.

BA078/24 13. STRATEGIC PLAN

The Committee noted that the most recent version had only been distributed on the day of the meeting and therefore unanimously **RESOLVED** to defer the item, with comments to be submitted to Cllr G Brown.

BA079/24 14. ALLOTMENTS

The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to defer the item to allow Officers to investigate costs, including water charges, of plots at other sites

BA080/24 19. ACTION PLAN

The Operations Manager updated the meeting that as part of the continued development of a Community Emergency Plan (BA 54) they are to liaise with a representative of Northumberland County Council to discuss liabilities and will report back to a future meeting.

After which, the Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to note the update.

BA081/24 21. ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA AND ACTIONS ARISING

The Chair provided an update that the December meeting of this Committee will focus largely on the budget.

After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** to confirm the following agreed actions:

Cllr L Hawken to:

- Liaise with Cllr P Rowe regarding the 3 areas of marketing / communications.
- Update the Schedule of Policies and Procedures.
- Work with the Operations Manager regarding the Staff Training Policy.

Cllr T Stewart to:

- Contact the internal auditor regarding internal controls.
- Work with Cllr J Robertson regarding the draft budget distributed as a background paper earlier in the meeting.

Cllr R Mackenzie to:

- Investigate Task & Finishing Groups for addition to the Terms of Reference.

The Operations Manager to:

- Investigate the protocol for awarding monies to the Berwick Riders Association for the Riding of the Bounds event.
- Produce a report regarding the market for full Council.
- Contact the Tweed Salmon Centre for feedback to the monies awarded.
- Investigate simplifying the grant process.
- Investigate adding the budget line expenditure to Purchase Order reports.
- Produce a brief risk assessment on Councillors working as staff.

The Finance Officer to:

- Investigate the costs that other sites charge for allotment plots including water rates.

BA082/24 22. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting will be Monday 09 December 2024 at 6.00 pm.