

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council Budget and Administration Committee Meeting held on Monday, 09 December 2024 at 6.00pm in The Meeting Room, Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council Office, Unit 1, 82 – 88 Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed.

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

R Mackenzie (Chair)
R Driver
M Greener
T Stewart

IN ATTENDANCE:

Stephen Robinson, Operations Manager
Stephen Cozens, Finance Officer
Cllr J Robertson (up to part way through Item 8)
Insp John Swan, Northumbria Police
0 members of the public

BA083/24 1. OPEN SESSION

Insp John Swan provide an update on CCTV in the town including that provision in North Northumberland is paid for by Town Councils, monitoring isn't 24/7 but footage is recorded so can be used, facial recognition is in place and whilst it is difficult to say how many incidents have been prevented the system is a deterrent. Points raised by Councillors were the opening hours of Berwick Police Station and whether it is manned 24/7 which it is. After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council that a CCTV Working Party be established to include 2 Councillors, a representative of Northumbria Police and the Operations Manager with the 2 Councillors to be agreed at Council.

BA084/24 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr L Hawken.

BA085/24 3. MINUTES

Points and issues raised included the transfer of the Town Council's main banking arrangements which is being investigated by the Finance Officer and monies paid to Berwick Riders Association to be considered at the next meeting of this Committee. After which, on the motion of Cllr T Stewart, seconded by Cllr M Greener, the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2024 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

BA086/24 4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

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

BA086/24 5. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINES

The Operations Manager raised the point that only 1 member of staff is trained for Level 2 Play Park Inspections. Cost for training is £565 per candidate for 2 people.

After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council they approve spending of £1,130 so that 2 members of staff can be trained in Level 2 Play Park Inspections.

BA087/24 6. PROPOSALS FOR GROWTH AND SAVINGS

Proposals for growth and savings were to be considered as part of Item 8 'Budget'.

BA088/24 7. EXPENDITURE VS BUDGET YEAR TO DATE

- i. The Finance Officer updated the meeting that grant money returned from Tweed Striders has been paid into General Reserves on the advice of the Internal Auditor. Members raised a number of queries and updates were received on the term 'Indirect Expenditure', bench maintenance, transport, salaries, play equipment, play area maintenance, Christmas Lights which were paid for by a donation, CCTV and grant money. It was further noted that grant money could be paid to applicants in 2 batches per year to spread payments with applications considered twice yearly whilst CCTV costs over the last 3 years be investigated to aid the working party. The Committee asked that Cllr T Stewart itemise required formatting changes for the report and that the Finance Officer investigate the Schedule 3 money to be received. After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** to agree the updates and note the report.
- ii. The Finance Officer updated the meeting that the grant money awarded to SENRUG has now been paid.
After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the update.

BA089/24 8. BUDGET

Cllr J Robertson introduced the item and provided an update on draft budget proposals including that reserves will be added to from the Strategic Reserve, Vehicle Replacement Reserve and War Memorials Reserve. With money potentially available from Schedule 3 income from the Freeman Trustees and spending on future projects this would leave approximately £311,416 in Reserves moving forward. Further updates were provided and Members raised a number of queries including on breakdown of salaries, office photocopier, HR and H&S, double insurance of Civic Regalia, the greater cost of elections which are taking place in 2025 and Visitor Support Services. There will be a review of

staffing including the consideration of a 3rd warden rather than a seasonal worker. The Committee then agreed that budget lines '5051 Spittal Seaside Festival' and '5201 Hoppa Bus' can be removed as not needed whilst money for '5203 CCTV' can be taken out of General Reserves if required.

At this point Cllr J Robertson left the meeting.

Budget Proposals were discussed and, other than Reserves, the need for the Schedule 3 figure was raised. Following on from this, points raised included the Town Council website, the declutter of street furniture on Marygate, allotments, community gardens, woodland walks and recycled material benches. Councillors also discussed outdoor fitness equipment which needs direction from Communities & Local Services and working with key partners to develop tourism banners. Members agreed that it was prudent to add £5,000 to '4504 Public Realm Works' and add £2,000 to '5251 Neighbourhood Plan'.

The Operations Manager provided an update on Christmas Trees. It was agreed that, for future planning, the Operations Manager would contact Berwick Rotary Club for feedback on arrangements for cancelled events.

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

BA090/24 9. NOTIFICATION OF PAYMENTS AND RECEIPTS

Members asked a number of questions and raised a number of points including that County Cllr I Hunter be thanked for her contribution towards the bus shelter on Cornhill Road and that as part of moving the Town Council's main bank arrangements that savings accounts be investigated once the Chief Officer is in post. After which, the Committee then **RESOLVED** without division to note the schedule of payments and receipts.

BA091/24 10. PURCHASE ORDERS

Members asked a number of questions and raised a number of points including on the installation of street furniture, IT equipment which is excluding VAT, strings of Christmas Lights which are for the Town Hall, lone working devices and that thanks are expressed in the newsletter to Berwick Rotary Club for installation of the Christmas Tree.

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

BA092/24 11. BANK RECONCILIATIONS

The Committee **RESOLVED** that the Chair sign and receive the bank reconciliations for October 2024.

BA093/24 12. AUDITS

- i. The Finance Officer introduced the item and highlighted that with regard to the

completion letter, the audited AGAR had not been received by 30 September 2024 hence the reason that the conclusion was published after this date. Code of Conduct training mentioned as a minor scope for improvement would be best dealt with after the elections in May 2025. The External Auditor's Report and Certificate 2023/24 was highlighted that no other matters have come to their attention giving cause for concern whilst the completion notice would be displayed at the Town Council office and published on the website.

- ii. The internal auditor had provided an update that they should be under way in the coming week or so with the interim report.
- iii. Thanks were given to the Finance Officer for his hard work in completing a successful Audit.

After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** to receive the Audited AGAR 2023/24 and to note the update regarding the internal audit interim report.

BA094/24 13. INTERNAL CONTROLS

Processes for internal controls would be confirmed at the next meeting of this Committee whilst it was noted that some of this work is already being carried out by items on the agenda.

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

BA095/24 14. FINANCE QUERIES LOG

No issues were raised under this item.

BA096/24 15. ALLOTMENTS

Points raised included that water charges be explored in future years whilst Officers investigate the possibility that individual plots be metered.

The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to suspend standing orders sufficiently to allow the meeting to proceed beyond 8pm.

After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** that allotment prices from February 2025 be set at £50 and £25 whilst tenants who have plots at Blakewell Gardens be made aware that they may be charged for water in future years. With this in mind the managing of water to be investigated by Officers.

BA097/24 16. MODEL PUBLICATION SCHEME

The Committee **RESOLVED** to adopt the Model Publication Scheme.

BA098/24 17. HR SOFTWARE

The Operations Manager updated the meeting that the agreed provider had decided to withdraw their service from the agreement with the Town Council. With this in mind, the recommendation is to go with the next best supplier which would result in a saving with costs at £68 per month as oppose to £198 per month. An additional payroll option would cost £40 a month which is less than the current salaries provider.

After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** to approve use of the next provider and that the possibility of adding the payroll package be explored for the start of the new financial year.

BA099/24 18. AGREED ACTIONS

The Committee **RESOLVED** to confirm the following:

Cllr R Mackenzie:

- Has provided an updated Schedule of Policies for the next meeting of this Committee.
- Has provided an updated Staff Training Policy for this meeting of the Committee.

Cllr T Stewart:

- Bring an update regarding internal controls to the next meeting of this Committee.

The Operations Manager:

- Explore how payments to the Riding of the Bounds are made.
- Continue the process of negotiating the lease for the market.
- Discuss grants process with recipients.
- Explore Purchase Order reports for next financial year.
- Risk Assessments now completed.

The Finance Officer:

- Confirm that allotments procedures are updated.
- Contact Tweed Salmon Centre for feedback on how the project is going.

BA100/24 19. ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA AND ACTIONS ARISING

Items for the next agenda to include:

- I. Completing Terms of Reference.
- II. A draft annual events plan and diary.
- III. Communications task group report back.
- IV. Allotments strategy including community garden.
- V. CCTV.

- VI. New premises for the Town Council was discussed and it was noted and agreed that having a Chief Officer working towards CILCA and elected Councillors would give access to funding and should therefore be added to the Strategic Plan.
- VII. It was further agreed to defer grants including a three-tier process to the Communities & Local Service Committee.

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

BA101/24 20. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting will be Monday 13 January 2025 at 6.00 pm.