

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council Budget and Administration Committee Meeting held on Monday, 13 January 2025 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 Mackenzie
R Driver
M Greener

IN ATTENDANCE:

Stephen Robinson, Operations Manager
Stephen Cozens, Finance Officer
Cllr J Robertson
Cllr P Rowe
Cllr G Smith
Cty Cllr C Seymour
0 members of the public

BA102/24 1. OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present.

BA103/24 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr L Hawken.

BA104/24 3. MINUTES

Points and issues raised included that wording at Minute Number BA100/24(VI) be changed from “Chief Officer working towards CILCA” to “Chief Officer with CILCA”. After which, on the motion of Cllr R Mackenzie, seconded by Cllr M Greener, the minutes of the meeting held on 09 December 2024 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

BA105/24 4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

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

BA106/24 5. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

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

BA107/24 6. FORMAT OF MINUTES

The Committee noted that all Council and Committee minutes are in portrait style, however, points raised included that format of wording such as the date may change between Council and Committee minutes.

After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** that Officers explore standardisation of formatting for all minutes.

BA108/24 7. DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN / DIARY OF EVENTS

The Operations Manager updated the Committee that they had met with the Sergeant-at-Mace to produce a rough draft of a diary of Civic Events including major festivals which will be circulated in due course.

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

BA109/24 8. ANNUAL MEETINGS PLAN FOR 2025 / 2026

The Committee noted that the Council's HR Consultant had provided advice that there were too many meetings whilst also noting the need that the Council meeting in January be in good time to submit the precept and a Staffing Committee meeting in November be in good time to consider any budget ramifications. Suggestions made during the discussion included that the Terms of Reference for the Planning Committee be strengthened and Grant Applications be the responsibility of the Budget & Administration Committee whilst there was general agreement that there should be a reduction in the number of meetings. After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** that the item be deferred in order to enable a discussion to be held between the new Chief Officer, the Operations Manager and Chairs of Committees.

BA110/24 9. SCHEDULE OF POLICIES

Cllr R Mackenzie updated the Committee that date of adoption for all items are now included, the document is divided into Statutory, Other and Staffing Policies and the need to complete the Community Emergency Plan when the new Chief Officer is in post. Points and issues raised included that the Community Emergency Plan would be more of a communications document as Northumberland County Council (NCC) are the primary authority and therefore are the responsible body whilst producing the document in portrait would be explored.

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

BA111/24 10. NEW TERMS OF REFERENCE

Cllr R Mackenzie introduced the item with an explanation that Terms of Reference for the Budget & Administration Committee included communications and there is an appendix covering Task and Finish Groups (Working Parties). However, ahead of discussions regarding Committees it is suggested that the Terms of Reference provided, which may change again, are noted at this stage.

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

BA112/24 11. COMMUNICATIONS TASK GROUP

Updates provided by Cllrs R Mackenzie and P Rowe included that the Task Group will meet next week and an action plan has been produced whilst members have reached out to partners.

Points and issues raised included the community database as an item to be included as an action point for the group whilst the Operations Manager would contact the Berwick Community Trust to enquire if they have a similar project.

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

BA113/24 12. BANKING ARRANGEMENTS

The Finance Officer introduced the item with an update regarding costs realised when the process of opening an account with the Unity Trust Bank was started along with the use of charge cards instead of debit cards. The Committee noted that the Finance Officer was unaware of the charges as preparatory work was carried out by a previous Town Clerk. The use of a local provider was raised as an inclusion for any decisions on banking arrangements.

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

BA114/24 13. EXPENDITURE VS BUDGET YEAR TO DATE

- i. The Finance Officer introduced the item with an update that there are overspends, however, these are known items such as transport and public seat maintenance. Members asked a number of questions and raised a number of points including on office rent, corporate subscriptions and rent for the depot which included service charges and costs for the compound license.

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

- ii. The Finance Officer updated the meeting that the Town Council will be invoiced directly by the Chamber of Trade for grant money awarded to the Berwick Festivals for the cost of the Map Advert as agreed by the Communities and Local Services Committee.

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

BA115/24 14. PROPOSALS FOR GROWTH AND SAVINGS

Members thanked Officers for their work in obtaining sponsorship for Christmas Lights at the Town Hall and noted that moving forward, it is hoped this be an ongoing agreement.

BA116/24 15. BUDGET

Cllr J Robertson introduced the item and updated Members with changes to budget figures and movement from Ear Marked Reserves with the amended report to be provided to

Council at its January meeting. A pie-chart document was circulated which provided an explanation of expenditure?

Points and issues raised by Members included the Precept Leaflet with Officers to explore when NCC will distribute Council Tax bills in the hope that it can be included and the Newsletter with gratitude for Officers work noted.

After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Council adoption of the draft budget with the amendments provided by Cllr J Robertson.

BA117/24 16. NOTIFICATION OF PAYMENTS AND RECEIPTS

Members asked a number of questions and raised a number of points including on hanging basket payments, items for Remembrance Sunday, hire of the 2nd van, Christmas Lights and the lights that functioned on the Royal Border Bridge.

Standing Orders were suspended sufficiently to allow County Councillor C Seymour to provide an update that NCC are exploring what can be done to reinstate the lighting to the Royal Border Bridge.

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

BA118/24 17. PURCHASE ORDERS

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

BA119/24 18. BANK RECONCILIATIONS

The Finance Officer updated the meeting that the November bank reconciliations show the sponsorship payment from GoFibre for Christmas Lights.

Points and issued raised by Members included if the bank reconciliations were available for public inspection with a response provided that they are included as an appendix on the Budget & Administration Committee meeting pages on the Town Council website.

After which, the Committee **RESOLVED** that the Chair sign and receive the bank reconciliations for November 2024.

BA120/24 19. AUDITS

The Finance Officer provided an update regarding a recent exchange of emails with the internal auditor requesting further information ahead of the interim report being received.

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

BA121/24 20. INTERNAL CONTROLS

This item was deferred to the next meeting with it being noted that internal controls are mostly being carried out through the normal business of this Committee.

BA122/24 21. FINANCE QUERIES LOG

No issues were raised under this item.

BA123/24 22. BERWICK RIDERS ASSOCIATION

The Operations Manager updated the Committee that they have a meeting arranged with representatives of the Berwick Riders Association (BRA). Following on from this, with the possibility of BRA submitting a grant application as previously discussed, the form could be modified so that it fits in with the Town Council's grant guidelines.

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

BA124/24 23. ALLOTMENTS

The Committee noted a previous decision to increase rental prices for Allotments and, due to the timescales involved in sending out invoices, **RESOLVED** that accepting payments via Direct Debit be explored for next year with BACS being offered this year as an option.

BA125/24 24. AGREED ACTIONS

Members and Officers provided updates that most actions had been completed with the exception that:

From the November meeting of this Committee:

Communications Task Group to:

- Consider the 3 areas of marketing / communications.

Cllr R Mackenzie

- Terms of Reference for Task & Finishing Groups completed. The Committee noted the addition of a caveat that the Chair of the Task & Finishing Group be decided by the parent Committee and this would usually be an Officer of the Council.

The Operations Manager to:

- Produce a report for the Market for full Council.
- Investigate adding the budget line expenditure to Purchase Order reports.

From the December meeting of this Committee:

- I. A draft annual events plan and diary is ongoing.
- II. A meeting regarding CCTV is scheduled for this week.
- III. Nothing new to report regarding a new premises for the Town Council.
- IV. Grants including a three-tier process deferred as part of the discussion regarding Committees.

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

BA126/24 25. ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA AND ACTIONS ARISING

Items for future agendas to include:

- Ratification of an Action Plan for the Communications Task Group to be added to the agenda for the next meeting of this Committee.
- Committee Membership be added to the agenda for the next meeting of Council.

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

BA127/24 26. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting will be Monday 10 March 2025 at 6.00 pm.