

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCILFULL COUNCIL MEETINGCaddstown Business Support Centre - BidefordMonday, 20 February 2023 - 6.30 pm

## PRESENT

Councillor D Bushby (Chair)  
 Councillor P Christie (Vice-Chair)  
 Councillors R Boughton, D Brenton, C Bright, M Brown, C Cottle-Hunkin, R Craigie, A Dart, J Gubb, P Hackett, P Hames, S Harding, C Hawkins, K Hepple, C Hodson, D Hurley, T Inch, K James, D Jones, S Langford, N Laws, C Leather, R Lock, J Manley, J McKenzie, P Pennington and R Wiseman

## ALSO PRESENT

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| S Hearse   | - Chief Executive                                 |
| S Dorey    | - Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) |
| S Kearney  | - Head of Communities & Place                     |
| D Heyes    | - Finance Manager (Section 151 Officer)           |
| P Hudson   | - Senior Capital Accountant                       |
| G Batten   | - Senior Accountant                               |
| T Vanstone | - Senior Electoral & Democratic Services Officer  |
| S Cawsey   | - Democratic Services Officer                     |

117. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: R Clarke, P Watson, C Woodhouse, L Ford, S Newton, R Hicks and D McGeough.

118. PUBLIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Mrs Penny Oldham, Treasurer of the Parkham Allardice Hall, addressed the meeting to appeal against the Council's decision to remove the 20% discretionary grant from Business Rates.

Mrs Oldham highlighted the impact removal of the 20% would have on their budget.

The Hall, she said, is extensively used by Parkham Primary School, Clubs and Societies and for private functions and celebrations. The running of the Hall requires commitment and hard work. There are fifteen Trustees who give their time without payment and who bring different areas of skill and expertise.

Details of maintenance and improvements made to the building to ensure it is fit for purpose was given.

Mrs Oldham concluded by stating that the Hall is an important and integral part of the village.

The Chair informed the meeting that three statements had been received all relating to the removal of the 20% rate relief for Parish and village halls and detailing their objections. These would not be read out to the meeting.

119. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

120. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

121. TO CONSIDER CORRESPONDENCE OR OTHER BUSINESS ESPECIALLY BROUGHT FORWARD BY THE DIRECTION OF THE CHAIR

Councillor Dart referred to her notice of motion, Agenda item 12(b), and queried the process should the budget be approved prior to the presentation of her notice of motion. The Chair advised, if the notice of motion was to be approved, it would then be taken to Community & Resources Committee who would decide if the budget was to be changed and would make a recommendation to Full Council.

122. BUDGET 2023 - 24, MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023/24 - 2027/28

The purpose of the report, presented by the Finance Manager & S151 Officer, was for Members to consider the recommendations from Community & Resources Committee on the 30th January 2023 as scrutinised by Internal Overview and Scrutiny on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023, in relation to the draft budget 2022/23 and to approve a budget and level of Council Tax for 2023/24.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) indicates the possible extent of the budget and funding shortfall that the Council will face in the future. It is an aid in identifying the extent of service changes that the Council will need to make to achieve a balanced budget in each financial year up to 2027/28.

The slide presentation highlighted the salient points in the report and the challenges faced by Torridge Council. Members were also provided with reasons and rationale to support the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Christie referred to the significant increase in the police precept and asked that the Police Commissioner be invited to attend a meeting of Torridge to answer questions on this.

It was proposed by Councillor Hodson, seconded by Councillor Manley and -

## RESOLVED:

- a) That Torridge's Band D Council Tax for 2023/24 is increased by (2.99%) from £178.66 to £184.00 per year
- b) That Torridge's Net Revenue Budget 2023/24 is £11.155m
- c) That the contributions to the Council's reserves as outlined in paragraph 11.4 of the report be approved.
- d) That in light of the risks to the Council's finances identified within the report, that the Member Working Group continue its work to bring the Council's budgets back into balance.

A recorded vote was taken.

| COUNCILLOR      | FOR | AGAINST | ABSTAIN |
|-----------------|-----|---------|---------|
| BOUGHTON, R     | X   |         |         |
| BRENTON, D G    | X   |         |         |
| BRIGHT, C       | X   |         |         |
| BROWN, M        | X   |         |         |
| BUSHBY, D       | X   |         |         |
| CHRISTIE, PS    | X   |         |         |
| CLARKE, R       |     |         |         |
| COTTLE-HUNKIN C | X   |         |         |
| CRAIGIE, R      | X   |         |         |
| DART, A L       |     | X       |         |
| FORD, L         |     |         |         |
| GUBB, J         | X   |         |         |
| HACKETT, P J W  | X   |         |         |
| HAMES, P        | X   |         |         |
| HARDING, S      | X   |         |         |
| HAWKINS, C      | X   |         |         |
| HEPPLE, K       | X   |         |         |
| HICKS, R H      |     |         |         |
| HODSON, C       | X   |         |         |
| HURLEY, D       | X   |         |         |
| INCH, A T       |     | X       |         |
| JAMES, K J      | X   |         |         |
| JONES, D        | X   |         |         |
| LANGFORD, S     | X   |         |         |

|                   |   |  |  |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
| LAWS, N           | X |  |  |
| LEATHER, C        | X |  |  |
| LOCK, R A         | X |  |  |
| McGEOUGH, D A D   |   |  |  |
| McKENZIE, J       | X |  |  |
| MANLEY, J         | X |  |  |
| NEWTON, S         |   |  |  |
| PENNINGTON, P W   | X |  |  |
| WATSON, P         |   |  |  |
| WISEMAN, R        | X |  |  |
| WOODHOUSE, C      |   |  |  |
| <b>TOTAL - 35</b> |   |  |  |

(Vote: For 26, Against 2)

In addition to the above, Members noted the following:

- The Chief Finance Officer (s151 Officer) assurance of the robustness of the budget 2023/24 set out in section 13 of the report.
- The assumptions and forecast applied to develop the MTFs outlined in section 9 of the report.
- The risks associated with the Budget 2023/24 and MTFs outlined in section 10 of the report.

### 123. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 TO 2027/28

The Deputy Section 151 Officer presented the report, the purpose of which was for Members to update the Capital Programme 2023/24.

The Capital Programme includes authorised projects which require updating due to inflationary pressures, along with new PIDs (Project Initiation Documents) which require authorisation from Members before inclusion.

A slide presentation highlighting the salient points in the report was given.

Following a brief discussion it was proposed by Councillor Hodson, seconded by Councillor Manley and –

Resolved:

That the Capital Programme be updated to include:

- Sully House

- Sully House Modular Units
- Hubbastone Conversion

(Vote: For 27, Abstentions 1)

124. TREASURY MANAGEMENT & CAPITAL STRATEGY

This item was introduced by the Deputy S151 Officer who explained that the purpose of the report was for Members to consider the Treasury Management Strategy, Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2023/24.

It was proposed by Councillor Manley, seconded by Councillor Inch and –

Resolved:

- That the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy and Counterparty List, Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy be approved.
- That the Capital Strategy be approved.
- That the following changes to banking limits as set out in appendix 6 of the report be approved:
  - Maintain counterparty limit of £18m (for our bankers Lloyds)
  - Reduce treasury deposit limit to £5m for our bankers Lloyds only.
  - Increase our bank account limit to £13m

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

125. COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION

The purpose of the report, presented by the Finance Manager & S151 Officer, was to enable Members to calculate and approve the Council Tax requirement for 2023/24.

It was proposed by Councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor Manley and –

Resolved:

That the formal Council Tax Resolution for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 1 attached to the report be approved.

A recorded vote was taken.

| COUNCILLOR   | FOR | AGAINST | ABSTAIN |
|--------------|-----|---------|---------|
| BOUGHTON, R  | X   |         |         |
| BRENTON, D G | X   |         |         |

|                   |   |   |  |
|-------------------|---|---|--|
| BRIGHT, C         | X |   |  |
| BROWN, M          | X |   |  |
| BUSHBY, D         | X |   |  |
| CHRISTIE, PS      | X |   |  |
| CLARKE, R         |   |   |  |
| COTTLE-HUNKIN C   | X |   |  |
| CRAIGIE, R        | X |   |  |
| DART, A L         |   | X |  |
| FORD, L           |   |   |  |
| GUBB, J           | X |   |  |
| HACKETT, P J W    | X |   |  |
| HAMES, P          | X |   |  |
| HARDING, S        | X |   |  |
| HAWKINS, C        | X |   |  |
| HEPPLE, K         | X |   |  |
| HICKS, R H        |   |   |  |
| HODSON, C         | X |   |  |
| HURLEY, D         | X |   |  |
| INCH, A T         |   | X |  |
| JAMES, K J        | X |   |  |
| JONES, D          | X |   |  |
| LANGFORD, S       | X |   |  |
| LAWS, N           | X |   |  |
| LEATHER, C        | X |   |  |
| LOCK, R A         | X |   |  |
| McGEOUGH, D A D   |   |   |  |
| McKENZIE, J       | X |   |  |
| MANLEY, J         | X |   |  |
| NEWTON, S         |   |   |  |
| PENNINGTON, P W   | X |   |  |
| WATSON, P         |   |   |  |
| WISEMAN, R        | X |   |  |
| WOODHOUSE, C      |   |   |  |
| <b>TOTAL - 35</b> |   |   |  |

(Vote: For 26, Against 2)

126. REVISION TO FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

The Finance Manager & S151 Officer presented the report, the purpose of which was to update Members on changes to the Council's Financial and Contract Procedure rules.

It was proposed by Councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor McKenzie that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

During the discussion, the following amendment was proposed by Councillor Hames and seconded by Councillor Cottle-Hunkin –

“ ... with full consideration given to the environmental impact involved when deciding which quotation to accept”.

A vote was taken on the amendment.

(Vote: For 19, Against 9)

It was proposed by Councillor Hackett, seconded by Councillor McKenzie and –

Resolved:

That the amendments to the Financial Procedures rules as detailed in the report be approved, subject to the amendment as stated above.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

127. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

128. NOTICES OF MOTION

(a) Written Notice of Motion from Councillor Cottle-Hunkin

Torrige District Council expresses its deep concern over the loss of the right to wild camp on Dartmoor.

In particular, this council is concerned over the impact this will have on the young people of Torrige District who wish to take part in Ten Tors and Duke of Edinburgh training and events in future years. We recognise the life-changing importance of these types of expeditions in teaching life skills to our young people.

This council supports Dartmoor National Park in its rightful defence of the right to wild camp, which is based on the principle of 'leave no trace'. It is an historic right enjoyed by generations of local people and visitors, and we recognise the mental and physical health benefits that it brings.

We are concerned for future generations and do not believe that the current “permissive agreement” is a sustainable long-term solution. We call on the Leader and Chief Executive of Torridge District Council to write in the strongest terms to our MP, the relevant Secretaries of State, and the Prime Minister, urging them to enact legislation to reinstate wild camping and protect the rights of people to fully enjoy Dartmoor.

Councillor Cottle-Hunkin presented her Notice of Motion.

A brief discussion followed.

It was proposed by Councillor Cottle-Hunkin, seconded by Councillor Brenton.

(Vote: For 23, Against 3, Abstentions 2)

The motion was carried.

(b) Written Notice of Motion from Councillor Dart

I would like us to revisit, and, ultimately revoke, the decision to remove the 20% rate relief for Parish and village halls.

The argument put forward at the full council in September, was utterly ludicrous!

The COVID grants were given to the halls because they had to cease income generation owing to the government stipulations with regard to COVID. This money was vital to keep these halls afloat.

This is most certainly a decision which adversely penalises the rural communities more than those with higher populations supporting and surrounding them.

Most of the parishes I represent run their halls on a knife edge financially, their viability is constantly a challenge for devoted volunteers to overcome, and yet their benefit to the surrounding sparse and quite isolated communities is absolutely unquestionable.

Young and old use these halls, social integration, warm spaces, clubs and fund raising all take place within they aren't just buildings, they are community hubs, quite often the only space that parishes have that communities can come together in.

I implore you to revisit this debate and overturn this unequivocally wrong decision.

The benefit to Torridge finances will be minimal.....the impact on our communities .... will be severe!!

Councillor Dart presented her Notice of Motion, strongly imploring the Council to change its decision, to find the money from elsewhere and to consider the mental and social impact on rural areas.

Councillor Hodson corrected a figure quoted by the public speaker. The correct increase will be £143 and not £500 per year as alluded to. A suggestion was put forward that a letter setting out the correct figures be circulated to all Village Halls. The Finance Manager indicated that the bills would be going out shortly.

The Finance Manager clarified the support and rate relief the Council gives to Village Halls.

It was presented by Councillor Dart, seconded by Councillor Harding

(Vote: For 18, Against 7, Abstentions 3)

The motion was carried.

129. PART II - (CLOSED SESSION)

There were no Part II items.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.05pm