

**WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE
POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT GROVE HOUSE ON
MONDAY 18th DECEMBER 2023**

Meeting Commenced: 7:02 pm

Meeting Concluded: 9.10 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Peak (Chair), Gill Bute, Mark Canniford, Peter Crew (S), John Crockford-Hawley, Hugh Malyan, Robert Payne, Tim Taylor and Helen Thornton.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Jemma Coles, Malcolm Nicholson (Town Clerk), Sarah Pearse (Deputy Town Clerk/ Responsible Financial Officer), Samantha Bishop (Committee & Office Manager), Fiona Walsh (Finance Officer), Molly Maher (Development Officer), Becky Walsh (Communications Officer) and Dan Heley (Member of the public).

234	To receive Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lisa Pilgrim who was substituted by Peter Crew and Martin Williams with no substitute. It was noted that Councillor Jemma Coles was in attendance.
235	To receive Declarations of Interest There were none received.
236	To approve the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on the 16th October 2023 The minutes had been previously circulated with the agenda. PROPOSED BY: Councillor Gill Bute SECONDED BY: Councillor Hugh Malyan A vote was taken and carried . Accordingly, it was: RESOLVED: That the minutes be approved and signed by the Chair.
237	To receive the minutes of the Working Party to Review Expenditure & Governance held on 30th November 2023 The minutes had been previously circulated with the agenda. RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.
238	To receive the minutes of the HQ Working Party Meeting held on the 1st December 2023 The minutes had been previously circulated with the agenda.

	<p>The latest contract valuation was noted at £55,000 over budget based on infinitive costs outlined within the report circulated at the meeting.</p> <p>It was clarified that that £167,40 was already approved from general reserves and so £38,260 was needed to be funded from capital reserves approved by the Town Council.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor John Crockford-Hawley SECONDED BY: Councillor Peter Crew</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes and latest contract valuation be noted for approval be full council. £55,000.</p>
<p>239</p>	<p>To receive the minutes of the Civic Consultation Meetings held on the 30th November 2023</p> <p>The minutes had been previously circulated with the agenda.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.</p>
<p>240</p>	<p>Monthly Financial Reports: September & October 2023</p> <p>a) For Approval Schedule of Unapproved Expenditure</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor Robert Payne SECONDED BY: Councillor Tim Taylor</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>.1 RESOLVED: That the Schedule of Unapproved Expenditure for September & October 2023 be approved.</p> <p>b) For Noting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Bank Reconciliations ii. Budgetary Control Report iii. Bank Interest Report iv. Schedule of Receipted Income v. Bad debt report vi. Overspend report <p>.2 RESOLVED: That reports b) i – vi be noted.</p>
<p>241</p>	<p><i>The Chair brought forward item 13. For discussion before the budget.</i></p> <p>Waterpark Operation and Business model for April 2024 The report of the Deputy Town Clerk / Assistant Town Clerk as directed by Tourism & Leisure Committee was available at the meeting.</p> <p>The report had been considered and recommended by the Tourism & Leisure Committee and the figures were considered to be conservative (kiosk sales were based on £3.00 admission and 18,000 visits).. The kiosk business model would help to control</p>

	<p>concessions and would with a view to working towards a resident’s cards in future years. This was considered a revenue opportunity for the council. The kiosk ‘Clara’s @ the Park’ would look to keep the concept simple and affordable. It was thought the proposal would help with waste issues and freeing up ground staff with water testing.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor Peter Crew SECONDED BY: Councillor Helen Thornton</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED: To approve the Waterpark Operational Business Model / Feasibility Study outlined in the April 2024 proposal. For inclusion within the 2024/25 budget.</p>
<p>242</p>	<p><i>The Chair brought forward item 17. For discussion before the budget.</i></p> <p>To approve the Town Council Charges for the year 2024/2025 The charging schedule for 2024 / 2025 had been previously circulated.</p> <p>It was reported that the officers proposed a general 10% increase across the board with some exceptions. Additional discretion was needed in some areas and flexibility was requested around the Blakehay and Museum for approval by the Town Clerk. For inclusion within the 2024/25 budget.</p> <p>It was noted that the Blakehay review would have an impact on the charges.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor Mark Canniford SECONDED BY: Councillor Helen Thornton</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Town Council Charges for the year 2024/2025 be approved and allow for flexibility at the discretion of the Town Clerk in some areas.</p>
<p>243</p>	<p><i>The Chair brought forward item 18. For discussion.</i></p> <p>To recommend a Draft Budget for 2024/2025 to Town Council</p> <p>The draft budget had been previously circulated.</p> <p>The Deputy Town Clerk informed that as per individual group and group leader discussions, the budget was as presented, reflecting an 8.6% increase.</p> <p>A proposal was made to increase the Community Services budget by £25,000 to fund street cleaning via self-help initiatives and voluntary groups.</p> <p>Discussion ensued on the draft budget and as a compromise it was</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor Tim Taylor SECONDED BY: Councillor Helen Thornton</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p>

243.1 RESOLVED: To add £10,000 into the Community Services Committee Small and Voluntary Grants budget, ringfenced for street cleaning initiatives.

A **proposal** was made to decrease the Community Events budget by £20,000, which was not seconded and was therefore **lost**.

It was then

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Alan Peak

SECONDED BY: Councillor Helen Thornton

To increase the Environmental Budget by £25,000.

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was: **lost**

Concern was raised that before the commencement of the meeting, members were informed that a report had been sent to the council from Somewhere To Go in support of their current Service Level Agreement. However, the report had not been received by Officers as yet and therefore had not been circulated to members for consideration.

It was noted that the report had been requested back in the summer and its latest submission was considered inefficient, for consideration within the budget.

Discussion ensued regarding the purpose of the SLA and it was noted that there was time between now and the Town Council meeting in January to review the report.

As members were conscious of the risks of withdrawing funding without full information, it was compromised that as long as satisfactory data reports were received before the Town Council meeting, there would be no change.

Discussion ensued regarding the Blakehay Theatre and a proposal was made to reduce funding by £24,000. However, it was felt that in order to conduct the review, the budget figures should remain the same. The review was planned to conclude by March/April and would be reviewed by the Expenditure & Governance Working Party for recommendation the Heritage Arts & Culture Committee and the proposal was therefore withdrawn.

Member of the public left at 8.30pm.

It was then:

PROPOSED BY: Councillor John Crockford-Hawley

SECONDED BY: Councillor Mark Canniford

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

243.2 RESOLVED: To remove £50,000 from expenditure to replenish General Reserves.

Discussion then turned to staffing levels and it was:

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Mark Canniford

SECONDED BY: Councillor John Crockford-Hawley

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

	<p>243.3 RESOLVED: To remove the £38,000 from the Central Services staffing budget to fund the Climate Change Officer position.</p> <p>Debate turned to the CAB drop in centre in the Sovereign and it was:</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor John Crockford-Hawley SECONDED BY: Councillor Mark Canniford</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>243.4 RESOLVED: To add £25,000 to the Community Services budget to fund the Citizens Advice Bureau drop in centre in the Sovereign Centre to be released on condition that it remained open in 2024.</p> <p>With the above amendments, the budget and Precept requirement for 2024/2025 = £3,135,840 (increase was at 6.8%), band D at £116.73 and the precept increase at 5.6%.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor Alan Peak SECONDED BY: Councillor Gill Bute</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>243.5 RESOLVED: That the draft budget, incorporating the above changes, be recommended to the Town Council for approval at its meeting on the 22nd January 2024.</p>
<p>244</p>	<p><i>Item 10.</i></p> <p>NNDR Rebate Weston Museum</p> <p>The report of the Deputy Town Clerk had been previously circulated.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor Peter Crew SECONDED BY: Councillor Gill Bute</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To formally note the conclusion of the NNDR refund rebate and receipt of monies as a result which will go back into the councils General Reserve Balances. 2. To approve the payment of fees as due to Avison Young to the value of £58,636.46 plus VAT.
<p>245</p>	<p>Interim Internal Audit Report</p> <p>The audit report had been previously circulated.</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED: To note the Interim Internal Audit report.</p>

246	<p>Medium Term Financial Plan 2024 / 2025 (including Capital forecast)</p> <p>The financial plan had been previously circulated with the agenda which outlined changes in yellow. A further balance sheet was available on the table.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor John Crockford-Hawley SECONDED BY: Councillor Helen Thornton</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED: To approve changes to the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024 / 2025.</p>
247	<p>PPM Update – issue of Purchase Order for revision of PPM programme following appointment of Contract Surveyor</p> <p>The report of the Deputy Town Clerk and Senior Development Officer had been previously circulated.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor John Crockford-Hawley SECONDED BY: Councillor Mark Canniford</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To approve the issue of the purchase order to Currie Brown following appointment as the councils Building Surveyor to undertake the quinquennial programme. - £27,800 2. To receive and approve the use of the schedule of rates related to the Building Surveyors professional services for use over the duration of the contract as required following the procurement exercise undertaken and subsequent appointment in June 2023.
248	<p>Town Council Vehicles</p> <p>To receive the report of the Deputy Town Clerk and Grounds Manager.</p> <p>RESOLVED: To defer this item until the February meeting.</p>
249	<p>Town Quarry Revised Heads of Terms</p> <p>The report of the Town Clerk and revised heads of terms had been previously circulated with the agenda.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor John Crockford-Hawley SECONDED BY: Councillor Mark Canniford</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To approve the Heads of Terms reported as the basis for a ‘peppercorn’ long Lease of the Quarry and to authorise the Town Clerk to complete the Lease.

	<p>2. To note that further reports will be brought to committee on the timescale and terms of future occupation and reopening of the site.</p>
250	<p>To Approve the amended Social Value Procurement Policy The report of the Town Clerk had been previously circulated.</p> <p>RESOLVED: To defer this item until the February meeting.</p>
251	<p>Social Media Report</p> <p>The report of the Communications Officer which provided an update on the use of Twitter (rebranded as “X”) had been previously circulated.</p> <p>The rebranding and shift were part of the owner’s attempt to turn X into an app that was seen as an “everything” platform which allowed users to do things like banking, e-commerce, and expanded social media features¹. The conversations on the platform were becoming more toxic as the restrictions had been lifted. The Town council had experienced issues for Weston Museum recently which spilled over onto the Town Council twitter feed since the restrictions had been lifted and responses often escalate quickly and unlike other social media platforms, there is no control in terms of deleting comments or turning comments off. This can create reputational damage with the ‘right to reply’ being challenging.</p> <p>The council had 1,824 Followers on Twitter/X.</p> <p>The report outlined ‘for and against’ considerations to help members decide if the council should leave the platform.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor Peter Crew SECONDED BY: Councillor Mark Canniford</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the council withdraws and removes its Twitter account.</p>
252	<p><i>To resolve under the Public Bodies (Admissions of Meeting) Act 1960 to exclude the public and press for the following item by reasons of the confidential nature of the business.</i></p>
253	<p>Bad Debt Report</p> <p>The report of the Deputy Town Clerk had been previously circulated.</p> <p>PROPOSED BY: Councillor Peter Crew SECONDED BY: Councillor Mark Canniford</p> <p>A vote was taken and carried. Accordingly, it was:</p> <p>RESOLVED: To write off debt no1 and that officers decide what further action could be taken to pursue debt no 2.</p>

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 9.10 pm

Signed.....Dated.....
Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee