



MINEHEAD TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Meeting
of Minehead Town Council which was held on
Tuesday 14th November 2023 at 7.30 pm at
the Town Council Offices, 3 Summerland Road, Minehead, TA24 5BP

Present: Councillors Palmer, M Palmer, Lawton, Hodson, Jewell, Hall, Beynon and Kravis

Apologies: Councillor Kingston-James

In attendance: Ben Parker (Operations Manager) and Helen Nathanson (Town Clerk via Teams)

1. To elect a new Chair of the Committee to replace Councillor Kingston-James who had resigned from the position.

Councillor Kravis nominated and Councillor Hall seconded Councillor Hodson who was elected unanimously as Chair of the Committee. Councillor Hodson then took over as Chair of the meeting and thanked Councillor Kingston-James for his time as Chair of the Committee.

2. To receive apologies for absence.

It was recommended that the apologies from Councillor Kingston-James, for work reasons, be accepted.

3. To receive disclosures of unregistered or other interests from councillors on matters to be considered at the Meeting.

Councillor Kravis declared his membership of Somerset Council.

4. To approve the [Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Meeting on Tuesday 10th October 2023](#) and to discuss any matters arising.

The following matters arose:

Item 3

The allotments running costs figures had not yet been presented and were ongoing.

Councillor Jewell reported that the Christmas lights preparations continued and were going well. The one hour's free car parking from 5pm had been approved and the message disseminated via social media.

It was recommended that the Minutes were approved.

5. Somerset Council – Devolution of Services

The letter from SC about devolution was discussed along with the list of services which had been presented as 'opportunities' for towns and parishes to fund or take on. This list had been transposed by MTC officers into an additional document to show which services were already provided by MTC and where the risks lay. Having already taken on various services when West Somerset District Council was declared bankrupt, it was agreed that MTC was in a strong position, providing many

services such as toilets and grounds maintenance which other towns were still having provided for them by SC. The existing experienced Amenities Team was therefore an asset in this situation. Councillor Kravis spoke about the issue from his perspective as a Somerset Councillor. He reinforced the message that this was a serious financial situation, with the pressures caused particularly by adult social care funding, and that no services or assets could be guaranteed to be safe, albeit that libraries could not be closed without public consultation. SC would be forced to increase revenue wherever possible.

Councillor Kravis suggested that this was an opportunity for MTC to consider how involved it wanted to be with the town, giving examples of services that MTC could request from SC, potentially alongside assets that could achieve cost neutral, such as car parks. Blenheim Gardens and the Esplanade were mentioned as possible assets/services which brought both responsibilities/costs but could offer an opportunity for the town to have control over important sites.

SC would be presented in December with the options to try to balance the budget but, if unable to do so, would issue a S114 notice. In that event, SC would have to sell any commercial investments first, followed by things like regeneration investments and operational assets such as depots and offices. Staffing structures were also under consideration and subject to constant review as the financial situation unfolded. In the meantime, there had been an embargo on recruitment.

Councillors discussed the role and importance of tourism in Minehead's economy and agreed that areas such as the beach, Blenheim Gardens, the Esplanade and Town Centre needed to be very well maintained and presented in order to continue to attract visitors to the town. Other, different, opportunities such as working with adjacent parishes to fund local bus services were also discussed as possible areas to look at. It was also suggested that MTC could request that SC hold a referendum to increase its own council taxes rather than put the responsibility on parishes and towns or take the risk that the latter would not do this. It was also argued that it was all public money and that at least this way Minehead could have more control over how it was spent in its own town.

It was agreed that this would require a great deal of thought and discussion in a short space of time and councillors were asked to look over the list of devolved services and add their own thoughts and ideas ready to discuss it again in more detail.

The meeting which had been arranged for Budget Training was reallocated and a **meeting was therefore confirmed for Tuesday 21st at 7pm in the Town Council offices.**

A subsequent meeting would then be arranged with the Somerset Councillors.

6. Notes from the Operations Advisory Group Meeting

The following recommendations from the Operations Advisory Group Meeting on 7th November 2024 were discussed:

Item 3 - Annual bedding displays

It was agreed not to offer any of the BID's hanging baskets for use in the town for 2023/24 but to plan and discuss with businesses how any additional floral baskets would be provided in future years. It was recommended that MTC would plant up the additional 4 cake stands still in town left by BID.

Item 4 - 2023 Summer band concerts

It was agreed to review the live music programme for summer 2024 with a view to reducing the number of performances and to ensure that the cost of staffing the events was properly considered.

Item 5 - Electric connection from Warren Road PC's to Coast watch Station

It was recommended that the connection be allowed.

Item 6 - Request for MTC to fund an Eat festival in Minehead in 2024

Councillors had discussed this application and recommended that MTC did not provide funding to the Eat festivals because it was not in line with the Council's grants policy.

Item 10 - Refurbishment of benches at Quay Street

It was recommended that the quote was accepted.

Councillor Hall raised an item in conjunction with the outstanding S106 money for Minehead and particularly for the Alcombe area. He had been seeking quotes for the installation of floodlights on the football pitches and suggested that the changing rooms could be upgraded if this qualifies. Councillors agreed that this should be discussed in due course, once all quotes had been received.

7. Accounts

- i) To note the Receipts and Payments.
- ii) To note the Income and Expenditure Report.
- iii) To note the Earmarked Reserves.

Delivery had been taken of two Christmas trees which had needed immediate payment. The Reports were noted.

8. Budget

It was agreed that the budget was going to be more difficult that year because of the latest developments at Somerset Council. An update would be available at the meeting on Tuesday 21st November at 7.30pm in the Town Council offices.

9. Town Council Offices

The lease on the Town Council offices was due to expire on 29th February 2024 and councillors were briefed about the possible options, which included buying or continuing to rent the office space. It was agreed that there were other options to be considered and that the Task and Finish Group should convene urgently. Councillor C Palmer was still part of the Group and it was agreed that Councillors Hall and Hodson would join him to discuss this issue in more detail and report back to Council. A date for the meeting would be arranged.

10. Grant Applications for approval

- To receive a request from Minehead Museum for a small grant.

Councillors discussed the application and recommended that a further grant could not be awarded to the Museum this year as the Museum had already received £5000 from MTC.

- To receive a request for funding from Citizens Advice West Somerset.

Councillors discussed this application and agreed that an SLA was not the right approach, given that it would need to be monitored and would require legal advice to set up. It was recommended that, in principle, further funding to CAWS would be supported and provided, subject to the constraints of the budget, and that the MTC Grants Policy needed to be updated to allow such repeat requests.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.

Councillor Hodson
Chair