



MINEHEAD TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Minehead Town Council which was held on
Tuesday 12th December 2023 at 7.30 pm at
the Community Centre, Irnham Road, Minehead TA24 5DW

There was a 15-minute open forum at the beginning of the Meeting for residents of Minehead to raise with councillors any matters related to the town. The following matters were raised:

A question was asked about whether or not Councillor Kingston-James was still on the Council and it was confirmed that he was but has needed to take some work-related absence.

A member of the public wanted to thank the Somerset Council Dog Warden for their help and swift response in a recent incident of dog fouling. The Warden had explained that there were problems locally with owners not clearing up after their dogs.

The meeting convened

Present: Councillors C Palmer (Chair), M Palmer, Lawton, Hodson, Hall, Jewell and Bonar

Apologies: Councillors Kingston-James, Kravis and Beynon

In Attendance: Ben Parker (Operations Manager), Somerset Councillors Chilcott and Hadley, and 1 member of the public

1. To receive apologies for absence.

It was **resolved** to accept the apologies from Councillor Kingston-James which were received for work reasons and councillors Kravis and Beynon for personal reasons.

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

There were no disclosures of unregistered or other interests.

3. To receive reports from Somerset Councillors.

Councillor Chilcott gave the following report:

- The Somerset Council overspend had been reduced slightly for the current year but was still in deficit. Councillor Chilcott gave some examples of the various services which might be affected by the financial situation but explained that more was still to be learned about how the Council intended to bridge the budget gap.
- A whole block at County Hall was to be closed and mothballed as a cost saving.
- There would be changes to waste collection days because of efficiencies with a new contract.
- The Wicker Man at Bridgwater was to be repaired and a consultation was underway. Funding would not be provided by Somerset Council.
- AONBs were undergoing a change and would now be called Protected Landscapes.

Councillor Hadley gave the following report:

- January recycling is 44% higher than other times of the year and shoppers were being asked to cut down on use of cardboard.
- The Budget Consultation to allow residents to have a say about Somerset Council spending was live.
- Free Bus Day on 19th December was intended to encourage as many people as possible to use the bus services more, so that funding would continue.
- A new Harbour Management Advisory Committee was being established to manage the four harbours within the county and put together a Harbour Plan.

4. To approve the [Minutes of the Full Council Meeting](#) held on 28th November 2023 and to discuss any matters arising.

It was **resolved** to approve the Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 28th November 2023.

The following amendments to the minutes were highlighted:

Somerset Councillor Chilcott had attended the meeting

Item 3

Councillor Kravis was asked to look into why trees had been flailed and damaged alongside Dunster Straight.

Item 14

Councillor C Palmer had attended the Christmas lights switch-on as the Mayor. Many Town Councillors had attended the event representing MTC.

Councillors C Palmer, M Palmer, Lawton and Hodson had attended the Remembrance Parade services and wreath laying events earlier in the month.

5. To receive the [Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting](#) on 6th December 2023 and to discuss any matters arising.

The Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting on 6th December 2023 were received.

6. Accounts

i) To note the Receipts and Payments.

The Receipts and Payments Reports were noted.

ii) To note the Income and Expenditure Report.

The Income and Expenditure Report was noted.

iii) To note the Earmarked Reserves.

The Earmarked Reserves Report was noted.

7. To receive the notes from the Operations Advisory Group meeting on 5th December 2023 and to discuss any matters arising.

The notes from the Operations Advisory Group Meeting on 5th December 2023 were noted and the following matters arose:

Item 3

It was **resolved** to accept the recommendation that the 2024 Blenheim Gardens band concerts would run from 25th May to 29th September with a total of 20 performances within those dates and some weekends to remain free in response to concerns from local residents.

The Operations Manager explained that there had been complaints from residents around the Gardens about noise levels and frequency. Councillors discussed this and agreed that it was a subjective but important consideration.

Item 5

It was **resolved** to accept the recommendation that the contract with Festive Lighting be extended for another two years, to include Christmas 2024 and 2025, and to request a specification review for the lighting through the centre islands in The Parade. The Operations Manager explained that the current lighting had been well received in the town. Other options could be available in the future such as bringing the lighting back in-house or seeking new contracts but this would take time and needed more consideration, which an extension of the current contract would allow for.

8. To note the Options Paper on the Town Council offices and to approve the recommendation.

The Options Paper was noted and it was **resolved** to approve the recommendations to:

1. Extend the lease for one year and make enquiries about a longer-term rental agreement with a one-way break clause in MTC's favour in the event of new offices being identified.
2. Adopt a backup plan in case of emergency which would be a combination of home working, depot space and portacabins if necessary with the Summerland Room as a short-term customer drop-in centre.
3. Ask the Task and Finish Group to continue to meet to explore longer term options.

9. To note the MTC response to Somerset Council regarding devolution of services and to discuss recent developments and updates.

The Operations Manager delivered a PowerPoint presentation to councillors outlining the possible impacts of Somerset Council devolution of services in Minehead (see attached slides).

The information was based on meetings he had attended with Somerset Council staff and other towns and parishes in the area to find out more about what the impact might be and how other councils are intending to react. He emphasised that Minehead was already delivering many services which other larger towns in Somerset were still having provided by Somerset Council, such as toilets, grass verge maintenance, street weed clearance and town centre floral displays. He then outlined the ways in which services in Minehead might be affected, for example with reduction in services for litter and dog bin collections, beach cleaning, maintenance of play parks and parks. The initial services highlighted by Somerset Council were all street scene related but it was clear that other services such as libraries and information may also be affected soon. Some larger towns were looking at taking over all street scene functions, others were preparing to buy-in to service provision by Somerset Council, a number of towns were consulting with their residents about what they should do. Overall, there were many different ways in which towns and parishes were willing and able to respond so there was no one answer or model.

From 1st April there would still be a level of service provision in the town and MTC's Amenities Team would be able to plug some of the gaps. There could be an opportunity to challenge how services were provided across the town and be more fluid in response. Community engagement would be essential to this and understanding what residents wanted, which required outreach and positive measures to make connections with the community.

The following matters were raised by councillors:

The Somerset Councillors were asked about whether they would be able to provide MTC with assistance in engaging the community and providing staffing help in this respect. Councillors explained that staffing was under pressure and with further staffing restructuring due to take place, they felt that this may not be possible. There was some potential through establishing closer working partnerships with other local, community focused organisations.

Somerset Councillors explained that they did not have oversight of the full impact of devolution themselves and were waiting on further information. It was asked whether MTC currently have the capacity within their staffing structure to support closer working with the community. The point was made that MTC could precept for someone to be in place and be ready to start consulting with the community.

Community buses were raised and potential cuts to the services they provide. Councillor Hadley said that the current provider of this service has a commercial arm to their operation and this could ensure services are retained.

A point was made about the importance of the street scene in Minehead because the businesses were dependant on the visitor economy. A councillor considered that there were not enough people in Minehead who wanted to volunteer within the town and that street scene work needed to be carried out by professional teams. The

Operations Manager pointed out that the new Coastwatch station had the quickest and largest uptake across the country of volunteers for duties at the station and that the Wombles operate within the town. He thought that MTC could do better with its outward facing operations to further support and galvanise the community involvement.

It was noted that Somerset Council had extended the deadline for precept demands to 2nd February 2024.

It was noted that Somerset Council had launched a Budget Consultation 2024-25. Councillors were encouraged to provide individual responses, as were all residents, who could collect paper copies from the Town Council office or find details on the MTC website. The Operations Manager had responded himself and suggested to councillors that it may be difficult to formulate a collective response from MTC, though the consultation allowed for this.

The following recommendations were made for inclusion in further discussion at the Finance and General Purposes Meeting to be held on 9th January 2024:

The Operations Manager had started speaking to officers at Somerset Council to look at potential costs of services and devolution. He was asked to continue with this work and speak to adjoining parishes about working in partnership, which he has already started doing. Councillors were reminded that there was only a month until the budget had to be set and that there was unlikely to be a definitive answer before that was due.

The Operations Manager thanked Somerset Council staff for their communication and how helpful they had been.

Councillors agreed that the cuts were not going to disappear and that more would be coming down the line.

10. To note the outstanding [S106 allocations for Minehead](#) and to agree how to collate eligible projects within the town.

The Operations Manager presented councillors with a slide showing the outstanding S106 money which had been allocated to the town, including dates by which the money needed to be claimed.

Councillors discussed the need for eligible projects which could be submitted to Somerset Council and the need to consult with other community organisations in order to agree priorities. It was agreed that a list of current S106 money and what it could be spent on should be drawn up and then another for future projects.

In view of the changes that devolution was likely to bring, it was clear that some of the funds might be required to replace play equipment, for example, in areas of the town which currently were not owned by MTC.

The Operations Manager explained that the S106 money was for the town and was not MTC money and that, if MTC collaborated in putting together plans for future funding, this would ensure that future pots could be allocated quickly and in the right places.

It was agreed that it was important to get a list of parameters and then use this to identify future projects.

11. To approve the transfer of allotment land from Somerset Council to MTC via a Register of Transfer without further legal work. The transfer had been agreed in principle at the meeting on 26th September 2023 and this is to confirm that MTC is happy to go ahead without seeking separate legal advice.

Councillor C Palmer explained to councillors how the Register of Transfer process would work. It was **resolved** to request that Somerset Council proceed with transferring the land to MTC ownership and that MTC would not seek additional legal advice.

12. To note the Somerset Rivers Authority Draft Strategy and Action Plan which is open for consultation until 31st December 2023. Details of the consultation are available at <https://srastrategy.co.uk>.

This was noted.

13. To receive updates from councillors on Advisory Groups and Outside Bodies.

There were no updates from the last meeting.

14. To note the date of the next meeting on Tuesday 23rd January 2024.

This was noted.

15. An update about confidential staffing matters was given to councillors.

The Operations Manager briefed councillors that a successful interview had been conducted for the role of Deputy Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer and that the Interview Panel had therefore offered the role to Jo Chapman subject to approval by Full Council, with a starting date of 1st January 2024. It was **resolved** to appoint Jo Chapman to the role of Deputy Town Clerk in accordance with the details given above.

The meeting ended at 9.15pm.

Councillor C Palmer
Mayor