

PRESENT:

North Ward:

Councillor D Bushby  
Councillor P S Christie  
Councillor T Johns  
Councillor D McGeough

South Ward:

Councillor S Inch  
Councillor Mrs S Langford  
Councillor P Lawrence

West Ward:

Councillor Mrs K Corfe  
Councillor C Hawkins  
Councillor D Ratcliff

East Ward

Councillor J Craigie  
Councillor Mrs J Gubb (Town Mayor)  
Councillor Mrs L Hellyer  
Councillor J A McKenzie

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs H Blackburn (Town Clerk)  
Mr R Coombes (Deputy Town Clerk)  
Councillor Wilton-Love (DCC)  
2 x Butcher's Row Tenants  
5 x Members of the Public

125. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors J Herron (North Ward – Personal) and Mrs R Craigie (East Ward – Meeting).

126. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND ANY REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION ON ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Councillor P Christie declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 18 (Trustee, Bridge Trust). The Town Clerk had previously authorised dispensation, upon application, for Councillor Christie to question the process of Agenda Item 10.c. Minute number.97.

127. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION OF 15 MINUTES DURATION

A Butcher's Row Tenant simply made reference to the Market Management Committee Meeting held on 23 February, that he confessed to not attending, and the protocol noting that a tenant could not speak / challenge a suggestion outside the public participation period (in line with standing orders). He did not believe the Studio Units took up a third of the Hall, perhaps one sixth. He believed in rental terms they had made £31,000 profit and that the Cinema Equipment £2,700 (£1,506 screen, seating – not exclusive to film showing – £1,194) had made no return.

He expressed surprise that letters giving three months' Notice, effective from 1 March 2023, had been received (by the three remaining tenants) the day following the Committee's resolution.

He made a final reference to the Council's commitment to the terms of the Lease ("use as a market").

A member of the public spoke in support of the Resolution relating to the future of the Market, Agenda Item 10. minute number 97 of the Market Management Committee Meeting Minutes. He had witnessed a steady decline in the Market over the years despite new initiatives. He believed that the Studio Units had ruined the Hall, rendering the space useless, limiting opportunities. He had sympathy for the (Market Hall) Tenants but highlighted removal of said Units provided the Council to open up the Community space for wider regular use.

Another member of the public urged the Council to press and work with the Devon County Councillors in addressing the County Council's torpor in effectively fixing the dangerous (pot) holes that blight Bideford's road network. Despite making multiple reports to the County Council specific works (Londonderry / Moreton Park Road) were no further forward. Cars are being ruined, tyres splitting and the claims process difficult.

Referring to the Market he felt that radical decisions needed to be made and acted upon.

The Member felt it important that the Council's website should provide an up to date attendance record of the councillors leading up to the elections in May. He wondered if Councillor Herron's poor attendance had breached the six month rule.

128. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

(Vote – For: 14, Against: 0)

129. ACCOUNTS

It was proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the List of Payments be approved.

(Vote – For: 14, Against: 0)

130. DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL (COUNCILLOR) REPORT

The Mayor welcomed Councillor Wilton-Love to the Meeting whose written report had been received by Members, prior to the Meeting and is attached forming part of these Minutes.

a. Councillor Wilton-Love agreed that the pot holes were dangerous, the County Council's management unacceptable. He had taken photographic evidence, witnessed driver evasion, stood in holes up to his ankles and raised his concerns to Cabinet Members, Head of Highways and the HATOC. Accidents are simply waiting to happen. Road management / safety will be his priority; should he fail to attain results he will go to the Press. The road network is dangerous and not good enough.

b. Members addressed points and questions that included:

- Social Worker contact details need to be updated and accurate.
- Social Worker moral is very low.
- Potential funding cuts could have damaging (and dramatic overnight) impact on those with higher needs in the face of possible loss of 15 – 20 bed spaces.
- o Structure of social worker management operation restrictive.

Councillor Mrs Hellyer explained that DCC in the face of inflation / cost of living stopped and reviewed a number of road works. Work earmarked for 2021 Abbotsham Road / Londonderry is in the system and will be resurfaced.

She advised that it was difficult to recruit social workers for Torridge and North Devon, in part down to the lack of housing. Twenty have been recruited from overseas, the majority from Zimbabwe; DCC are looking at how to address accommodation for the officers.

Councillor Mrs Hellyer spoke about the Link Centre consultation but raised no hopes for it to be returned to its former offer.

The Drop In element is not a statutory service.

Devon Mind and Rethink run similar services but not in North Devon. There is, though an alternate Drop In at the Burton.

Councillor Mrs Hellyer again made references to County Hall finances and the need for the review of spending. A balanced budget is required by law. Savings of £50 million had to be made and £46 million will need to be saved next year. Any changes or funding for new initiatives will have to be taken from other budget established streams.

Councillors Locality Budgets have been reduced by half from £10,000 to £5,000.

She indicated that it costs £300,000 to keep the old building open.

Councillor Craigie, speaking as a trustee of the North Devon Food Bank, indicated a desire for permanent premises, in favour of annual negotiation of lease.

Further points were made on the state of the Old Town Meddon Street / Clovelly Road and the plight of the Autism Society, North Devon Dementia Project suffering through the vagaries of lost finance.

The Mayor thanked both Councillor Wilton-Love for attending the Meeting, for his contribution including the (DCC) report and that of Councillor Mrs Hellyer.

#### 131. COMMUNICATION BROUGHT FORWARD ON THE DIRECTION OF THE MAYOR / TOWN CLERK

- a. The Mayor advised Members that there would be a Charity Easter Bingo held in the Town Hall at 18.30 on Friday 31 March 2023: £10 a ticket.
  - b. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Councillor / Meeting attendance will be published with the Annual Parish Meeting Report. The website does provide for the last term: April 2021 – April 2022.
  - c. The Commonwealth Flag will be flown from the Town Hall on Monday, 13 March 2023. The Mayor will be attending Riverbank House at 9.45 am for a brief Flag raising ceremony. Those Members wishing to attend to advise accordingly.
  - d. Manor Court Saturday, 25 March 2023. Town Hall open from 09.45, councillors to be robed by 10.15.
  - e. Elections: 4 May 2023.
- Purdah, 20 March, Members / Council to be careful not to publicise in manner that could be misconstrued as supporting election opportunity.
  - Nomination papers available from TDC.

f. 6 April 2023. Final Full Council Meeting. Group photograph prior to Meeting start.

#### 132. STAFFING, FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES (SF&GP) COMMITTEE MEETING

a. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 February 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 13, Against: 0, Abstention: 1)

b. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 February 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 14, Against: 0)

#### 133. PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 January and 15 February 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 14, Against: 0)

#### 134. MARKET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Councillor Christie made reference to his past relationship with the Market Complex and made observations on Minute No.97. that included:

- The time taken to serve Notices to Quit upon three Market Hall Studio Unit Tenants iaw the Resolution.
- The variation in number of trading days and the consequential impact upon the Market Trading attraction.
- Loss of Trader base following Market Hall closure for “deep clean,” in January 2020.
- Questioned the Resolution in relation to financial figures declaring the Market Complex isn’t losing money.
- Conceded that the lack of parking and siting on the hill counted against the Market trader attraction.
- Resource required to maintain empty building.
- Approach to Landlord in terms of lease condition to hold Markets.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained:

- Market Management Committee mandate to “manage” and run the Market iaw Standing Orders and devolved authority to resolve accordingly.

- Prior to 1 April 2016, trading days had been varied upon demands from traders leading to a five day trading week with the introduction of the Studio Units.
- At the end of 2019 decision made to return trading days to two, withdrawing concession for traders to leave items within the Hall at cease of day. Subsequent Lockdowns adversely impacted the trader base / attraction. Despite rent incentives trading never recovered.
- Market Management Committee report in September confirmed desperate plight of Tuesday / Saturday trading, paucity in numbers of traders leading to decision to repurposing of Market Hall.
- Committee working with Event Contractor, SWEMS, who has provided itinerary for 2023 that includes Tuesday Market trading under the banner of Craft and Scoff, and other scheduled events including most recent successful Wedding Fair.
- Lease provides for use as Market; reaffirmed Market Management Committee intent to hold specialist markets in addition to SWEMS Tuesday schedule / commitment.

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 February 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 9, Against: 2, Abstention: 3)

#### 135. TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 January 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 14, Against: 0)

#### 136. DECARBONISATION AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 February 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 14, Against: 0)

#### 137. RE-SCHEDULE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING 18 TO 15 MAY 2023

The Clerk explained the importance of the Power of Competence to Council activities and the requirement for an officer of the Council to hold the CILCA qualification at the first Meeting of the new Council.

Re-scheduling of the Meeting provided for her to be in attendance, at the outset, allowing for the Council to satisfy the necessary criteria, prior to her impending retirement.

Proposed by Councillor J Craigie, seconded by Councillor Mrs Hellyer and

RESOLVED: That the Meeting of the Council scheduled for 18 May 2023 be rescheduled to Monday 15 May 2023.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0, Abstention: 2)

#### 138. BIDEFORD 450TH ANNIVERSARY

Councillor Inch referred Members to the Tourism Committee Minutes adding that Professor Market Horton had confirmed his attendance.

Councillor Christie advised that Bideford Rotary, the Bridge Trust, Friends of St Mary's and the North Devon Athenium had expressed a desire to be involved.

#### 139. TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP MEETING NOTES – 24 JANUARY 2024

Noted.

#### 140. TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL – UPDATE

Councillor Christie advised that the five year land supply figures would be confirmed in April 2023. Should quota for new build housing figures be reached potential for halt the building of new estates.

#### 141. BRIDGE TRUST

Councillor Christie gave detail on income, Estate expenditure, Grants: individual, student and group.

The business of the meeting having been completed, the Mayor thanked the members for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 7.35 pm.

PV NO	ALLOCATION	VAT	NET	TOTAL
1	06787 R Coombes		123.25	123.25
2	17/02 HMRC		4,526.43	4,526.43
3	17/02 Councillors		700.00	700.00
4	17/02 Living Wage	12.00	60.00	72.00
5	21/02 The National Alotment Society	11.00	55.00	66.00
6	21/02 Okehampton Town Council		80.00	80.00
7	24/02 Council Staff & DCC Pension Fund		18,401.97	18,402.29
8	7/03 Clear Sky	40.00	200.00	240.00
9	7/03 Torrington District Council		15.00	15.00
10	7/03 Just Office	11.18	55.89	67.07
11	7/03 Tansar Trading	4.71	23.55	28.26
12	7/03 RGB	32.50	162.47	194.97
13	7/03 RNLI Appledore		500.00	500.00
14	7/03 Lincal	7.52	37.60	45.12
15	DD BT	21.27	106.35	127.62
16	DD Clarity Copiers Ltd		83.24	99.89
			<u>156.83</u>	<u>25,130.75</u>
				<u>25,287.90</u>
	Bank Balances at 2 Mar 23	- Current Account	10,765.41	
	Bank Balances at 2 Mar 23	- Deposit Account	411,949.25	

## Minute Number 8. – DCC Report.

### Bideford Town Council from County Councillor Wilton-Love – 2 March 2023

To start I would like to say I hope everyone had a nice festive period and it will be a pleasure to be back with you on the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

1. Budget: Obviously it's that time of year again and our annual budget has been set. Personally, I was pleased with it – considering the blackhole that opened through the previous years – and it delivers to our most vulnerable as I would have hoped. There is a lot to go through and I would be happy to take questions on it, but it was Mahatma Gandhi who most famously said “the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.”

Times of crisis make it clearer who the most vulnerable members of society are and recent years have most definitely brought more people to the forefront and, with a finite amount of money, some difficult decisions have needed to be made. We have delivered to the most vulnerable amongst us whilst, most importantly, providing a balanced budget which, I would hope, is able to be kept to!

I think it's a tribute to those who worked tirelessly on this for so long. I will add, this isn't the end of works to increase productivity whilst making savings. It is my opinion that processes need to change in all areas to be able to provide a more seamless and dynamic service that is more cost-effective again.

2. SEND: There is still a lot to do to bring SEND up to a satisfactory standard, but things are moving in the right direction. The interim Director of the service, Julian Wooster, is doing an excellent job and after only a few weeks has a firm hand on the tiller. We also have appointed to the two Deputy Director roles, albeit interims, but again experienced professionals so for once we have a full complement of senior officers – Jassi Broadmeadow as Head of Social Care (taking over from Lisa Burill) and Steve Liddicott as Head of Children's Welfare (taking over from Janet Fraser) with Jackie Ross in charge of SEND. The service is stabilising, but we have to be realistic and accept there is no quick fix.

The number of Social Worker vacancies is making a steady decline from 40 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) of vacancies in April 2022 to 10 FTE of vacancies in Dec 2022, which evidences that the increase in recruitment strategies that have been implemented are working. From July 22 to Dec 22, we have had 55 new permanent starters, whereas the previous 5 months we had 30 new permanent starters in Jan-June 22 within our front door services (this also includes Family Practitioners and Personal Advisors). Of those 55 new employees, 44 were qualified Social Workers.

This is another area I will be pushing for change; the shortage of Social Workers was partly pay but is also partly process and the next step – in my opinion – is ironing that out, allowing them to do their jobs without so many layers of management above them. I, personally, think they need much less micro-management and more responsibility. We can speed up service and give our Social Workers a much better feeling of self-worth if we do this.

3. There has been an extra £2million allocated to pothole repair and drainage – the road network does suffer most of its issues during extreme weather (as we have just witnesses). During the cold snap and thaw we were receiving in excess of 500 reports a day with a 2,500 backlog. As you can probably appreciate it is very difficult to catch up with such vast numbers and service was strained. Especially trying to fix during extreme wet weather which makes a repair much less likely to hold. BUT, again, I believe we need to look at process and accountability for defective repairs and poor workmanship. To that end, if you come across a defect, please report it and if you find poor workmanship it is vital that it is reported as soon as possible. I would be particularly interested in any poor workmanship reports, if people could email me with them, I will get to them as soon as I can. But I need to hear about them as they are found. Hearing about them a month later makes it very difficult to action.