

PRESENT:

North Ward:

Councillor P S Christie
Councillor D Bushby
Councillor K Bines
Councillor K Hind

South Ward:

Councillor S Inch
Councillor Ms R Clarke (Deputy Mayor)
Councillor P Lawrence

West Ward:

Councillor T Inch
Councillor C Hawkins
Councillor M Taylor

East Ward

Councillor J Craigie
Councillor Mrs J Gubb
Councillor J Hellyer

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr P Swan (Town Clerk)
Mr R Coombes (Deputy Town Clerk)
Ms V Rowe (Chief Executive Officer, Citizens Advice Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon.)
1 x Members of the Public

42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Mrs L Hellyer (East Ward – personal) and J A McKenzie (East Ward – personal).

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

Councillor Mrs Gubb declared a pecuniary interest in Item 5.8. (husband is the seasonal worker).

Councillor P Christie declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 19 (Trustee, Bridge Trust).

44. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SESSION OF 15 MINUTES DURATION

A member of the Public expressed thanks to DCC for bus shelter provision “at Lidl’s,” made, following a request, during the Pandemic.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

It was proposed by Councillor J Hellyer, seconded by Councillor Ms Clarke,

RESOLVED: That the Order of Business be changed with Item 16 brought forward to be considered before Item 4.

(Vote – For: 13, Against: 0)

45. APPOINT COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

The Clerk advised Members that he had attended the “New Councillor Training,” in July, along with the then Deputy Mayor, Councillor Morgan and office staff, run by the Devon Association of Local Councils.

The Training Officer advised the importance of electing nominated substitute members for committees, iaw Standing Orders para 4.iv.

Councillor T Inch expressed concern at the item. The practise was not followed at District Council level, and he was not aware of other Town or Parish Councils similarly following the diktat.

Councillors J Hellyer and Hind observed that the Standing Order is not in bold, so may not be incorporated and similarly agreed with the aforementioned observations.

The Deputy Town Clerk further explained that a member of the Council who is not appointed to a committee may attend a committee meeting as a member of the public. They would have no right to participate in the meeting unless a member of the public also has the same right i.e. withdrawal from Part II discussions; a practice not hitherto adhered to.

It followed, therefore, that not previously nominated substitutes would have no voting rights when “substituting,” for a fellow councillor, noting Councillor J Hellyer had sat and voted on Planning meetings in the absence of Councillor Mrs L Hellyer.

Councillor T Inch further expressed reservations that non-committee members being excluded from Part II discussion could lead to decisions made in camera resulting in actions taken where fellow councillors would be ignorant, leading to mistrust.

The Deputy Town Clerk excused himself from the Meeting to obtain further written detail provided by DALC.

It was proposed by Councillor Christie, seconded J Hellyer and

RESOLVED: That the Council would not appoint substitute members to the Council Committees.

(Vote – For: 9, Against: 1, Abstention: 3)
(Councillor Hawkins left the Meeting.)

46. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Extra Ordinary Meeting held on 24 August 2023 were approved as a correct record.

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

(Councillor Hawkins returned.)

47. ACCOUNTS

It was proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the List of Payments be approved.

(Vote – For: 13, Against: 0)

48. DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL (COUNCILLOR) REPORT

Councillor Mrs Hellyer’s report had been received by Members, prior to the Meeting and is attached forming part of these Minutes.

49. CITIZENS ADVICE TORRIDGE, NORTH, MID AND WEST DEVON PRESENTATION

a. The Deputy Mayor welcomed Ms Rowe to the Meeting who had provided the “Annual Impact Report Bideford 2022–2023” to Members, prior to the Meeting.

Ms Rowe explained that the Citizens Advice Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon (CA TNNWD) were an independent charity, although a member of the National Citizens Advice Bureau and covered four local authority areas of Devon. There are ten offices and a number of outreach posts.

The paid and volunteer advisers helped over 15,000 people with over 34,000 issues generating £9.5 million (back) into the local economy.

She spoke about the effects of the cost of living crisis, and the levels of demand placed on the Service. There has been a huge increase in the need for charitable support including food bank referrals and energy advice. Securing future funding was paramount in developing the provision of support for advice, guidance and reassurance.

The Bideford Office has seen 1,079 people with 2,559 problems including the cost of living but often with multitude and complex issues. The Bideford support work has generated an income of £797,382.00 (a year on year increase since the Pandemic).

Ms Rowe explained the decision to sell and move from the property in Bridgeland Street, the “not fit for purpose three storey building,” having been largely vacant for two years and the change in working patterns prompted by the Pandemic. Monies attributable to the sale, she insisted, was released to the front line (services).

Threat of homelessness, actual homelessness, increased recourse to food banks and fuel debts issues are representative of the Cost of Living Crisis.

The Trussell Trust (Stop UK Hunger) allows the opportunity when providing (food) vouchers to engage with and offer (further) support to clients.

Charitable support is a Service provision along with the issue of fuel vouchers – TDC and DCC have supported this funding which has continued to grow over the last four years.

CA TNMWD have run several campaigns providing fuel vouchers as well as giving advice on the potential benefits of having a smart meter installed and offering advice on ways to economise on fuel usage.

Benefits and tax credits continue to be the biggest issues facing people in the community. There has been an increased number of people asking about general benefit entitlement.

Personal Independence Payments has been the prime issue not least the twenty eight page document that can cause delays, necessitating appeals that can take a year to come to fruition (albeit the claims are backdates); the process can create additional stress and hardship.

General Benefit entitlement, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance – the higher allowance could provide £90 a week to carers, if they know and is not means tested – are all part of the top five welfare benefits where advice is provided.

Ms Rowe spoke about debt issues including Council tax arrears, fuel debt, debt relief orders (provides for rescheduling of debt, stops bailiffs and stops creditors hastening), breathing space moratorium, credit, store and charge card debts. (The latter was enhanced during the Pandemic.)

(Councillor Taylor left the Meeting.)

Clients can visit the offices two days a week behind the Medical Centre at Abbotsham Road.

The telephone service is restricted to the number of volunteers available, currently eighty seven but down from pre-Pandemic. Only twenty per cent of calls are answered; the demand for the service has doubled in two years. (Operates 9.30 am to 4.30 pm, Monday to Friday.)

E mail, Facebook, Messenger can all be used to engage the Service.

Members addressed points and questions that included:

- Concern no longer based in Town Centre. Potential to use Library or Town Hall.
- o 80% of service is provided digitally.
- Utility Vouchers.
- o 'Phone App, bar code to be used against provider.
- Volunteer Training.
- o IT competent, Cloud base case management. One day a week for six months training prior to phased introduction to frontline work.

The Deputy Mayor thanked for Ms Rowe for her report and contribution.

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

a. The Clerk advised Members that there was a 12% increase of monies received solely through the Market Hall generation for the period March to August 2023 over the previous period 2022.

b. The Clerk had provided Members with detail to support the employment extension of the Seasonal Worker by two months to the end of November.

(Councillor Mrs Gubb indicated her Pecuniary Interest and volunteered to leave the Chamber; Members indicated there was no desire for her to vacate.)

The Members, all but Councillor Mrs Gubb, fully expressed their resolve in support of the two month extension of contract.

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

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

(Vote – For: 12, Against: 0)

b. The Clerk explained the inclusion of the Agenda item by quoting from the Town Council Meeting held on 12 November 2009 in the light of Councillor Hawkins abdicating from the role of Deputy Town Mayor:

“The Town clerk reported that following the decision to devolve power to committees it would be prudent for both the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to sit on the Staffing, Finance and General Purposes Committee as this would allow continuity from one financial year to the other. He also recommended that the Internal Finance Inspector be part of this Committee. This objective could be achieved by either replacing two of the current Committee members, or increasing the membership of the Staffing, Finance and General Purposes Committee to eight until next year’s committees are elected. Proposed by Councillor A T Inch, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the membership of the Staffing, Finance and General Purposes Committee be increased to eight to include the Deputy Mayor and the Internal Finance Inspector.

(Vote – For: 13, Against: 0)”

Members engaged in full discussion led by Councillor Bushby who proposed that the SF&GP Committee be expanded to ten councillors, until the Annual Town Council Meeting. This would allow for Councillor Hawkins to remain on the Committee although no longer the Deputy Mayor, the role now filled by Councillor Ms Clarke.

Whilst it was seconded members considered the implications on other Committees, most notably the Market Management Committee. Councillor Hawkins conceded that he was happy to step down (from SF&GP) given the 2009 resolution.

The Deputy Town Clerk, given the scope of discussion, reminded Members that the item was specific to the SF&GP Committee.

The Chairman confirmed, by reading aloud, the resolution made at the Annual Town Council Meeting of the constituents to the present Committee that was subsequently approved, by Members at the subsequent meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Bushby, seconded and

RESOLVED: That

- i. the SF&GP Committee be extended to ten councillors, to include the newly appointed Deputy Mayor, Councillor Ms Clarke, and Councillor Hawkins who had given up the role.
- ii. Councillor Hawkins remain on all committees that he had been appointed to as Deputy Mayor.
- iii. Councillor Ms Clarke attends those committees where the Deputy Mayor has been appointed.
- iv. the composition of the Committees are reviewed at the Annual Town Council Meeting.

(Vote – For: 9, Against: 1, Abstention: 2)

(Councillor J Hellyer left the Meeting.)

52. MARKET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 17 August 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 10, Against: 1)

53. PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 16 August and 6 September 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 11, Against: 0)

54. TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 September 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 11, Against: 0)

55. DECARBONISATION & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 15 August 2023 were approved and adopted.

(Vote – For: 11, Against: 0)

56. TIDY TOWN WORKING GROUP

Members noted the Working Group Notes.

Councillor Christie congratulated the Clerk in effecting an immediate positive response from one of the waste contractors in the Town.

57. NOTICE OF MOTION

Submission by Councillor K Hind.

“Bideford Town Council resolves:

- a. To re-commit the Council to support the preparation and adoption of a Bideford Neighbourhood Plan.
- b. To reconstitute the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and support its work.
- c. Appoint a minimum of four Town Councillors to the Steering Group or as many as the Council considers appropriate.
- d. Provide secretarial and administrative support to the Steering Group in preparation of the Bideford Neighbourhood Plan
- e. Advertise in social media, on public notice boards and in the press for volunteers to form part of the Steering Group to prepare a plan.
- f. To work with Torridge District Council in preparation of the Plan and invite a Torridge Planning official to the next Full Council to advise and answer questions on the preparation of the Plan.”

Prior to Councillor Hind introducing the Motion the Clerk indicated that there was much important work occupying Council including the Levelling Up, Tidy Town and Market Working Groups. He indicated that there was limited office resource available. (Councillor Bushby expressed agreement).

Councillor Hind proposed the Motion explaining the potential of a Neighbourhood Plan and its importance to the Local Community believing that the heart of the Steering Group should come from the Council.

Councillor Craigie seconded the Motion noting that it would take longer than six months to achieve adding that Northam, Great Torrington and Winkleigh had established Neighbourhood Plans. A Plan would be the voice of the people of Bideford.

Councillor Bushby indicated that the Council did try to engage the Community with a Neighbourhood Plan yet were faced with “an awful lot of apathy.” There was no appetite from the Community, which he stressed has to take the lead, not the Council. It is not the Council driving – it has to be the Community that takes the lead.

He cited a huge housing development at Winkleigh, which the Community were against, that was approved. He concluded that the adoption of a Neighbourhood Plan requires a lot of work; the Council has no capacity.

(There was discussion on whether the Local Plan impacted upon the Winkleigh development and Neighbourhood Plan.)

Councillor Bind felt that the COVID-19 impacted upon the Community engagement. He noted the Clerk and Councillor Bushby’s concerns regarding (staff) resources and that the Motion be amended to reflect this:

d. “Provide secretarial and administrative support to the Steering Group in preparation of the Bideford Neighbourhood Plan as can be achieved in available resources.”

Councillor Hind agreed to the adjustment.

Councillor Christie indicated that Bradworthy had suffered a similar fate to Winkleigh.

He noted that in terms of administrative help TDC do employing planning consultants. He also warned that Northam’s Neighbourhood Plan had yet to be finished in the light of Committee changes and differing stand points. He too agreed that there was a huge amount of work involved.

Councillor Christie alluded to North Devon and Torrridge District Councils establishing a five year land supply in a move to stop speculative developers.

It was proposed by Councillor Hind, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the Motion is supported:

- a. To re-commit the Council to support the preparation and adoption of a Bideford Neighbourhood Plan.
- b. To reconstitute the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and support its work.
- c. Appoint a minimum of four Town Councillors to the Steering Group or as many as the Council considers appropriate.
- d. Provide secretarial and administrative support to the Steering Group in preparation of the Bideford Neighbourhood Plan as can be achieved in available resources.
- e. Advertise in social media, on public notice boards and in the press for volunteers to form part of the Steering Group to prepare a plan.
- f. To work with Torrridge District Council in preparation of the Plan and invite a Torrridge Planning official to the next Full Council to advise and answer questions on the preparation of the Plan.”

(Vote – For: 8, Against: 1, Abstention: 2)

58. TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL – UPDATE

Councillor Bushby advised that the Environment Centre sited at East-the-Water will in future be referred to as the “Operational Services Facility.”

He added that the housing project, Sully House, was near completion and that it and the three installed modular housing pods would be commissioned in October; three further modular pods will be installed, also.

59. BRIDGE TRUST

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

He noted that an organisational grant had been given to TTVS to provide Carers with lunches.

The business of the meeting having been completed, the Mayor thanked the members for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 8.10 pm. The Mayor thanked the Members, also for their support during her tenure as mayor.

		VAT	NET	TOTAL
1	11/09 L Barben		724.00	724.00
2	11/09 National Windows	43.00	215.00	258.00
3	19/09 TDC	8.33	41.67	50.00
4	19/09 RGB	1.59	7.95	9.54
5	19/09 Blights	31.96	159.81	191.77
6	19/09 Tame Trading	6.26	31.27	37.53
7	19/09 Jewson	0.85	4.25	5.10
8	19/09 Acon	64.98	324.90	389.88
9	19/09 MS Auto Repairs	63.24	351.22	414.46
10	DD BT	47.78	238.90	286.68
			<u>267.99</u>	<u>2,098.97</u>
				<u>2,366.96</u>
	Bank Balances at 14 Sep 23		29,798.33	
	- Current Account		415,566.74	
	Bank Balances at 14 Sep 23			
	- Deposit Account			

Minute Number 47. – DCC Report.

Bideford Town Council from County Councillor Mrs Hellyer – 14 September 2023

Since I last did a report for you, Bideford library has opened at its new location. It is lovely inside, being very light and airy with lovely views. It is well worth a visit.

I was pleased that the potholes outside the Town Hall finally got repaired, which will make it a lot safer for any parades that start from that location.

Manteo Way is being repaired between the 11th and 13th September. There will be overnight road closures between 7pm and 7am and all local businesses e.g., the industrial estates, will have been informed.

The section of Abbotsham Road between Harsley Wood and Londonderry Farm estate is due to be resurfaced in October.

Single fares on Stagecoach buses are still capped at £2 for a single ticket until October. I do attend Bus Forum meetings and passenger numbers are still well below what they were pre pandemic. I keep pushing to get the 21A to go up and around East the Water, as it used to do. With all the new building planned and for Manteo way, this is not an unreasonable request.

The consultation regarding Bideford Link centre has been paused and I understand that there will be a new consultation in due course.

I am on various committees at DCC including Childrens Scrutiny, Health and Adult Care Scrutiny, Development and Management, and I chair the public rights of Way committee. I am also on various task groups and subcommittees. Having said all that, most enquiries I get from our residents are Highways related.

I did have a lot of enquiries about employment for adults with learning difficulties, and I was able to host a meeting for the service users and our MP, Sir Geoffrey Cox. That matter is now in the hands of the police, social services and various other agencies.

Routine matters can all be reported online. If you google Devon County Council report a problem, a page comes up with icons, and you can report potholes, overgrown vegetation, problems with streetlamps or with signage and much more.

Alternatively, you can telephone the customer care desk at DCC on 0345 155 1015

Highway issues can be reported on 0345 155 1004.

Out of hours Highways EMERGENCIES only

01392 380380

0345 155 1008

For flooding out of hours telephone the control room 01392 383329

I am always happy for residents to contact me on 07828758360.

Linda.hellyer@devon.gov.uk