

**BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL**  
**Minutes of the Finance & Staffing Committee**  
**held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2024 at 7:00pm held in Woodhouse Gardens**



**PRESENT**

Cllr L Hitchings – Committee Chairman	Cllr C Stevens – Committee Vice Chairman
Cllr N Lacey-Clarke – Chairman of Council	Cllr H Miéville – Vice Chairman of Council
Cllr S Chapman – Chairman of R&A	Cllr S Hitchings
Cllr A Cross	Cllr T Clarkson

**SITTING IN**

Cllr M Putt	Cllr Y Miéville
-------------	-----------------

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Town Clerk Operations Manager	Responsible Financial Officer Daniel Cadisch
----------------------------------	---

**38. PUBLIC SESSION**

Cllr Lacey-Clarke thanked the organisers of the Yuletide Festival for an excellent event on Friday evening, despite the weather.

**39. APOLOGIES**

Cllr R Holmes

**40. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Chapman, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously that

**A dispensation is granted to all Councillors to enable them to participate in discussion and vote on the setting of the council tax.**

**41. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23<sup>rd</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Cross, SECONDED by Cllr H Miéville and AGREED unanimously that the Minutes be APPROVED and SIGNED.

**42. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT & CORRESPONDENCE**

The report was noted (see Appendix A).

Bank Charges/Petty Cash – Lloyds Bank is introducing bank charges, which you will notice have been included in the budget for 2025/26. The Chairman of the Finance & Staffing Committee has therefore suggested we no longer pay in the market/general income each week and withdraw money for the petty cash. Instead, we use the cash income to cover the petty cash required, which makes good sense and will reduce the amount we are charged for our business banking.

National Pay Increase – All staff will receive the back pay between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 and 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024 within their December salaries.

Health Surveillance – All the grounds and caretaking staff have now received their health surveillance for 2024, provided by NHS Dorset.

It was agreed that the SLA agenda item would be brought forward.

**43. TO CONSIDER SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2025 TO 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2028**

The paper was noted (see Appendix H) and Cllr Lacey-Clarke asked for the up-to-date accounts for all organisations prior to the full council meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

**43.1 Citizens Advice (CA) Dorset – £5,000 a year**

Daniel Cadisch was in attendance to thank Councillors for the support, which is vital for the team to be able to deliver the service to the local residents. Usage has increased by 47% and they continue to work from the Parish Rooms, the GP Surgery and the Royal British Legion. Their concern is this coming winter, with numerous residents already approaching the CA for support and guidance. There is a 10% increase year on year with debt. Daniel expressed how vital the Town Council's financial support is, and confirmed that the CA's reserves have 3-4 months running costs.

A response was received confirming that the CA very much values its partnership with Blandford Forum Town Council and the support provided by the SLA has been vital in maintaining its services in the town. On that basis the CA would respectfully request that the SLA is extended beyond March 2025. The costs continue to rise with inflation and demand is increasing by 47% on last year, so the CA would very much appreciate it if the Council could consider ongoing support.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke, SECONDED by Cllr Cross but NOT AGREED (2 in favour, 6 against) that a RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that the SLA is renewed as per the existing agreement at £5,000 a year.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr H Miéville, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED (6 in favour, 1 against, 1 abstention) that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**The Service Level Agreement is increased by 10% a year to £5,500 for a three-year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

**43.2 Nourish – £5,000 a year**

Nourish would appreciate a continuation of the SLA with the Town Council due to demand for the service and increasing costs.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr H Miéville, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED (7 in favour, 1 abstention) that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**The Service Level Agreement is continued at £5,000 a year for a three-year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

**43.3 Fashion Museum – £2,500 a year**

The Fashion Museum has written thanking the council for its continued financial support, which makes a significant difference to the Museum, and has asked the council to continue with the Service Level Agreement.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr H Miéville, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**43. TO CONSIDER SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2025 TO 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2028 (cont.)**

**The Service Level Agreement is continued at £2,500 a year for a three-year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

**43.4 Town Museum – £2,500 a year**

The Town Museum has responded to confirm that they very much appreciate the support they receive from the council and would like the SLA to continue as it stands.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Cross, SECONDED by Cllr H Miéville and AGREED (6 in favour, 1 against, 1 abstention) that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**The Service Level Agreement is continued at £2,500 a year for a three-year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

**43.5 Information Centre – £2,000 a year**

The Information Centre has written to request a continuation of the SLA along with an increase to £3,000 a year. They would like amendments to the SLA, changing the title of the organisation from Blandford Forum Tourist Information Centre to the Blandford Information Centre and reducing the opening hours from 50 to 46. The covering letter has been shared with Councillors by email on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Cross, SECONDED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke but NOT AGREED (3 in favour, 4 against, 1 abstention) that a RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that the Service Level Agreement is continued at £2,000 a year for a three-year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr H Miéville, SECONDED by Cllr Clarkson and AGREED (3 in favour, 3 against, 2 abstentions) with the Committee Chairman using his casting vote in favour of the proposal that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**The Service Level Agreement is increased to £3,000 a year for a three-year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

**43.6 TREADS – £2,000 a year**

A response was received, thanking the Town Council for its support and asking if additional funding is available due to an increase in demand for their services, which have expanded since the last SLA.

The covering letter has been shared with Councillors by email on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024. They would also like amendments made to 1.3 (the word Trustee to Trustees) and 6.6 (the location where they deliver their work at the Scout Hut).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Cross, SECONDED by Cllr H Miéville and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**This SLA is considered at the full council meeting scheduled for 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

**43. TO CONSIDER SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2025 TO 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2028 (cont.)**

**43.7 Service Provision Agreement with Blandford Stour Valley Band – £1,500 in exchange for ten performances**

A response was received confirming that the Band is very grateful for the support from the Council and would very much like to be considered for an extension of the Service Provision Agreement following the expiry of the current agreement on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 and would also appreciate a modest increase in funding due to their insurance costs.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**The Service Provision Agreement is continued at £1,500 a year for a three-year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028, with a 3% increase in 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026 and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2027.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

**43.8 Plastic Free Communities**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED (7 in favour, 1 abstention) that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**The SLA/SPA recipients are amended to include a condition that recipients must agree to sign up to Plastic Free Communities Status by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

**44. ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF EXPENDITURE AGAINST BUDGET FOR THE FOLLOWING:**

**44.1 Administration Budget for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

The paper was noted (see Appendix B).

**44.2 Overall Revenue Budget for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

The paper was noted (see Appendix C).

**44.3 Reserves Accounts as at 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

The paper was noted (see Appendix D).

8:13pm – Cllr Chapman left the meeting.

**45. REVIEW OF FINANCE DOCUMENTATION**

**45.1 Cheque payment 011146 & 011147 totalling £267.08 (for Petty Cash)**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens AGREED (7 in favour, 1 non-vote) that

**The cheque payments 011146 & 011147 totalling £267.08 (for petty cash) are received and retrospectively approved.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

8:15pm – Cllr Chapman returned to the meeting.

**45. REVIEW OF FINANCE DOCUMENTATION (cont.)**

**45.2 Direct debit payments for the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024 (sheets 224 – 225) totalling £70,117.48**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED unanimously that

**The direct debit payments for the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024 (sheets 224-225) totalling £70,117.48 are received and retrospectively approved .**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

**45.3 Online Faster Payments FP 254 – FP 271 totalling £442,694.92 (including transfers of precept, and grants to other Town Council accounts)**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED unanimously that

**The Online Faster Payments FP254 to FP271 totalling £442,694.92 are received and retrospectively approved.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

**45.4 Online Corn Exchange Faster Payments CE022 – CE030 totalling £280,986.74**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens and AGREED unanimously that

**The Online Faster Payments CE022 to CE030 totalling £280,986.74 totalling £280,986.74 are received and retrospectively approved.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

**45.5 Investment Account for the period to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Chapman, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously that

**The investments are retrospectively approved.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

**45.6 Report by Chairman on Bank Reconciliation and Petty Cash checks**

The report was noted (see Appendix E).

The Committee Chairman, Cllr L Hitchings confirmed that the monthly bank reconciliation had been undertaken during the period and was in order. Cllr L Hitchings had carried out the petty cash check but was unable to confirm it balanced due to £1.50 discrepancy which will be checked by staff.

**Post Meeting Note:** This has been double checked and now balances, there was an error on one of the receipts.

**45.7 Bank Reconciliation to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

The report was noted (see Appendix F).

The Committee Chairman, Cllr L Hitchings confirmed that the monthly bank reconciliation had been undertaken during the period and was in order.

## 46. INTERNAL AUDITOR

- 46.1 To receive the Internal Auditor's Report (the IA is not due to visit until 13<sup>th</sup> December 2024 and the report will therefore be presented at the next relevant meeting)

Noted

- 46.2 To consider the renewal of the Internal Auditor's Contract

The paper was noted (see Appendix G).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**The Committee appoints Company A as the Internal Auditor for the financial years 2025/26 – 2029/30, based on 4 x 7 hour days, and with the long-term five year contract (giving a 2.5% saving on the hourly scale rate, which they anticipate rising by £1.50 per scale hour from 2025/26 to 2026/27), the cost to the council would be £1,425.82 plus VAT for 2025/26, £1,472.31 for 2026/27, £1,518.80 for 2027/28, £1,580.80 for 2028/29 and £1,642.78 for 2029/30 giving a five year total of £7,640.51 plus VAT.**

**The long-term contract could be terminated at any time by either party giving three months' notice and would give an approximate saving of £172.55 over the five years. The number of days required is based on historical performance and generally proves fairly accurate. In the event that additional work arises, this will be invoiced at the quoted rates. If less work is needed the Town Council will be charged proportionately less.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

## 47. CONFIDENTIAL

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke and AGREED unanimously

**The public and press may be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity might be prejudicial to the public interest as per Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.**

- 47.1 To receive the Payroll budget (staff grading) for the year 2025/26

The paper was displayed (see Appendix I).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr H Miéville and AGREED unanimously that

**The staff grading for 2025/26 is approved as per the displayed document and is signed by the Committee Chairman.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr H Miéville and AGREED unanimously that

**The public and press were welcomed back into the meeting for the following items;**

**48. CONSIDERATION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2025/26**

**48.1 Consideration of the proposed revenue budget for Administration Costs for 2025/2026**

The paper was noted (see Appendix J).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Chapman and AGREED unanimously that

**The proposed Administration budget is accepted.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

**48.2 Recommendations from Committees**

The paper was noted (see Appendix K).

**Recreation & Amenities Committee Meeting held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

Minute No. 26 – Consideration of the proposed budget for the financial year 2024/25 and recommendation to Finance & Staffing Committee Meeting

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Chapman, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED (7 in favour, 1 against) that

**The earmarked reserves are set at £11,500, for the Recreation & Amenities Committee, for the 2025-26 financial year.**

**Town & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

Minute No. 30 – Consideration of the proposed budget for the year 2024/25 and recommendation to Finance & Staffing Committee Meeting

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Chapman and AGREED (7 in favour, 1 against) that

**The earmarked reserves are set at £16,000 for the Town & General Purposes Committee for the 2025-26 financial year and further discussion on the Reserves is held at the Finance & Staffing Committee meeting.**

**48.3 Consideration of the overall budget for the year 2024/25 and recommendation of the precept for 2025/26**

The paper was noted (see Appendix L).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr H Mieville and AGREED (7 in favour, 1 against) that a **RECOMMENDATION** is made to full council that

**The draft budget of £920,873 is approved for the 2025/2026 financial year (2.88% increase on the 2024/2025 budget, and £7.11 over the year).**

**This will be finalised at the Town Council meeting scheduled for Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

The Meeting closed at 9:13pm.

**SIGNED: .....**

**DATED: .....**