

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Town Hall, Bideford

24 February 2014 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor AT Inch (Chair)  
Councillor A Eastman (Vice Chair)

Councillors: AP Boyd, DG Brenton, P Christie, PR Collins, AL Dart, P Davies, B Edwards, D Fulford, RH Hicks, J Himan, D Hurley, SG Inch, K James, R Johnson, T Johns, M Langmead, DM Lausen, CJ Leather, RA Lock, HA Martin, BM Parsons, PW Pennington, H Ratledge, B Redwood, C Simmons, RMM Tisdale, P Watson and J Whittaker.

ALSO PRESENT:

J Wallace (Head of Paid Service)  
C Bowen (Solicitor – South Hams District Council)  
S Hearse (Joint Head of Finance)  
N Simcoe (Chief Accountant)  
S Cawsey & S Squire (Democratic Services Officers)

H Lumby – Executive Director iESE

8 members of the public

89. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: M Brown, M Footitt, K Murdoch, A Symons and G Tabor.

90. MINUTES

The minutes of the Meeting held on the 3 February 2014 were presented.

Resolved: That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(Vote: For 28, Abstentions 3)

Matters Arising:

Councillor Collins advised that Working Groups for Legal Highs and Northam Burrows had been set up and will be meeting in March.

91. PUBLIC CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Ms N Tregoning addressed the meeting regarding the Financial Transaction Tax (FTT). She provided information about the FTT and suggested consideration be given to a motion supporting the FTT and this being sent to Westminster.

Councillor Pennington thanked Ms Tregoning for presenting the information and advised that this would be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

2. Mr Emms addressed the meeting regarding the Peer Review held in May 2013. He asked if details of the Peer Review were accessible to the public and when an outcome would be available.

The Head of Paid Service replied that the Peer Review was an item for consideration by the Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee the following day. She added that it was a voluntary exercise which did not necessarily require publication.

92. CORRESPONDENCE OR OTHER BUSINESS ESPECIALLY BROUGHT FORWARD BY THE DIRECTION OF THE CHAIR

The Chair invited all Members to the Commonwealth Flag Raising event to be held at Riverbank House, Bideford on 10 March 2014 at 10 am.

93. TO ANSWER QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE A9

There were no questions submitted under Procedural Rule A9.

94. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Head of Paid Service presented the Report, the purpose of which was for Members to approve changes in the Constitution regarding recorded votes for budget decisions.

The Head of Paid Service referred to the letter attached to the Agenda, received from Brandon Lewis MP, which stated that legislation would be in place on 25 February 2014, requiring all Council's to adopt the practice of recorded votes for budget meetings. The letter strongly recommended that Authorities implement these changes for this year's budget decisions. It was noted that Members had voted in favour of a recorded vote at last year's budget decision meeting.

Members expressed their dissatisfaction at having this legislation imposed on them, and felt it was something they could not support.

It was proposed by Councillor Tisdale, seconded by Councillor Leather and –

Resolved:

That no immediate change be made to the Council's Constitution regarding the recording of votes at budget decision meetings.

(Vote: For 27, Against 1, Abstentions 2)

95. BUSINESS RATES – AUTUMN STATEMENT AND CHANGES TO THE DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

The Solicitor provided legal advice regarding the declaration of interests. Councillors Edwards, Redwood, Collins, Pennington, Himan and Watson declared prejudicial interests as they had businesses which are potentially affected by the new rules, left the room and took no part in the debate and decision making.

The Joint Head of Finance presented the report and advised that during the Autumn Statement, Central Government introduced a number of changes to business rates and business rates relief. Members were informed that there would be no cost to this Council with the changes included in the report as they were fully funded by central government.

The Joint Head of Finance asked Members to consider an amendment to the third recommendation in the report. In so far as the government are introducing changes to rate relief policy and where there is no cost to the District Council, that authority be delegated to the Head of Paid Service to incorporate those additional reliefs into the Councils Discretionary Rate Relief Policy.

The Joint Head of Finance advised that this would enable future reliefs to be implemented quicker and negate the need to return to Full Council each time something new was introduced.

It was proposed by Councillor Johnson, seconded by Councillor Lock and –

Resolved:

- That the information in relation to the new measures applicable from 1 April 2014 be noted.
- That the £1,000 discount and re-occupation relief, up to State Aid limit to be included in the Council's Discretionary Rate Relief Policy as an addendum, be approved.
- That delegated power be granted to the Head of Paid Service to establish whether a hereditament meets the definition of a shop/retail for the purpose of Rate Relief as detailed in the report. That delegated power also be extended to allow incorporation of additional reliefs advised by Government where there is no cost to the Council.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

Councillors Edwards, Redwood, Collins, Pennington, Himan and Watson returned to the meeting.

96. IMPROVEMENT EFFICIENCY SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (iESE)

The Head of Paid Service introduced Heather Lumby, Executive Director of Improvement Efficiency Social Enterprise (iESE). Members were advised that iESE had been working with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) for a number of weeks and had identified additional areas for savings and formulated proposals for a future transformation programme.

Ms Lumby gave a presentation to the meeting and invited all Members to attend a Workshop on Tuesday 11 March 2014 for further details of the work being carried out by iESE and CMT. Members were advised that there would be two Workshops at 2pm and 5.30pm and to please contact the Democratic Services office to book a place.

The Chair welcomed Mr Nicholas Simcoe, Chief Accountant, to the meeting.

97. REVENUE BUDGET 2014-15

Councillors Parsons, Boyd and Eastman declared personal interests – dual hatted – County Councillors

The Joint Head of Finance presented the report on the Revenue Budget 2014-15. He explained there is a legal requirement on the Authority to set a balanced budget, which he advised had been increasingly difficult to achieve, and the setting of the Council Tax.

He gave a detailed overview of the report, which outlined the current budget gap based on work undertaken to date and the current forecasts for Government funding, announced 5 February 2014. The report also included the recommendations from the Community & Resources Committee held on 18 December 2013.

Councillor Redwood as Chair of Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted that the observations from the Committee meeting held on 14 January 2014, which mirrored the recommendations from the Community & Resources Committee, had not been included in the Revenue Budget report. He would like to see them noted in all future reports.

Members were informed that a proposal had been put forward for balancing the budget by temporary use of New Homes Bonus, which would allow sufficient time to consider long term options, taking into account the significant Government funding reductions.

It was proposed by Councillor Brenton, seconded by Councillor Simmons that recommendation b) ii) be amended –

“To increase the Council Tax by 1.95% and that increase be equally divided between a Homelessness budget and economic regeneration”.

During the debate discussions took place regarding ring fencing the proposed increase, and concern was expressed with regard to the impact an increase would have on those who are on low incomes.

It was proposed by Councillor Johnson, seconded by Councillor Tisdale and -

Resolved:

That a recorded vote be taken.

More than five Members voted in favour of a recorded vote, therefore the motion was carried.

Councillor Whittaker proposed an amendment to the amended recommendation b) ii) as follows:

“That the additional monies raised be ring fenced for the benefit of those in the community who will be directly affected by the increase”.

This proposed amendment was seconded by Councillor Boyd.

Councillor Collins suggested an amendment to recommendation 5 b) ii). It was proposed by Councillor Collins and seconded by Councillor Simmons that recommendation 5 b) ii) be amended :

“That the council tax be increased for 2014/15 by 1.95% and half the monies raised be put into a discretionary financial and homelessness budget, details to be agreed by Members, and the other half of the monies raised to go to the economic regeneration budget”.

The movers and seconders of the previous two amendments accepted Councillor Collins' amendment, and therefore Councillors Brenton and Whittaker (agreed by their seconders) withdrew their proposed amendments.

(Vote: For 22, Against 8)

Councillor Tisdale left the meeting at 7.55 pm.

A recorded vote was then taken on amended Recommendation 5 b) ii).

It was proposed by Councillor Collins and seconded by Councillor Simmons and –

Resolved:

That the council tax be increased for 2014/15 by 1.95% and half the monies raised be put into a discretionary financial and homelessness budget, details to be agreed by Members, and the other half of the monies raised to go to the economic regeneration budget.

(Vote: For 18, Against 11)

Votes were recorded as follows:

<b>COUNCILLORS</b>	<b>FOR</b>	<b>AGAINST</b>	<b>ABSTAIN</b>
BOYD AP	X		
BRENTON D	X		
CHRISTIE P	X		
COLLINS P	X		
DART A		X	
DAVIES P		X	
EASTMAN A	X		
EDWARDS B	X		
FULFORD DC		X	
HICKS RH		X	
HIMAN J		X	
HURLEY D	X		
INCH SG		X	
INCH AT	X		
JAMES KJ	X		
JOHNS T		X	
JOHNSON R		X	
LANGMEAD M	X		
LAUSEN DM	X		
LEATHER CJ		X	
LOCK RA	X		
MARTIN H	X		
PARSONS BM		X	
PENNINGTON PW		X	
RATLEDGE H	X		
REDWOOD B	X		
SIMMONS C	X		
WATSON P	X		
WHITTAKER	X		

It was proposed by Councillor Collins, seconded by Councillor Boyd and –

Resolved:

- a. That £514k of the New Homes Bonus for 2014/15 be used to fund the Revenue Budget 2014/15, subject to the further work being done that may reduce the budget gap
- b. i) That the revenue budget for 2014/15 be approved
- c. That appropriate task and finish groups be developed to work with Internal Overview and Scrutiny to consider and develop options for delivering a longer term sustainable budget

(Vote: For 23, Against 6)

Councillor Langmead left the meeting at 8 pm.

98. COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION 2014-15

The Joint Head of Finance explained that it was a requirement that Full Council adopt the Council Tax Resolution for 2014/15.

It was proposed by Councillor Johnson, seconded by Councillor Watson and –

Resolved:

That the Council Tax Resolution for 2014/15 as set out in the amended Appendix 1 tabled at the meeting be approved.

(Vote: For 24, Against 3) - one Member out of the room

99. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

100. NOTICES OF MOTION

There were no Notices of Motion.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and ended at 8.10 pm.

Signed:

Date: