

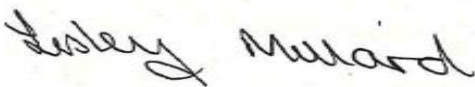
ANNUAL TOWNS MEETING

Tuesday 16th April 2024 at 7 pm (Doors open at 6.45 pm)
To be held at The Princess Theatre, Princess Street,
Burnham-on-Sea

Agenda

1. Introductions and welcome from The Mayor, Councillor Lesley Millard
2. Official noting of the Town Councillor apologies for absence
3. To receive and approve the Minutes of the Annual Towns Meeting of 18th April 2023
4. To receive a report from the Police. Sergeant Hardaway will be in attendance to answer questions on any relevant matters raised at the meeting
5. Presentation of Annual Reports 2023-24
6. Open Forum - to receive questions relating to the towns of Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge which may be asked by any of the towns electors. To help us to provide the best possible answer, especially if related to finances, then please submit your question in advance – please email info@burnham-highbridge-tc.gov.uk.
7. Town Mayor's closing remarks and thanks

Light refreshments will be provided.



Councillor Lesley Millard
Mayor of Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge



**Burnham-on-Sea
& Highbridge**
TOWN COUNCIL

Annual Reports 2023-2024

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MAYOR'S REPORT

This year the Town Council has sought to ensure the growth and development of both towns. The High Street Taskforce Working Group has now become Better BOS. It is setting up as a CIC to provide stimulus and innovation that will kick start the local economy in Burnham. We have reformed the Highbridge Regeneration Working Group to include several local members of community groups in Highbridge. The group will revisit and reignite the Regeneration Framework and create an Action Plan that will engage the community in projects that will improve facilities in the town and stimulate local pride.



The Climate and Ecology Working Group has been working closely with the local community to raise awareness of environmental issues and create ways of creating greener practices. We now have two very successful Repair Cafes that are encouraging residents to have a more sustainable life style. They are creating their own communities as volunteers and residents work together. The Plastic Free Group has been encouraging businesses to become Refill Centres to reduce single use plastic.

The Growing Group is working in partnership with Burnham and Highbridge in Bloom to improve the planting around the town. They are aiming to ensure that flower beds are sustainably planted to reduce maintenance and give all round colour. Burnham and Weston Solar Energy have been working closely with our most vulnerable families offering support to reduce energy bills. They have also offered to audit community buildings providing advice on energy reduction. They are now available at both the Waffle and Morland Hubs to provide advice and support.

Somerset Wildlife Trust and Our Highbridge have been working to raise awareness of environmental concerns in the Brue Green Pathway project. They have completed a lot of community engagement activities encouraging people to become involved in their work on the river Brue.

The Bus User Group has been holding First Bus and Somerset Council to account for our poor bus service. This is ongoing with the next focus being the problems for young people getting to school or college. We are working with GWR as part of the Transport Strand of the action plan but it also will form part of Highbridge Regeneration. We are aiming to create a travel plan that incorporates and encourages active travel. We are also aiming to develop the train station to enhance its outlook and make it an attractive destination for visitors.

The Town Council is also planning for the devolution of services from Somerset Council. This will give us the opportunity to manage and improve the current service but of course it will be at a cost. Alongside most local parish councils we are looking to provide best value in our service provision over the next few years. We are involved in the Local Community Network of parish councils that will give us the opportunity to work together in some areas to achieve a more economical service.

The Town Council has allocated £32,300 in grants to local organisations. This has provided a variety of resources including; a defibrillator, IT equipment and equipment for stand-up paddle boards. This money also supported a selection of events including; Pride on Sea, the pantomime, BoSFest, Sedgemoor Playday, Emergency Services Day and BEES. It also supported local community groups with everyday repairs, maintenance and publicity.

I have enjoyed my two years as Mayor. It has been a privilege to serve the community and I now know the towns better. I look forward to continuing my work as a councillor over the next three years.

Cllr Lesley Millard - Mayor

TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The first part of the year had been particularly challenging with several staff vacancies. However, a full complement of staff has been in place since September 2023.

There have been many challenges over the year, not least with the District and County Councils becoming a Unitary Council and then declaring a financial emergency. The devolution of services to the Town Council is a complex ongoing process.

There have been many improvements to policies and procedures and all staff have embraced the changes, which are helping the Council run more effectively and efficiently.

The Responsible Finance Officer has made improvements to the accounting systems to improve transparency and is maintaining the accounts in good order.

The Princess Theatre staff have been working hard to book a variety of shows for the coming year and the enhanced marketing has seen an increase in customers.

The cemeteries staff continue to work hard to keep the cemeteries well maintained, which has been difficult due to the continual wet weather.

The Rangers carry out a variety of tasks to keep the town looking clean and tidy and are always willing to go above and beyond.

The office staff carry out an enormous amount of work in the background, as well as responding to public enquiries in person, on the phone and by email. They also regularly update the Council's Facebook page (BOSHTownCouncil) and website.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the staff for all their hard work. I would particularly like to thank the Deputy Clerk for her help and support.

The Council has an excellent, dedicated team of staff, all of whom play a vital part in the smooth running of the Council and provision of services for Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge.

Katherine Noble - Town Clerk

RESPONSIBLE FINANCE OFFICER'S REPORT

Council Tax (Precept)

For 2023/24 the Town Council requested a precept of £768,500 making a Band D Property £116.10 per annum, an increase of £7.60 to a Band D property on the Town Council element of the Council Tax.

Grants

The Council agreed grants to 21 local organisations totalling £34,356 including the applications for Beautification grants funded by Somerset Council. This financial support enabled the groups that applied to put on events in the towns, it has supported the sustainability of the local clubs and has enabled a variety of projects to be undertaken by local businesses and organisations. Applicants are required to complete an application and provide a copy of their constitution and bank account as well as details of how they are will spend the

grant. There is a monitoring form in place that enables the Town Council to ensure that the grant funding has been used appropriately. The council has already received positive feedback from the majority of applicants. The next round of grants will be June 2024.

Resources

EXPENDITURE	Estimated year-end figures 2023-24
Staff Costs and Expenses	£371,520
Administration. Office & Running Costs	£113,031
Democratic & Civic	£10,064
Grants	£35,000
Cemeteries	£34,693
Princess Theatre	£218,988
Joint funding with other Councils	£81,250
Other Assets & Community Services	£19,148
Events inc Christmas lights displays	£50,500
Total expenditure	£934,194
Income received	£196,761

Total estimated income for the year = £196,671

Total estimated expenditure for the year = £934,194

Estimated Earmarked reserves = £753,380

Estimated general reserves = £371,957

Procedures & Protocols

The council constantly strive to maintain a high standard of accounting practices which are reviewed regularly. Improvements have been made to several procedures and protocols throughout 2023-24 which has been noted by auditors during an interim audit.

2024-25

On Tuesday 30th January the Town Council agreed a budget of £952,901 for the 2024/25 financial year which includes projected income of £118,025 and expenditure of £1,070,926. The expenditure will be funded by a precept of £952,901, which will form part of the council tax along with the requirements of Somerset County Council and Police. This equates to an increase in the Town Council element of £27.31 per year to a Band D property to £143.41, a weekly increase of just over 50p and one of the lowest increases throughout Somerset.

Nicole Brooks - Responsible Finance Officer

FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT

The year has continued the direction of the previous year with the Council, Officers and the Finance and Resources Committee working towards closer control and understanding of the Council's finances, following the disruption caused by staff shortages in 2022 and early 2023.

We welcomed our new RFO near the end of the summer of 2023 and I am pleased and grateful that she and our Clerk have worked together to clear a backlog of reconciliation and documentation work as well as tightening controls over spending over the course of the last few months.

Cllr. Matthews and I were appointed to conduct quarterly checks on the financial processes and I can report that we are now working to a regular, systematic checking process which, whilst it has not shown up major deficiencies, has allowed us to lend our professional experience to the work of developing tighter controls. The internal audit report, pointed up some relatively minor issues, which were largely already in the process of being addressed.

Through the year the Committee considered a handful of contractual renewals. Power contracts due for renewal were fixed for one year only, due to the uncertain direction of future power prices.

The Committee also reviewed and updated several financial and risk management policies. Most recently, we have increased the range of investments we can consider for surplus funds, with an updated investment policy and process.

During the year we once again had the opportunity to support local community groups and charities through the award of just over £32,000 of grants. A summary of grants awarded is included in the appendix to this report.

We were also able to distribute some Town Centre Beautification grants. Three businesses were awarded a total of £2,305 to help improve their premises.

The discussions around the 24/25 budget and precept were in large part dominated by an uncertain environment relating to services provided by Somerset Council. We undertook consultation with local residents and a series of judgements as to which services could sustainably be funded by the town. This did require to us to recommend a substantial increase in the precept to Council, although I note that the level in our town remains at the lower end of the range compared to comparable towns in Somerset.

Cllr Ganesh Gudka - Chair of Finance and Resources Committee

Appendix – list of grants awarded

Applicant	Notes	Amount
BoSFest	Regular annual event	£2,500
CADS	Regular events (Party in the Park)	£2,500
Sedgemoor Playday	Contribution to Regular town event.	£2,500
Somewhere House	Mayor's charity - for a specific service to vulnerable people	£2,500
Nornen Project	Community event	£2,500
Air Cadets 290 Squadron Detached Flight Burnham and Highbridge	IT Equipment	£486
Burnham Excellent Entertainment Society (BEES)	Rehearsal costs and materials	£1,000
Burnham and District Pantomime Society	The hire and installation of lighting for pantomime	£2,500
Burnham Heritage Group	Reprinting of leaflets	£1,220
Burnham-on-Sea Sea Cadets	Equipment for stand up paddle boards	£400
Highbridge Community Hall Trust	Hall repairs and maintenance	£1,350
King Alfred Amateur Boxing Club	Welfare fund to subsidise membership	£500
Monarchs Gymnastics	Competition expenses in Germany	£2,000
Somerset Youth Theatre CIC	Towards provision of services	£2,500
The Waffle Hub	Enhance the "Free Digital Café"	£2,500
The Zone Youth Club	Expanding facilities	£2,500
Pride-on-Sea	Towards event costs	£2,500
Mens' Shed	Half of defibrillator cost	£375
Total		£32,331

HR SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

The HR Sub-Committee meets on an ad-hoc basis to consider all matters of human resources, including staff establishment, grading and conditions of service, as well as training and related functions for councillors and staff. The Sub-Committee has met on many occasions this year (2023-24) to address these issues.

Since last year, we have continued to strengthen the staffing of the Town Council offices. Two customer services assistants were appointed to work at Jaycroft Road in April/May 2023, thus completing the administrative team there.

We were also pleased to welcome a new RFO to work at Jaycroft Road in July 2023. This role had been particularly difficult to fill, due to a national shortage of suitably qualified candidates. It is fair to say that there has been a great deal of work for the current postholder to undertake, given the absence of a council-employed RFO since April 2022.

The HR Sub-Committee acknowledges the difficult period between April and September at the Princess Theatre and Arts Centre, when staff turnover was high. This had an impact on staff at the theatre and other Town Council staff. Our thanks go to the Town Clerk and all staff for pulling together at such a challenging time.

The Princess Theatre welcomed a new Theatre Manager and a Marketing and Programming Officer in September 2023. The impact of the appointment of these two post-holders is already evident in an increased profile of the theatre and increased sales and attendance at events held there.

The HR Sub-Committee also agreed a restructuring of the staffing at the theatre, with the removal of the post of Front of House Coordinator and the appointment of a Casual Duty Officer to be available when the need arises.

The HR Sub-Committee has also recently agreed to advertise for a seasonal worker for the Cemeteries to help during the summer months. This will be more cost effective than contracting out.

Training of Councillors

Over the past year, councillors have undertaken training on the following topics:

Chairman's training, responding to planning applications and councillors' essentials.

Training of Staff

Staff have undertaken training from CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration), ILCA (Introduction to Local Council Administration), FILCA (Financial Introduction to Local Council Administration), IOSH (Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) and on subjects such as PAT testing, Manual Handling and Health and Safety.

Cllr Sharon Perry - Chair of HR Sub-Committee

PRINCESS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

The Committee has delegated authority to: deal with the administration, maintenance and use of the Princess Theatre and Arts Centre; consider the provision of new or replacement equipment or furniture, within budget; set fees and conditions of use; and liaise with community organisations that have an interest in the theatre or entertainment facilities in the town.

Staffing

The past twelve months at the Princess Theatre can be categorised as a year of two halves. From April to September, the Theatre was without a manager, following the resignation of the BDO in January. Two other members of staff also left in the summer. This, of course, had a major impact on the remaining staff, other Town Council staff and volunteers.

The Princess Management Committee acknowledges the pressures this brought to all staff associated with the theatre and would like to formally thank everyone for their cooperation and hard work at such a challenging time.

During this period of time, the Princess Management Committee, in collaboration with the HR Sub-Committee and the Finance and Resources Committee, reviewed the staffing structure of the Theatre. This led to the redefining of key roles within the theatre.

The second half of the year saw the theatre welcome two new appointments: a Theatre Manager and a Marketing and Programming Officer. Both post-holders started in September and their positive impact has been immediate.

As a priority, the Theatre Manager undertook a review of all procedures at the theatre and introduced improvements in contracts and agreements. Reports from the Theatre Manager to the PMC are professional and detailed, allowing the PMC to check on the progress of the theatre and its increasing audience numbers and ticket sales. We have also seen an increased media profile of the theatre and its shows and this, in turn, has led to increased ticket sales.

Programming and Events

Over the past year, the theatre has programmed, among other things, the following events: comedy nights, tribute acts, boxing, pantomimes, Highbridge Festival of the Arts, talks (eg a documentary on Ukraine), theatre productions (both professional and community), ballet, crafts fairs, and the Burnham Book Festival. It also hosted a celebration for the King's Coronation in May 2023 and a Volunteers' recruitment day in June 2023.

During the summer, the theatre was used as a rehearsal space by the Nornen project, which was a successful local community project, and we were proud to support them in staging this in Marine Cove.

The theatre remains a venue for many community-based groups, such as a choir, art group, kurling, and rehearsal spaces for local amateur dramatic associations, and there are plans for the coming year to widen this to other creative events and community groups.

Theatre Review 2023

A review of the theatre and its operation was conducted in 2023 and a report received in June, making a number of recommendations to the PMC to improve its staffing structure and operational efficiency. These recommendations were adopted by the PMC and are regularly reviewed at Committee meetings. Many of the recommendations have now been implemented.

Princess Theatre Working Party

Last year, the Town Council considered a letter expressing an interest to run the theatre. In June 2023, the Town Council formally declined this expression of interest. However, a working group of councillors was established to conduct research on how other theatres of a comparable size are organised, owned and funded, with a view to presenting different options to the Town Council, including retaining ownership. This work is on-going and will report to a full Town Council meeting this year.

Café at the Princess Theatre

During the past two years, Hellends Kitchen has operated within the Princess Theatre as a café during the day and offering a bar service on show nights. They have built up a loyal customer base and the presence of a day-time café has been welcomed by many, adding to the friendly and welcoming atmosphere of the theatre. Sadly, the operators of Hellends Kitchen have decided to leave the theatre at the end of May; we thank them for their association with the theatre and wish them well for the future. The PMC has tasked the Theatre Manager and Town Clerk to explore options for a temporary service from May, whilst still looking at a long-term solution for the café.

Cllr Sharon Perry - Chair of PMC

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Planning Committee usually meets every 3 weeks since May 2023 and to date, the Planning Committee has considered and commented on 79 planning applications including several large-scale developments.

The Committee has been consulted on 12 applications regarding trees, either notification of proposed TPO's or felling. There have also been 9 variations of existing planning conditions and 8 premises licencing applications relating to outside seating, variations of hours and street trading.

The Committee has also considered 6 Certificates of Lawfulness, 4 applications for illuminated posters and 2 appeals.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meetings and speak in the public participation session. Comments made by the public are also considered by the Committee before voting on an application.

Cllr. Alastair Elrick - Chair of Planning Committee

TOWN IMPROVEMENTS COMMITTEE REPORT

Within the terms of reference for the TIMPS committee are items such as: monitor the maintenance of various items of the town's infrastructure, monitor Community Events (Armed Forces Day, Annual Fireworks Display, etc), consider the applications for markets artwork or other aesthetics and monitor CCTV provision and crime and disorder in the town; to manage the Council's tourism and destination marketing initiatives.

The TIMPS committee also prepares its budget each year; sets up sub-committees and working groups, as necessary; and undertakes any other matter referred to the TIMPS committee by the Town Council that is not already within the terms of reference.

During the past year, the TIMPS committee has considered the following issues:

High Street Taskforce – Burnham-on-Sea

This government funded project, supported by Somerset Council, held workshops of interested stakeholders, including Town Council representatives, to discuss the regeneration of Burnham-on-Sea Town Centre. TIMPS nominated Cllr. Gudka to be the Town Council representative and Cllr. Clayton represents Somerset Council on this working group, which has now evolved into Better BOS. Cllr. Gudka reports regularly to TIMPS and to the full Town Council on the discussions about the future vision for Burnham-on-Sea.

Highbridge Regeneration Project

TIMPS appointed Highbridge ward councillors to be part of the Highbridge Regeneration Project, which is considering improvements to the town. The work of this group reports to the full Town Council.

Christmas Lights and Christmas Trees

A working party of councillors from the TIMPS committee oversaw the process to award contracts for the purchase, installation and decoration of Burnham and Highbridge Christmas Lights. A contract for Christmas Trees was also considered by TIMPS and approved for recommendation by the Town Council.

TIMPS also agreed to contribute funds to the Christmas Lights Switch on Events in both towns. There was some disappointment at the Burnham-on-Sea lights, due to the overall cost, the fact that they failed to come on all at once at the switch on event and high winds led to one of the trees falling. The installation issues have been taken up with the contractor and an improvement plan agreed for next year. The trees and lights are contracted for a further two years but some members will review whether the position of the trees and use of the lights can be improved in future years.

Seawall Art

A presentation by SEED Somerset was made to the TIMPS committee in July, proposing to install more mosaic panels on the Esplanade walls. This was an impressive presentation and it was felt by Committee members that this would add more interest to the seafront and compliment the art that was already there. Whilst the Committee

wished to commission one panel, it was subsequently decided by the full Town Council that it could not budget for this in 2024/25, given the other financial pressures on the Council.

Legacy Clock and Water Feature

The TIMPS committee agreed the purchase of a legacy clock for Burnham-on-Sea. The Town Council is waiting for permission from Somerset Council to erect the clock on the proposed site.

In September, it was reported to TIMPS that extensive repairs were required to the water feature in Burnham-on-Sea. TIMPS recommended to the Town Council that this be carried out. This work has now been completed.

Esplanade Play Area

Throughout the year, the TIMPS committee endeavoured to find a way to resolve the issue of the Esplanade Play Area. Regrettably, it proved impossible to reconcile the differing opinions on this issue and, having considered all possibilities, the Town Council accepted advice from Somerset Council (who own the seafront) that the equipment could not be installed due a legal objection from local residents.

Decision to disband the TIMPS Committee

A decision was made at the Town Council meeting in February 2024 that the TIMPS committee, as currently constituted, would be disbanded. Issues that were formally considered by the TIMPS committee will now be allocated to other committees. Councillors who have served on TIMPS, both this year and in the past, are thanked for their hard work and determination to improve the features of both Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge.

