

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL EXTRAORDINARY FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2020

Present

Chairman: The Mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe, MBE

Councillors: Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr J. Broom, Cllr R. Doney, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr S. Williams

Officers: M. Adamson-Drage (operations manager), M. Green (deputy town clerk), A. Mullins (support services manager), M. Russell (finance manager), J. Wright (town clerk)

Absent: Cllr L. Howe

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe, read out the protocol for virtual meetings and ensured all participants could hear each other.

19/222/C Public Forum

N. Ball

N. Ball thanked the council for how they had managed things during the coronavirus crisis and he felt the town had fared well. He said there were several things that needed to be done in the gardens but overall, the outside team had done very well. He said it was important everyone co-operated with each other to give visitors a nice experience and keep the town tidy and operating. N. Ball said he had also thanked some individuals working for the council.

N. Ball also spoke in relation to agenda item 18, Dorset Council Staffing Proposal. He asked why and how this position had been arrived at, and why the council may consider giving money to Dorset Council (DC) to fund a member of staff for 12 months. He was concerned it might set a precedent and asked how financially stable the council would be if there were more lockdowns and it ran out of money.

G. Symonds (read out by an officer)

G. Symonds asked if the town council could ask DC not to carry out beach replenishment and profiling during the summer after the beach was closed for three days in June, and a pipe pumped sand from the harbour for several weeks. He said he was advised it wasn't necessary to do this work during the summer and could be done before the tourist season. He said it caused huge disruption and impacted on businesses.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said this was for DC to manage and it was a necessary task, which was heavily influenced in timing by the lockdown. He said the town council had no influence over when the work was done.

G. Symonds asked what measures the town council was taking to support the jobs and economy of Lyme Regis outside of district and national government.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said the government had given tangible support to employment through the Job Retention Scheme and business loans. He said throughout this period, the town council had endeavoured to keep the town tidy and functioning during a difficult time and by simply doing that, it had made a substantial contribution to the town and the businesses which relied on tourists.

G. Symonds asked what the chairman and tourism committee had planned to support the tourism economy and jobs over the next 12 months.

G. Symonds asked if the council was aware the Post Office was on the market and if so, what measures it was putting in place to make sure there were banking facilities for businesses, locals and elderly people in Lyme.

Keian Gillett (read out by an officer)

K. Gillett said he would like the council to address the possible loss of the Post Office and for it to consider funding a buyer to run it. He said it would be a disaster for the local community and businesses if it was to close.

R. Austin (read out by an officer)

R. Austin said having seen the closure of the banks in Lyme Regis in recent years, the prospect of losing the Post Office would be a terrible blow to the town. She said for members of the community with limited internet access, those unfamiliar with the technology and also those with reduced income, unable to keep pace with the demands for constantly newer technology to support banking apps, the Post Office offered an alternative to the long journey to the nearest bank branch. She said added to this was the need to access social support payments and the simple act of posting anything bigger than a basic letter and suddenly not only individuals, but businesses would start to feel the loss. She said it was true nobody took on a Post Office simply for the money, but she felt a town council supported community-run Post Office, a business run not for profit but by the community to provide a necessary service, could be a real asset. She asked if the town council could consider how it could support an effort to secure this vital asset for the community.

The town clerk said the issue of the Post Office was not a new one and it was important the council determined a position, but it also needed to be clear about what it could and couldn't realistically do. He said this was a commercial sale and the council needed to consider what its role was in the Post Office.

19/223/C Dorset Council Matters

Cllr D. Turner said a climate and ecological emergency paper had gone through DC's Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet and an action plan had been produced, which was currently being costed.

Cllr D. Turner said he had met with Insp John Lacey following a meeting with the police and crime commissioner regarding the issues of anti-social behaviour in Lyme Regis during the summer. He said as part of the uplift programme for Dorset police officers, the issues experienced in Lyme would be borne in mind when officers were allocated to areas, which would hopefully mean more officers in the area. He said a joint letter between himself and the police and crime commissioner had also been sent to the chief executive and leader of DC regarding the issues surrounding licencing and anti-social behaviour.

Cllr D. Turner said a bid had been received from Lyme Regis for funding from the police and crime commissioner to link the town's CCTV system with the Dorchester control centre.

Cllr D. Turner said DC would continue holding virtual meetings until March 2021.

Cllr D. Turner said the public space protection order (PSPO) for dogs had gone through the Overview Committee. He said there were 8,600 responses to the public consultation and representations from 25 parish councils. He said the proposal was to provide generic restrictions combined into a single dog-related PSPO, which would make it easier for people to understand the provisions across the area. He said there was significant support for the harmonisation of the beach exclusion period from 1 May to 30 September. He said there had been 1,175 responses related to Lyme Regis. Cllr D. Turner said the committee recommended dogs were excluded from the beach between 1 May and 30 September and must be on leads at all other times.

Cllr D. Turner said work was due to start on installing the new puffin crossing on 5 October 2020, to be finalised in early-November.

Regarding the dredging work in the harbour, Cllr D. Turner said it was carried out later than normal because of Covid-19 and this shouldn't happen again.

Cllr C. Reynolds asked if Cllr D. Turner would attend a meeting with Will Haydock from Public Health Dorset regarding a new needle exchange in Lyme Regis, especially in view of a recent spate of needles being found in the town. Cllr C. Reynolds confirmed the town council had agreed she and Mark Ellis could look into this proposition but progress had been delayed by Covid-19. She said she would now go ahead and arrange the meeting with Will Haydock and she hoped Cllr D. Turner would attend.

Cllr D. Turner said he was willing to attend that meeting.

Cllr C. Reynolds also asked a question related to plans to set up a new Lyme Regis Pre-School, which couldn't progress as DC would have required the pre-school to

take on full maintenance of the inside and outside of the children's centre building, which the group couldn't afford. Cllr C. Reynolds said she was aware Whitchurch Pre-School were interested in operating from the building and she had been assured by DC they would be bound by the same conditions. Cllr C. Reynolds asked Cllr D. Turner if he could follow this up and ensure this was the case.

Cllr D. Turner said if members were contacting DC, it would be helpful if they could copy him in on correspondence from the outset.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe asked Cllr D. Turner if he could give an update on the harbour, following a meeting regarding the future of Lyme Regis and West Bay harbours.

Cllr D. Turner said the main issue was the Grade I listed structure and the cost of repairing it as it was still not clear where the funding would come from. He said a surveyor had recently been appointed. He said there was a continuing issue with jet skis and there was a waiting list for moorings at Lyme Regis. Cllr D. Turner said funding of harbours was a concern as most of them broke even but trying to get more boats into the harbour was contradictory to the climate and ecological emergency agenda.

19/224/C Apologies for Absence

Cllr K. Ellis – exam

19/225/C Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr D. Sarson declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 21, Candles on the Cobb, as he was a member of the Rotary Club of Lyme Regis.

19/226/C Dispensations

There were none.

19/227/C To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 26 August 2020

Cllr B. Bawden requested an amendment to minute number 19/216/C, Environmental Strategy, as she was not 'fully trained and accredited' to deliver the Carbon Literacy training, but the Carbon Literacy Trust said she was more than qualified to deliver it.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 26 August 2020, with the above amendment, were **ADOPTED.**

19/228/C Matters arising from the minutes of the extraordinary Full Council meeting held on 26 August 2020

Members noted the report and agreed the deputy town clerk would provide members with a verbal update in exempt business regarding the issuing of invoices for sites at Monmouth Beach.

19/229/C Planning Committee

It was noted the meeting due to be held on 2 September 2020 had not taken place and comments were made on planning applications by the chairman and vice-chairman of the committee under the power delegated to them.

Cllr C. Reynolds raised an issue with a planning application which had been submitted some time ago, but the town council had still not been consulted. She asked if officers could follow this up.

19/230/C Reaffirmation of the Eligibility Criteria required to hold the General Power of Competence

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members **RESOLVED** to reaffirm that Lyme Regis Town Council meets the eligibility criteria to hold the General Power of Competence.

19/231/C Annual Items of Business

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, members **RESOLVED** that the chairmen and vice-chairmen for all committees remain in post for the remainder of the 2020/21 council year and re-election to these posts takes place in the 2021/22 council year as normal; that membership for all committees remains the same for the 2020/21 council year and new appointments take place for the 2021/22 council year; and the appointments to external bodies remain the same for the remainder of the 2020/21 council year and re-appointment takes place in the 2021/22 council year as normal.

19/232/C Review of the Council's and/or Employees' Memberships of Other Bodies

The town clerk said there were two memberships for the Society of Local Council Clerks because both he and the deputy town clerk were members and the rates were different as they were based on salary.

Members questioned whether there was any benefit to being a member of the Improvement Development Agency and it was agreed this membership would be cancelled.

The operations manager suggested the council became a member of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA).

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members **RESOLVED** to approve the annual subscriptions for the council and/or employees to advisory and professional bodies, but to cancel membership to the Improvement Development Agency and to subscribe to the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA).

19/233/C Financial Resilience

The town clerk said the council needed to focus on the level of its reserve, which was currently forecast at £400,000 at the end of the financial year, although this could increase to £450,000. However, he said Covid-19 had cost the council c.£350,000, principally in the first quarter, and if there was a repeat of this in spring/summer 2021, the reserve would quickly be depleted.

The town clerk said Covid-19 had not been on the council's risk register previously but it was now included, with an impact score of 5 and a probability score of 5, the maximum numbers. Due to this, the town clerk said the council needed to achieve financial resilience and there were a number of potential strategies to do this, but he emphasised they needed to be relatively simple and easy to achieve and within the council's gift.

The town clerk said the suggested strategies would aim to increase the council's reserve to 100% of turnover by March 2022. The strategies included a loan, asset sales, looking for other sources of revenue and identifying cost savings of £100,000, which officers believed were achievable.

Members discussed the proposal to take out a loan. Several members felt it was too early to consider this, especially if there was another major outbreak of Covid, which may require a further loan, placing the council in further debt.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said the council should be looking instead at a continued exercise of finding savings, specifically targeting the £50,000 a month spent on consumables.

Several members felt a loan should be considered further and Cllr J. Broom asked if it was possible to get a loan in place but only take it up if or when it was needed.

The town clerk said he was unable to confirm if this was possible but officers had started and would continue this discussion with Dorset Council. He said the council needed to think seriously at this point about financial resilience so it could demonstrate to any loan provider it was managing its financial risk. He added loan providers would be less inclined to provide funding or may impose higher interest rates if the council tried to take out a loan at the eleventh hour.

Members were not in favour of selling off any assets at this point, but several members acknowledged this could be a last resort if required.

Cllr M. Ellis said the council needed to put some actions in place immediately and suggested additional beach huts for sale or rent, cutting back on outgoings and

tighter authorisation of spending, keeping office refurbishment costs to a minimum, chasing up chalet debts and ending leases if necessary, and pursuing the possibility of a loan.

Cllr C. Reynolds felt the council should be spending its own reserve before considering a loan and believed the government would provide more help to local councils which didn't have reserves.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said the council needed to look at its running costs against its income as the margin between the two was narrowing.

The town clerk agreed the council had increased its expenditure in recent years but pointed out it had also increased its income. He said the surpluses made had been spent on approved projects or put into the reserve. He said he would be happy to look at staff vacancies which may arise and allow the council to consider if they should be filled. The town clerk said the percentage of staffing costs to budget was low compared to other councils.

The town clerk said there was a degree of immediacy required to strengthen the council's reserve and a loan of £400,000 with an interest rate of 2%, costing £8,000 a year, would provide some financial resilience over the next few years. If the council performed to the model provided, in around three-and-a-half years the loan could then be paid off.

Cllr R. Smith asked if there was a trigger level when the council would need to take out a loan.

The town clerk said the warning signals on the attached forecast started in January/February 2021 and there would need to be some lead-in time for getting the loan in place. He said decisions must be made by the end-December 2020, at the latest.

It was proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe to look to explore savings of £100,000 and as much that can be found, to get updated figures for the actual financial position in December 2020 and in the meantime, explore what a loan would cost and how late in the process it could be taken out, work up ideas by December 2020 which are informed by end-of-season figures, and pull in any debts that are owed.

This motion was not seconded.

The town clerk advised against holding off on making any decisions until the last minute as it would create a degree of uncertainty for several months. He said it would be helpful for members to ask officers to identify measures to strengthen the council's finances during the next two financial years and to come back to the next meeting with proposals.

Cllr C. Reynolds asked for confirmation that the council offices would not be sold.

The town clerk said a significant sum would need to be spent on the offices in the next three to four years but work costing tens of thousands could be spent in the meantime to undertake basic improvements.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, members **RESOLVED** to look into getting additional beach huts to sell; to cut back on outgoings from £50,000 a month to £30,000 to £40,000; to minimise the cost of the office refurbishment and do only necessary works; to look into getting a loan which can be taken up if or when needed; and to instruct officers to explore all other alternatives to save money or increase revenue for presentation to the Full Council meeting in October.

The town clerk clarified that officers would look at getting an additional two beach huts to start with and if possible, to consider up to two more.

19/234/C Member IT and Equipment

Cllr M. Ellis said she agreed in principle with members having IT equipment and support but she wanted to see the costs before agreeing to anything, as well as the estimated savings in staff time and postage, for example.

The town clerk said as soon as costs had been obtained, the information would be circulated to members.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members **RESOLVED** that the council equips its members with consistent IT, equipment and support and a council email account to conduct its business, to become GDPR compliant, to move to a paperless office and improve efficiency in the way the council operates.

Cllr R. Doney left the meeting at 9.07pm.

19/235/C Harbour Dredging, Beach Replenishment and Shingle Regrading – Request for Contribution Towards Costs Received from Dorset Council

Members agreed it was not the town council's responsibility to help pay for these works as they were part of the sea defence system, also bearing in mind the work had already been carried out and the financial contribution in 2018 was a one-off.

The deputy town clerk said the total cost of the work was £150,000 and the DC contribution was £60,000, with the remainder from the Environment Agency (EA) and other partnership funding. He said the EA was reluctant to give funding to projects that didn't include partnership funding.

The deputy town clerk said DC felt an element of the works were an amenity value to the town council as owner of the sandy beach. However, the ability to deposit spoil from the harbour onto the beach saved DC money as it would otherwise have to be transported and deposited elsewhere.

Cllr R. Smith said if the EA was not prepared to pay for sea defences, this should be taken up with the local MP.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, members **RESOLVED** to refuse the request from Dorset Council for a financial contribution towards the cost of harbour dredging, beach replenishment and shingle regrading in Lyme Regis in 2020.

19/236/C Bridport and District Citizens Advice Bureau Grant Review

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members **RESOLVED** to approve Bridport and District CAB's request to use council office space and approve future grant payment to the CAB.

19/237/C Lyme Arts Community Trust Grant Review

The town clerk said he assumed the council was happy to continue future grant payments to recipients of term grants and on that basis, he would write to the organisations after this meeting to confirm the council's position in terms of funding for the remainder of the financial year. He said he intended to get the grant agreements in place at the beginning of the next financial year.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members **RESOLVED** to approve future grant payment to LymeArts Community Trust.

19/238/C B Sharp Grant Review

The town clerk said B Sharp was looking to build its student base in Lyme Regis, something which had been a concern to members in the past.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members **RESOLVED** to approve future grant payment to B Sharp.

19/239/C Dorset Council Staffing Proposal

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members **RESOLVED** that under Section 1, Paragraph 2 of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for this item of business as it included confidential matters relating to relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person within the meaning of paragraphs 1 and 8 of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (see Section 1 and Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985), as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

19/240/C Car and Bike Rental Scheme

Cllr B. Bawden said she hoped to provide options for a car rental scheme which would be at no cost to the council but use of a parking space at Woodmead car park was essential for it to work. She said she was proposing a trial to see how it works before working up a proposal.

Cllr R. Smith said he would prefer it to be an electric car rather than a hybrid.

Proposed by Cllr B. Bawden and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members **RESOLVED** to allow use of a designated car park space at Woodmead car park to run a car-club trial for six months to demonstrate the car-club concept.

19/241/C Royal College of Arts Project

Cllr B. Bawden said the Royal College of Arts (RCA) wanted to hear from local stakeholders so she was trying to determine the best way to input that feedback into the research project. She said the level of commitment was only answering survey questions.

Cllr J. Broom said he would be happy to respond to the survey on the council's behalf.

Proposed by Cllr B. Bawden and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** that Cllr J. Broom would answer stakeholder questions in the Royal College of Arts project on behalf of the town council.

19/242/C Candles on the Cobb

Cllr J. Broom pointed out the Langmoor and Lister Rooms may not be available for use in 2022 as the council was considering other uses.

The support services manager said all bookings were provisional and the council reserved the right to change or cancel bookings.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members **RESOLVED** to approve Candles on the Cobb taking place over the August bank holiday weekend in 2022, requiring use of the market area from 22 to 28 August, and use of the Jubilee Pavilion, performance area and Langmoor and Lister Rooms on 27 and 28 August

19/243/C Exempt Business

(a) Dorset Council Staffing Proposal

The town clerk said the proposal for a DC funded member of staff would ideally have been longer than 12 months. He said there was the potential for DC to withdraw the funding after that period and the council would be forced to walk away from the arrangement, causing reputational damage.

The town clerk said if this was agreed, the implementation would have to be deferred until the office had re-opened.

Members agreed the 12-month timeframe was a concern, especially given the council's current financial position and the need to cut costs, rather than potentially taking on more.

The town clerk confirmed the person would be appointed and employed by the town council, and the post would be advertised as a 12-month fixed term contract, funded by DC. He said the employee would work as part of the town council's front desk team and the whole team would deal with both town council and DC issues. He added that town council staff already dealt with some DC issues and signposted people to the right place.

Cllr M. Ellis suggested that if town council staff were already partly fulfilling this role, DC could provide some funding for that service.

The town clerk agreed this could be viable but also suggested some benefit in kind might be more valuable.

Several members felt the proposal was worth pursuing as a community information service was needed in the town and suggested deferring any decision until the office had re-opened.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members **RESOLVED** not to pursue the staffing proposal from Dorset Council and look to absorb the cost benefit by reaching an agreement with Dorset Council on the provision of local information services.

(b) Debtors' Report

The deputy town clerk informed members of some emerging issues with the chalet leases which he would continue to look into and bring further information to the council when necessary.

The deputy town clerk said producing plans to accompany leases had been more problematic than anticipated but it was the intention to finalise the plans to send along with the leases.

The meeting closed at 10.33pm.