

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2021

Present

Chairman: Cllr M. Ellis

Councillors: Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr J. Broom, Cllr R. Doney, Cllr B. Larcombe, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner

Officers: M. Green (deputy town clerk), A. Mullins (support services manager), M. Russell (finance manager), P. Williams (operations supervisor)

21/34/SF Public Forum

There were no members of the public who wished to speak.

21/35/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr C. Reynolds – not attending due to Covid-19

Cllr D. Ruffle – illness

Cllr R. Smith – work commitments

Cllr T. Webb – illness

Cllr S. Williams – illness

21/36/SF Minutes

Proposed by Cllr G. Stammers and seconded by Cllr R. Doney, the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2021 were **ADOPTED**.

21/37/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

21/38/SF Dispensations

There were none.

21/39/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 13 October 2021

Members noted the report.

21/40/SF Update Report

There were none.

21/41/SF Internal Audit Report, Visit One 2021-22

The deputy town clerk said this was a good report with very few items reported. He said the one issue which did concern officers was cash collection, which had originally been a high recommendation but had been downgraded to a medium following discussion with the auditor.

The deputy town clerk said it was an issue with the cash collection company G4S collecting from the car park machines on a timely basis, which had still not been resolved. He said some of the larger security vehicles required a HGV licence and given the national shortage of HGV drivers, this had affected G4S's ability to provide a service.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if recommendation 7.1 regarding the net pay agreeing to the final pay report was a pensions or National Insurance issue.

The deputy town clerk said it was a one-off issue that related to his pension contribution in-year.

The finance manager said a very small adjustment was made and 20p wasn't picked up and although officers argued that it was an insignificant amount, the auditor said the amount was irrelevant. However, he said the final salary was reconciled and adjustments were not often required.

Regarding recommendation 3.1 and the signing of council minutes, Cllr M. Ellis said it was down to the chairmen to sign them at the end of meetings.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the internal auditor's report following visit one of 2021-22 and approve the management responses.

21/42/SF Governance

Cllr R. Doney said he felt the council needed to be clear about what it wanted to achieve, to have clear objectives, themes and values, and now was a good opportunity to do this coming off the back of Covid-19 as a lot had changed in the way everyone worked.

Cllr R. Doney said he was suggesting a session for members in January to consider a strategic approach, where someone external who didn't know the council facilitated the meeting. He felt it would be good for members to consider what the council's headline objectives should be for the next two to three years.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the idea of looking at themes and values and coming up with several adjectives to describe an organisation was a dated approach and he felt the council should be judged on the things it did and the way it did them, rather than what it said. He agreed the council needed to have clear objectives but they were already costed and voted on by this committee, so he wasn't sure if an away day with a facilitator was needed to discuss it further.

Cllr B. Bawden said she wasn't keen on the idea of another away day as several members had paid no attention to what had been agreed at the last one.

Cllr B. Larcombe said if better behaviour came off the back of the away day, he would be happy to take part.

Cllr G. Stammers said when members first joined the council with established councillors, it took a long time to find your way through the objectives and strategies so she felt it would be helpful to get some clarification and was therefore not opposed to an away day.

Cllr R. Doney said the intention of the away day was not about addressing behaviour as such, it was about determining the council's key objectives. He clarified that although later in the agenda the council was discussing 'objectives', he saw those as tasks which the officers would carry out; the objectives he wanted the council to determine were the high level aims of the organisation.

Cllr B. Bawden said at the first away day there was an item about values and purpose but because it was at the end of the day, it was never really discussed, so some members already had an idea of what they wanted to achieve but didn't articulate it clearly. She said she was reluctant to have another away day unless everyone signed up to a collective agreement.

Cllr B. Larcombe said this should not send a signal that the council was in crisis or that it had come as an emergency measure; it should be regarded as a normal review of where the council was.

Cllr R. Doney agreed and said it was an opportunity presenting itself to the council on the back of Covid-19 and how the council could take advantage for the good of the town.

Proposed by Cllr R. Doney and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to hold an away day with a facilitator to support the event to help the council develop its strategic approach.

21/43/SF Bad Debts

Members noted the report.

21/44/SF Broad Feed Chipper

Cllr G. Stammers said she appreciated the need for a bigger chipper as she had been approached by residents at Garmans Field concerned about the burning of foliage by the council at Strawberry Field.

The deputy town clerk said although officers appreciated the council's aims to replace vehicles with electric models, the currently available electric model didn't shred so the gardeners would still need to burn material at Strawberry Field. He said the officer view was a fossil fuel powered machine would be better, which could both chip and shred.

Cllr M. Ellis said if there was no electric model on the market that was suitable, the council had no alternative but to buy a diesel-powered machine, which would also save the council money in manpower.

Members asked about the potential lifespan of the preferred diesel machine.

The operations supervisor said it would last indefinitely with annual servicing.

Cllr G. Turner asked how much it would cost to charge an electric chipper.

The operations supervisor said it would take seven hours to charge and the battery would need to be replaced, probably after around two years. He said the preferred diesel machine had low emissions and had an idle mode so it was one of the greener models on the market.

Cllr J. Broom asked why the original cost estimate for the equipment had now increased by at least £10,000.

The operations supervisor said he had priced for a tow-along, top-fed chipper but later felt it wouldn't be the right machine for the council's needs.

Cllr B. Larcombe said if the council was investing in this equipment, it could be hired out to neighbouring councils and he suggested officers spoke to them about this possibility.

Proposed by Cllr G. Turner and seconded by Cllr B. Bawden, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve purchasing an Eliet Mega Prof broad feed chipper and shredder at a cost of £24,845.24 +VAT, therefore approving the additional expenditure over the approved budget of £15,000.

21/45/SF Budget and Precept 2022-23 and Five-Year Financial Plan 2022-27

The finance manager said he had now modelled in all the figures following decisions made during the last round of meetings; this had produced an income of £1.7million in 2022-23, expenditure of £1.3million, and a reserve of £388,000. Looking at the five-year financial plan, he said business rates of £50,000 for the car parks were factored in, taking the reserve down by that amount in the following four years.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what assumption the budget made about the precept and about the discounts for residents on beach huts.

The finance manager said the budget assumed no change on the precept, as per the decision made at the last meeting.

The finance manager said based on the decision made at the last meeting to introduce a 50% residents' discount on beach hut bookings, he had done some rough calculations on how this would have affected the bookings made for 2022. On beach hut booking day, bookings from Gateway Card holders totalled £38,000, representing a £3,800 loss at the current 10% discount; if the 50% discount was applied, this would be a loss of £19,500, a difference of £15,200 including VAT or £12,500 net. The finance manager said this was based only on the booking day and officers estimated this figure could be doubled to take into account the whole year.

Cllr B. Bawden said it felt like it was a nice idea to offer residents a 50% discount on beach huts but it was too much of a financial hit. She said if there was a choice between a 50% discount and not offering the Gateway Card to Uplyme and Charmouth residents, she would rather reduce the discount to 20%, for example, and extend the scheme to Uplyme and Charmouth.

Cllr M. Ellis said the intention of offering the 50% discount was to help Lyme Regis residents who paid a precept and gave up their town for most of the year.

Cllr B. Larcombe said keeping the precept static for many years and giving money to local groups in grants was already giving something back to the residents. He said the 50% discount on beach huts could also be claimed by residents who owned holiday lets, which were then used by visitors and that wasn't in the spirit of the gesture.

Cllr R. Doney said setting the precept to zero seemed like a visible way of rewarding residents for what they had had to suffer for the last few years. He said it was wrong for the council to accumulate a reserve of £300,000 over the next few years just because it could, and any loss of income could be ameliorated by putting up car parking charges by 2p an hour at Monmouth Beach and 1p an hour at Woodmead.

The deputy town clerk said Lyme Regis charged the second lowest precept within the Dorset Council area at £78 per year for a Band D property, which had been held for 11 out of the last 12 years. Because there had been an increase in the number of properties in Lyme Regis, it meant Band D properties had actually paid less each year.

The deputy town clerk said some would argue that the precept was to fill the gap between income and projected expenditure and that if a council made a surplus, there was no need to charge a precept; however, he said there was no legislation to prevent this and this council was in an unusual position of projecting a surplus each year. He added the council could afford to not charge a precept but he would urge caution as one of the organisation's identified objectives was an asset management plan, which would highlight the need for significant investment in its assets.

The deputy town clerk said a local authority should be accountable to its local electorate, including financially, and if the link of accountability between the local community and the council was broken, this wasn't good for democracy. However, he said it would only be for one year so it may mitigate this issue.

Cllr B. Larcombe said he didn't think this was the right time or climate for making gestures or running a slimmer budget, as the size of the climate and environment bill was still unknown and inflation was rising.

Cllr B. Bawden said she agreed the council should give back to residents but she felt it was more important for residents to give back to the town and those who could afford to pay towards local services should. She said it would cause more confusion and annoyance when the council tried to re-introduce the precept next year. She added that she was in support of a 50% discount on the other council services, i.e. amenities and weddings.

Cllr R. Doney said he was disappointed he had still not heard how the council could reward residents in a tangible way and he raised shoppers' permits, which were discussed at the last meeting but not formally agreed. Having gone electronic for all other permits, he said he had an idea how the shoppers' permits could work and would be willing to meet with council staff to discuss it further.

Cllr M. Ellis said the council needed to look at some other way of giving back to residents as there was a feeling the council was doing everything for tourists and wasn't giving enough to them.

Members discussed the idea of a free community bus as it was felt the whole community could benefit from this, as well as other service extensions to the town bus as it currently only went to certain roads in the town.

The deputy town clerk said there had been various discussions about the town bus, including a Saturday service, extending the route, or a free service. He said the operator was open to discussing all options but extending the route was the lowest cost and introducing a Saturday service was the highest cost. He said the additional £13,000 identified in the 2022-23 budget was to make it a free service.

Cllr B. Bawden said when passing their climate and environmental emergencies, Bridport, Weymouth and Dorchester Town Councils had each dedicated £100,000 to their climate action plans and she asked the council to consider doing the same, a lot of which would be of benefit to residents. She said it would be £100,000 for the remaining term of the council and would enable the council to help the town and its residents reach net zero.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the 2022-23 budget included a contingency for park and ride as he was aware the landowner of the Charmouth Road site might want to make alternative use of the land in future.

The deputy town clerk said a report would be coming to members in the first cycle of meetings in 2022 as there was an option to change from pay to ride to pay to park and with the charges increasing in DC car parks, this would encourage more people to use the park and ride. He said this was cost neutral if the park and ride stayed on the current site and the 2022-23 budget assumed this was the case.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to increase the discount for weddings and amenities to 50% for Gateway Card holders but to hold the discount for beach huts at 10%.

Cllr R. Doney said the shoppers' permits would allow residents to have two hours to park at any time of the day, at any time of the year and they would be available to those with a residents' concessionary permit. He said he would like an opportunity to check with the office and enforcement officers that the scheme would work and report back to the Full Council.

Proposed by Cllr R. Doney and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to introduce shoppers' parking permits for residents.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to commit £75,000 over the remaining life of the council, i.e. £25,000 per year, to carry out a climate action plan.

Cllr D. Sarson asked if the £40,000 grant had been confirmed towards the cost of the CCTV. The deputy town clerk said it had not yet been confirmed.

Cllr D. Sarson asked if the cost of dealing with water ingress at the Jubilee Pavilion was an actual or estimated cost.

The deputy town clerk said it wasn't fully understood what was causing the problem so they were not proper costings but he felt £50,000 was a more than adequate budget.

Cllr D. Sarson asked why outside works expenditure was so significantly overspent at £76,000.

The finance manager said one of the biggest overspends was the extra toilet cleaning in the summer, as well as the storage container in the gardens.

The deputy town clerk said officers may need to re-visit some of the nominal codes used in the accounting system because there were some items which didn't fit into those categories; for example, legal fees were within office administration.

The deputy town clerk said one thing to come out of the last Town Management and Highways Committee meeting was a suggestion that one way of controlling uses of the seafront roof was to look at picnic benches and planters but there was currently no budget for it. He said if members wanted to pursue this, it would need to be included in the budget now.

Proposed by Cllr G. Turner and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** not to include a budget for picnic benches and planters in the 2022-23 budget.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the 2022-23 base budget and assumptions

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr R. Doney, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the base five-year financial plan and assumptions.

21/46/SF Investments and Cash Holdings

Members noted the report.

21/47/SF List of Payments

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the report and approve the schedule of payments October 2021 for the sum of £133,348.59.

21/48/SF Debtors' Report

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr B. Bawden, 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.

21/49/SF Exempt Business

a) Debtors' Report

Officers reported that the chalet owner with the biggest debt had started to make payments within recent days and the other large debt related to the chalet park would be resolved this week.

The deputy town clerk said officers were working with DC on issues of waste collection and properties that were business rated, of which there were 14 across the entire site. He said although the requirements for registering a chalet or caravan with DC for business rates was different to the lease or licence with the town council, officers now had better information about those that were business rated.

The deputy town clerk said although chalet and caravan owners who were business rated were required to pay a 15% premium to the council, only around five did and this information would now allow officers to follow it up.

Cllr G. Stammers asked if owners were regularly reminded that they should be paying the premium.

The deputy town clerk said there had been so many problems with people signing leases and not paying debts that officers had put all their efforts into resolving those issues but officers would start actively pursuing it.

The meeting closed at 9.07pm.