

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2022

Present

Chairman: Cllr M. Ellis

Councillors: Cllr J. Broom, Cllr R. Doney, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr G. Stammers

Officers: N. Cleal (finance manager), A. Mullins (support services manager), J. Wright (town clerk)

21/65/SF Public Forum

S. Davies

S. Davies spoke in relation to agenda item 18, Unit 1A Rental Proposal. She said prior to April 2021, she referred to minute number 19/59/TMH when it was agreed to renew the lease of Unit 1A for a seven-year period and it was noted the use by other organisations was low, several members felt it was not advertised well enough and should be improved. She said LymeForward rented the suite of rooms from 1 April 2021 and subsequently asked to review the rental agreement on 18 January and 4 February 2022. S. Davies said on 11 March 2022, they were advised by the deputy town clerk that Lyme Regis Development Trust's (LRDT) board of trustees had not agreed to an extension and had set the final date at 31 May 2022 for LymeForward to vacate the unit, essentially giving them two months to find other accommodation. She said LRDT's board of trustees ran a company with a value of over £1million and LRDT received £50,000 in grant funding over five years from the council. She said a report to the Charity Commission said LRDT served to promote general charitable purposes for the benefit of the community of Lyme Regis and surrounding areas. S. Davies said LymeForward needed to know the reasons given by LRDT to evict them within such a short timeframe and why it had taken such a protracted period to come to this decision. She said it appeared Unit 1A was considered a community resource, the town council fronted the lease, but LRDT had all the say who occupied Unit 1A. She asked what safeguards were in place to manage any serious conflicts of interest in terms of disadvantaging organisations that sought to rent out the premises. S. Davies said the foodbank had never been in more demand; it was dedicated to improving the lives of residents in-and-around Lyme Regis by providing emergency support in times of need. She said there were no other suitable facilities available to them at this short notice and their eviction would have a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of families and children who used the foodbank. She said they were asking for a six-month grace period at the very least, bearing in mind the way in which the matter had been handled by the council and LRDT over the past year.

21/66/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr C. Aldridge – illness

Cllr B. Bawden – fear of intimidation

Cllr B. Larcombe – compassionate absence
Cllr R. Smith – isolating
Cllr G. Turner – operation
Cllr T. Webb – work commitments

21/67/SF Minutes

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2022 were **ADOPTED**.

21/68/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr G. Stammers declared a pecuniary interest in matters relating to the park and ride as its operation would affect her workplace.

21/69/SF Dispensations

There were none.

21/70/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 2 February 2022

CCTV

Cllr C. Reynolds asked if there had been any progress on installing CCTV as it would probably be held up if planning consent was required.

The town clerk said the operations manager had been approaching premises in the town to determine if cameras could be attached to their buildings because there had been no progress with Dorset Council (DC) in trying to attach cameras to lamp columns, despite raising the matter to director level.

It was noted that if cameras were installed on listed buildings, it was likely planning consent would be required, but the town clerk said the operations manager had been selective in choosing buildings to try and avoid this scenario.

21/71/SF Update Report

Members noted the report.

21/72/SF The Annual Review of the Communications/PR Policy and Procedure

Members noted that if a recommendation from the Tourism, Community and Publicity Committee was approved relating to the production of a quarterly newsletter, it would be necessary to amend section 7 of the procedure.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr R. Doney, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the amended Communications/PR Policy and Procedure, including changes to section 7 if a recommendation from the Tourism, Community and Publicity Committee relating to the production of a quarterly newsletter is approved by the Full Council.

Cllr R. Doney said he was on an email list for DC and he was sent updates about various issues, such as health and environment. He said as part of the town council's community engagement, residents could be invited to provide their email address so information could be sent out to them on matters of community interest, such as road closures.

21/73/SF Internal Audit Report, Visit Two 2021-22

The finance manager explained the audit recommendations and the management responses.

Cllr D. Sarson asked who was renting the cemetery workshop.

Cllr M. Ellis said it was rented by Lyme Regis Pantomime Society and had previously been shared by Lyme Regis Musical Theatre.

Proposed by Cllr C. Reynolds and seconded by Cllr R. Doney, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the internal auditor's report for visit two of 2021-22 and approve the management responses.

21/74/SF Community Governance Review

The town clerk said the first stage of DC's community governance review had been undertaken and the draft recommendations were published in February 2022, with a deadline of 23 May 2022 for the council to respond to the recommendations.

The town clerk drew to members' attention some of the comments which had been made by the public about this council, although the council's own response had been to request no changes. He said DC had taken on board comments raised and based on comparative information and what various bodies recommended in terms of size of electorate, it was not proposing any changes.

The town clerk said the town council had a policy position and members were now being asked whether they wanted to stick to that position, which was in line with the recommendation from DC, or state an alternative position.

Referring to the comments made by the public as part of the consultation, Cllr M. Ellis said members needed to stop bickering in the council chamber, it had gone too far and everyone needed to respect each other.

Cllr C. Reynolds said the responses all seemed to be very similar and complaints received by the council seemed to always be from the same people. She felt the issues with the council were being raised by a small number of people, not the majority of residents.

Cllr R. Doney said regardless of whether it was a limited number of people, it was damaging the council's reputation and it had to show it was attempting to deal with it.

The town clerk said before Christmas, it was agreed members would spend some time away from the council chamber with a facilitator, but this had been deferred due to the introduction of further Covid restrictions. He said he had started conversations with a facilitator and he had discussed with Cllr G. Stammers, as

chairman of the Human Resources Committee, about providing a brief to the facilitator to help the council.

Cllr D. Ruffle said his advice to anyone who thought there was a toxic atmosphere in the council was to come along to a meeting and see for themselves, rather than reading it in the newspaper.

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the changes to Dorset Council's community governance review process and the public response to the first phase of the consultation process; support Dorset Council's draft recommendations relating to Lyme Regis Town Council; and instruct the town clerk to complete the online survey accordingly.

21/75/SF Budget Performance, 1 April – 28 February 2022 and year-end forecast

The town clerk said this report demonstrated how well the council had done to move from potential financial issues 18 months ago to a very strong financial position currently.

The finance manager said this budget report largely repeated the report which was presented to the last meeting on 2 February 2022; there had been no further unexpected expenditure and the income was following the same pattern, the net product being a forecast surplus of £320k. She said this was after the repayment of the DC loan.

The finance manager said the forecast reserve at the end of the year remained at £1.2million. She drew members' attention to a mistake in the budget figures; the variance on the chalet, beach hut and caravan income should be 28%, not 65% as stated, but the actual figures were correct.

Cllr R. Doney said the council was going to have a healthy surplus against budget this year but it didn't have plans as to why it was collecting that money, and he felt it was wrong if the council didn't have a justifiable reason for building up reserves.

The town clerk said the council had agreed to undertake public consultation this year to inform its future spending priorities. He said the uncertainty of other external factors also suggested the council should hold onto its money for the time being.

The town clerk said by the 2023-24 budget-setting process, there would hopefully be a better understanding of the economic climate and the council could begin to release funding for projects if it was confident to do so.

Cllr M. Ellis said she would like the council to concentrate on spending money on the fabric of its buildings so it didn't cost as much to maintain them because they had been allowed to reach a poor state.

Proposed by Cllr D. Ruffle and seconded by Cllr R. Doney, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the performance against budget from 1 April to 28 February 2022 and of the forecast year-end position at 31 March 2022.

21/76/SF Support for Ukraine

Cllr C. Reynolds said the suggestions from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) were good but other than making buildings available for donations and signposting information on charities and aid agencies, they didn't actually support Ukraine. She felt the council needed to demonstrate its physical support.

The town clerk said the council was able to provide financial support to organisations as it had the General Power of Competence. He said the council could make a donation to an international or a local organisation which was transporting aid.

Cllr M. Ellis said it might be better to wait until further down the line when the money was needed rather than giving a donation now.

Some members were concerned about giving a donation to an international charity as it was difficult to see exactly where the money was being spent.

Cllr C. Reynolds said it would be good to have the support of members when local donations needed to be sorted and packed for transporting to Ukraine. Several members said they would be happy to help if they were kept informed of when they were needed.

The town clerk said the council could demonstrate its solidarity in various ways; a Ukrainian flag had already been purchased which could be raised on the Guildhall if members agreed, and all the suggestions listed in the NALC briefing could be implemented. He said the big issue for the council to consider was whether to offer any financial aid now or to hold back and reconsider the situation.

Cllr J. Broom felt the council should make a donation now and he suggested the British Red Cross as it had a specialist disaster fund; he suggested £2,500.

Cllr R. Doney said the enthusiasm the public had shown was tremendous but it did raise the question of Afghan refugees. He said he would support giving financial support to Ukrainian refugees, and he would support more than the £2,500 suggested, but he felt the council should also be putting money into the Afghan refugee campaign, probably through DC.

Cllr M. Ellis said this particular item wasn't on the agenda so it would have to be brought back to another meeting.

The town clerk said a report on the whole issue of financial aid for refugees could be brought to a future meeting.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to give a donation of £2,500 to the British Red Cross for Ukraine, and to show solidarity by approving the following:

- flying the Ukrainian flag
- lighting up buildings in blue and yellow
- holding vigils or moments of silence including at council meetings
- passing motions and statements of support and solidarity
- making council and community buildings available for donation of items

- signposting information on charities and aid agencies.

21/77/SF Use of the Jubilee Pavilion

Cllr M. Ellis asked if there were any bookings for the Jubilee Pavilion in the summer for the Regatta and Carnival and Lifeboat Week.

The town clerk said there were bookings pencilled in but not confirmed; they had not been confirmed because water ingress issues needed to be dealt with. The first event pencilled in was the Fossil Festival, followed by the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. He said there was a site inspection due to take place the following Wednesday to assess the water ingress problem and it would probably take another couple of months to get a contractor on site. However, he said Garry Sutherland was looking for an extension of six months.

The town clerk said if contractors were not working on the building, he was sure members would give him the authority to authorise an extension, but the nature of the work needed to be understood first. He also reminded members there was a plan to move towards commercial use of the building. The town clerk said he had asked the deputy town clerk to bring this matter back to members because when the decision to let the pavilion commercially was made, it was during Covid-19 when the council was thinking about maximising income and selling assets.

The town clerk said there was a consensus at that time that the Jubilee Pavilion was significantly underused and a recognition that the building was worth a significant amount of income. He said Garry Sutherland might have a proposal about the future use of the building but if that was the case, other organisations should be given the chance to submit proposals to use the building.

Cllr C. Reynolds said as it would take some time to determine exactly what the water ingress issues were and to get quotes from three contractors, probably up to three months, she suggested the pavilion could be let to Garry Sutherland on a month-by-month basis while this work was taking place.

The town clerk agreed if the builders were not in, there was no reason why Garry Sutherland should vacate the pavilion. He said in a couple of weeks' time when there was a better idea of what the problem was, officers would be able to get some quotes and determine a start date for the works. When he had a better understanding of timescales, he could speak to Garry Sutherland about a reasonable extension.

Cllr C. Reynolds asked if there was anywhere else the rowing centre could go.

The town clerk said the only other available buildings were the Langmoor and Lister Rooms, although the council had decided to rent the Lister Room. There was also an issue of size as the enterprise would be less viable with fewer machines in a smaller venue.

The chairman invited Garry Sutherland to speak. He said he would be happy to move the rowing machines aside to accommodate any events using the pavilion.

The town clerk said the main issue was the water ingress work and the future use of the pavilion as he felt members would want to reconsider what they wanted to do with the building, even if it was reaffirming decisions already made.

Cllr G. Stammers asked if after the works were done and the council was happy for Garry Sutherland to use the pavilion for a period of time, would it have to go out to tender if it was let commercially.

Cllr M. Ellis confirmed it would need go out to tender and would also require a commercial valuation.

The town clerk said when the council had let premises before, it had been keen to ascertain their commercial value. He said there could be an opportunity for the council to obtain a full commercial rent, or it could decide to use the building for something that benefitted the local community and businesses with a discount on commercial rent. However, he reminded members the council was representing the whole town, not just individual clubs.

Cllr G. Stammers asked if the council could be open to challenge from other organisations if it allowed Garry Sutherland to use the pavilion long-term without offering the opportunity more widely.

The town clerk said there could be other organisations who would like to use the pavilion for another activity and if the council was considering a subsidy to support community interests, the council had to be fair and give others an opportunity.

Cllr C. Reynolds asked how much interest had been shown in the pavilion in the last eight years as she didn't feel there had been any from other organisations.

The town clerk said there would be significant commercial interest in the pavilion; officers knew this because they had done some soft market testing. He said it was a prime location and it was worth a lot of money to the council.

Proposed by Cllr R. Doney and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to allow Garry Sutherland to extend the indoor rowing club's use of the Jubilee Pavilion on a month-by-month basis until work is carried out on the building to resolve water ingress issues and to delegate agreement of any ongoing extensions to the town clerk.

21/78/SF Reinstatement Valuations

The town clerk said the requirement for the council to obtain current re-instatement valuations for all its major property assets on a 'total loss' basis was a requirement of the insurance market and the council had no choice but to do it. He said the deputy town clerk was in the process of finding someone to do this work.

Cllr M. Ellis asked that officers made sure there was provision and costings for clearance of a site as well as re-building so the council was not underestimating what was required.

21/79/SF Levelling Up

The town clerk explained the White Paper's policy proposals in terms of devolution moving forward. He said there was a budget of £2.6bn identified for this work but it was all centred around bigger areas of the country and his feeling was Dorset and Lyme Regis wouldn't get much out of it. However, he said he would keep an eye on the agenda as there may be money and resources available to DC which the town council could tap into.

The town clerk said there was another debate the town council needed to have about how local initiatives were driven because in Dorset, they were driven by DC; if government grant money came into Dorset, DC decided how it was going to be spent. He said he felt there needed to be a change in mindset and there was a movement towards the approach adopted by other principal councils, i.e., more money was allocated to towns to spend on local initiatives. However, he said it wasn't in this council's gift to change DC's approach.

21/80/SF List of Payments

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the schedule of payments for January and February 2022 for the sums of £107,329.53 and £164,606.13, respectively.

21/81/SF Investments and Cash Holdings

Cllr D. Sarson asked if officers envisaged any increases in interest rates and whether they were checking the marketplace for competitive rates on its investments.

The town clerk said officers reviewed interest rates on a regular basis. He said the council had a policy of low risk investment and with low risk you got low interest. He said the council could consider adopting a medium risk approach to a proportion of its reserve.

21/82/SF Unit 1A Rental Proposal

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, 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.

21/83/SF Debtors' Report

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, 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.

21/84/SF Exempt Business

a) Unit 1A Rental Proposal

Cllr C. Reynolds said two months' notice to vacate Unit 1A was not enough for LymeForward to find other premises in Lyme Regis. She said if the council was happy to agree in principle to an extension, as the council's representative on LRDT, she would be happy to ask the trustees if they would agree to a six-month extension.

The town clerk said he would be happy to talk to the CEO of LRDT as well, but members agreed it should just be an approach from Cllr C. Reynolds to the trustees.

Cllr M. Ellis said it needed to be stressed to LRDT how important the foodbank was at the moment.

Proposed by Cllr R. Doney and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that the council would be willing to extend LymeForward's occupation of Unit 1A until 30 September 2022 under the existing arrangements and that Cllr C. Reynolds is delegated to negotiate with the trustees of Lyme Regis Development Trust to agree the extension.

b) Debtors' Report

The town clerk said officers intended to re-establish their fortnightly meetings to deal with debts because there were now a handful of long-standing debts and it was time the council took a tough stance on them.

The meeting closed at 8.27pm.