

**LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL**

**STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 11 MAY 2022**

**Present**

**Chairman:** Cllr B. Larcombe

**Councillors:** Cllr C. Aldridge, Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr J. Broom, 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)

*As the chairman and vice-chairman were not present, it was proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr J. Broom that Cllr B. Larcombe took the chair for the meeting.*

**21/85/SF Public Forum**

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

**21/86/SF Apologies for Absence**

Cllr M. Ellis – attending Royal Garden Party  
Cllr R. Doney – prior commitment  
Cllr C. Reynolds - illness  
Cllr R. Smith  
Cllr G. Turner – work commitments  
Cllr T. Webb – illness

**21/87/SF Minutes**

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, the minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2022 were **ADOPTED**.

**21/88/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

There were none.

**21/89/SF Dispensations**

There were none.

**21/90/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 23 March 2022**

Members noted the report.

## **21/91/SF Update Report**

Members noted the report.

## **21/92/SF Review of Standing Orders**

Cllr D. Sarson asked what the council's position was on members leaving meetings before they were finished, which had happened on a number of occasions, and arriving to vote for a particular item and leaving immediately after. He said there was no mention of how to manage this in either standing orders or the code of conduct.

The town clerk said this wasn't an issue for the standing orders but certainly for the code of conduct, which included requirements about attending meetings. He said members sometimes didn't get the decision they wanted but there should be an obligation on them to stay for the whole meeting.

Cllr B. Larcombe said if all members attended meetings to vote on specific items, the meetings wouldn't function. He said the code of conduct was self-policing and it was up to members to ask themselves if they were acting in the best interests of the people who elected them.

Cllr C. Aldridge asked if there was anything the council could do to help chairmen take a stand if a member behaved inappropriately or prevented proper business being done.

The town clerk said there were no powers at a local level to control member behaviour; as such, it was more of a cultural issue and about individual responsibility rather than finding structural mechanisms to deal with it. He said the council had a voluntary code of conduct, in addition to the normal code of conduct, but very few members had signed up to it. He added that there had only been a few incidents of members walking out of meetings in the time he had been in post, so it was important to put this issue into perspective.

The town clerk said this was an issue for the code of conduct, not the standing orders, and he would be happy to put something on a future agenda if members wished to discuss it further. He said there was also an away day planned for members and he suggested this issue was high on the agenda, but there had to be complete buy-in from members to sign up to it.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the proposed standing orders, including replacing the reference to The Data Protection Act 1998 with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK Data Protection Regulation.

## **21/93/SF Financial Regulations**

Cllr B. Bawden said the financial regulations didn't make any reference to the need to recognise climate risk or take into account any green investment decisions.

The town clerk said the financial regulations were about the council's rules and processes, not about the policy.

Referring to paragraph 11.1.1, Cllr J. Broom felt the council couldn't obtain value for money on utilities if it was aiming to use green energy as it was more expensive.

The town clerk clarified that the financial regulations were the rules, regardless of the policy decisions the council had made. He said there were often policy changes but the council couldn't continually amend its rules to fit its policy decisions.

*Cllr D. Ruffle arrived at 7.23pm.*

Cllr B. Larcombe said every time the council made a policy decision, it could refer to the financial regulations and if it didn't fit, the council could decide it was an exceptional circumstance.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the proposed financial regulations.

### **21/94/SF The Annual Review of the Complaints' Policy and Procedure**

Cllr J. Broom felt the timescales for the appeal process should be extended from 20 to 30 days for an appeal to be considered, and from 10 to 15 days to inform the complainant of the decision.

The town clerk advised leaving it at 20 and 10 days as it prevented the issue from drifting. It was also pointed out the word 'normally' had been used so this would allow some flexibility.

Cllr J. Broom felt there needed to be timescales given for an investigation to take place when dealing with complaints against employees.

The support services manager said Cllr J. Broom's recent experience in dealing with a complaint against employees was the timescales were too short to carry out an investigation. As such, no timescales had been given to carry out an investigation, as it would largely depend on the number of people involved and being able to arrange meetings and interviews. However, the normal timescales of 10 and 20 days would still apply at the appeal stage.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Stammer, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the amended complaints' policy and procedure and note the volume and nature of complaints received since March 2021.

### **21/95/SF The Annual Review of the Fixed Asset Register**

Cllr B. Larcombe reminded members that the value of each item was the price paid at the time of acquisition, rather than its current value. He said for that reason, it was important to have an indication of how old an asset was because it would give a true sense of how valuable it might be.

The town clerk said he agreed it was meaningless to value assets at their purchase price but these were the accountancy rules that applied to local authorities.

Cllr J. Broom asked if there could be another column in the register to state what the assets were currently worth.

The town clerk said the deputy town clerk was already doing some work on asset valuation because their real value was required for insurance purposes.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the value of the tool inventory was high enough given the regularity the equipment was purchased.

The finance manager said only items with a value over £1,000 were recorded so not all the tools would be listed.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the youth shelter was still on the register but it had been removed several years ago.

The finance manager said this was an error and it would be removed from the register.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the fixed asset register, with the removal of the youth shelter.

#### **21/96/SF A35 Trunk Road**

Cllr B. Larcombe said the council needed to be aware of what the expectations would be in getting involved in these issues as it was a big scheme. He said the town council had limited opportunity to comment on and influence this issue but it might be worth sending a member to the meeting.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to nominate Cllr J. Broom to attend a meeting with other A35 parishes and communities to discuss common issues regarding the A35 on the invite of Chideock Parish Council's clerk, and to formulate a joint response to National Highways.

#### **21/97/SF List of Payments**

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what the current position was with the contract with Glen Cleaning for the servicing of the toilets as the cost was quite high.

The town clerk said Glen Cleaning had been a good contractor which had provided plenty of flexibility; however, he agreed the cost had increased because the number of cleans had been increased due to Covid and this would be scaled back this year, therefore there would be a reduction in costs. He said he was happy to review the contract for the next financial year.

The town clerk said the council could also consider combining the toilet cleaning contract with Dorset Council (DC) but this might tie the council to DC's schedule, which didn't include any extra cleans when they were required and would mean less flexibility.

Cllr D. Sarson asked if payments of £8,000 to South West Water in March were normal as this seemed excessive.

The town clerk said this was normal for the council and included things like the toilets, showers and also the chalet and caravan park, where the council paid for the water and re-charged the residents.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the schedule of payments March and April 2022 for the sums of £490,491.13 and £113,963.77, respectively.

## **21/98/SF Investments and Cash Holdings**

The town clerk said the report broadly reflected the position that had been anticipated at the beginning of the financial year, with a current reserve of £1.3million.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the events of the last few years, including Covid-19 and the major roof resurfacing project, demonstrated the council should not consider reducing its turnover or selling assets to cover a shortfall, as once the assets were sold, the income was lost. He said the council needed to look at strategic financial planning.

The town clerk said it was important the council had enough money in reserves to cover most of the things an organisation like this would experience. He said the council had put together a prudent budget but he advised remaining cautious and getting through this year and the following year, then have a more considered view in terms of where the council wanted to keep or invest its reserve.

Cllr B. Larcombe suggested the council increased its reserve to 75% of income.

The town clerk advised against making that decision at this point; he suggested there needed to be a more considered report to allow members to consider this. He said at the moment, the council was in a relatively strong position and he conservatively estimated the council would have an additional £300k added to the reserve in this financial year.

## **21/99/SF Debtors' Report**

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.

## **21/100/SF Exempt Business**

### **a) Debtors' Report**

Members acknowledged the level of debt had decreased significantly and was now at a manageable level.

Cllr B. Larcombe congratulated the finance manager on bringing the debt down over the last year and for handling it sensitively.

*The meeting closed at 8.25pm.*