

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2022

Present

Chairman: Cllr M. Ellis

Councillors: Cllr C. Aldridge, Cllr B. Larcombe, Cllr P. May, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner

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

22/34/SF Public Forum

There were no members of the public present.

22/35/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr B. Bawden – illness
Cllr J. Broom – illness
Cllr R. Doney – illness
Cllr T. Webb

22/36/SF Minutes

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2022 were **ADOPTED**.

22/37/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

22/38/SF Dispensations

There were none.

22/39/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 12 October 2022

Members noted the report.

22/40/SF Update Report

The Oyster and Fish House seating

The town clerk said officers had been notified The Oyster and Fish House intended to withdraw its planning application to Dorset Council (DC) for the outside seating area.

Cllr B. Larcombe said he presumed this would mean the council would not pursue a valuation of the land.

The town clerk said officers would need to have discussions about the removal of the structure because there was no consent for it.

22/41/SF Internal Audit Report, Visit One 2022-23

Cllr M. Ellis asked why it would take until the end of December to obtain and reconcile the car park ticket machine reports as this was a high recommendation.

The finance manager said as the parking machines were new, along with staffing issues, officers had not been able to obtain the required information from the system. She said they were working with the company and doing some training to be able to build the reports and reconcile the card and cash payments, and this would be worked through by the end of the calendar year.

Cllr P. May asked if officers were confident they would be able to access the required information from the company that supplied the machines.

The town clerk said the back-office system was very comprehensive and officers were going through a learning curve but the finance manager was confident they would get there.

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the internal auditor's report and approve the management responses from visit one 2022-23.

22/42/SF Budget and Precept 2023-24 and Five-Year Financial Plan 2023-28

The finance manager said this was a continuation of the report agreed at the last meeting of this committee and it included any changes made to charges at that meeting, as well as any known factors that would affect the budget. She said the 2023-24 budget identified a surplus of £227,226 and she was forecasting a year-end cash position of over £1.5million. She outlined the council's available budget for projects if the council was to drop its reserve to £1.2million, £1.1million or £1million.

The finance manager said the objectives had been presented in three categories, with the first priority being mainly asset based, and the second priority being the projects identified through the community consultation process.

Cllr B. Larcombe felt the reserve shouldn't go much higher as the auditor might comment that it was too high.

The town clerk said his personal view was 50% of turnover was adequate because the council was an asset-based organisation and, if necessary, it could sell an asset. He said the auditor would be relaxed about a reserve of £1million.

Cllr B. Larcombe noted £100k had been identified for the harbourmaster's store and the lodge and he asked how that sum was made up. He also asked why there was no figure against the office refurbishment as the council had discussed this project three years ago, but no work had taken place.

The town clerk said officers felt £100k was adequate to undertake the works required but they didn't know until access was given to the store what condition it would be in, so the figure was a budget estimate. He said a figure had not been identified for the office because the council had not yet agreed the approach it would take to office premises. He said there was no point in putting any amount in the 2023-24 budget because if the council decided to remain in the office, for the proper preparation and procurement of the works, it would have to be the sole project for the following year.

The deputy town clerk said a figure of £350k was identified when the work was first discussed, but a decision was made not to proceed beyond the stage of work at that time, which was the architect coming up with some indicative initial alterations and essential repairs to the office.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked for more details on the £10k budget for employee benefits and the £30k for bursaries.

The support services manager said the employee benefits could include things like an employee assistance programme, gym membership, childcare vouchers and Christmas saving schemes, but the details were yet to be discussed and agreed. At the moment, the £10k had just been allocated in the budget for this purpose.

The finance manager said the council had agreed a budget of £20k at the previous meeting for bursaries for local children for things like football membership or drama club, but this had been increased to £30k to provide support to small start-up businesses. She said the details were yet to be discussed and members were only asked at this stage to agree the budget allocation.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked why the Strawberry Field options appraisal had been put into priority two of the objectives as this was something the council had wanted to progress for many years. He asked if £10k was enough for this work.

Cllr M. Ellis said the projects in priority one were more day-to-day works and those in priority two had come out of the consultation.

Cllr C. Reynolds asked if £38k would be required for CCTV as she understood funding would be provided by the police and the council would only be required to pay 10% of the £63k total.

The town clerk said the Dorset police and crime commissioner had committed to £16.6k but a further £38k was needed to make it work.

Cllr R. Smith asked for clarification over the climate action plan budget as there had been concerns expressed at the Environment Committee that if the allocated £25k was not spent in year, it would be lost.

The town clerk said the normal procedure was if money was not spent in year, it would not roll over to the next year. However, if members wanted to roll the money over, they needed to have a plan of what the money was for. He said the council also needed to clarify the starting date of the total £75k budget; whether it was 2022-23 and therefore it would drop into the first year of a new council administration, or 2021-22 when the decision was made. He added that in the 2021-22, there was draw down on the budget.

The town clerk suggested he met separately with Cllr R. Smith to discuss a plan for how the money could be spent in future years if the council wanted to roll it over and to take a report to the Environment Committee.

Cllr C. Aldridge said the £150k allocated each for a multi-use games area and a children's play area concerned her and she asked for more details. She said not only would there be a cost to implement them but also the cost of maintenance and replacement, so they were not real investments.

Cllr M. Ellis said she saw them as investments in the community as they were projects which were suggested during the public consultation. She said the details would be discussed at a later date.

The town clerk suggested the council made a commitment to do one big project – either the multi-use games area or the children's play area – and then it could also do all the other projects on the priority two list. However, it was clarified members were not being asked to decide between the two projects at this point.

Cllr B. Larcombe raised the issue of urinals as one of the reasons given for not pursuing this was the loss of waste facilities. He asked if the council was allocating any time and resources to managing waste bins so the council could find a way of reducing queues at the toilets.

The town clerk said it was decided at the last meeting of this committee not to take this project forward and although Cllr B. Larcombe had raised it at Full Council, he had got no traction. He confirmed no time or resources were being put into this.

The town clerk asked the members to consider the level of reserve they wanted to set.

Cllr B. Larcombe suggested a reserve of £1.2million due to rising inflation and energy costs.

It was proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe to set the council's reserve at £1.2million.

The town clerk said inflation and rising energy costs had already been factored into the 2023-24 budget. He said there might be some unknowns, but this was the reason for budgeting a surplus of £100k.

Cllr P. May asked if one of the major £150k projects was taken out, if more money could go towards installing solar panels on council buildings as he felt the council should do this urgently and it would provide a payback.

The town clerk said the value of the projects in the three priority lists was more than the council had available, so removing one of the £150k projects would make it possible to carry out all the projects. He said £10k had already allocated for solar panels and the £25k allocated for the climate action plan could also be used for this purpose.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if it was proposed to do anything with the cadet hut.

The town clerk said officers were proposing to leave it as it was, although it would no longer be used as mess facilities for employees and would only be used for storage.

Going back to the reserve, Cllr M. Ellis said the higher the council set the reserve, less of the priority two and three items could be achieved.

Cllr B. Larcombe withdrew his earlier motion and proposed an alternative.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr P. May, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to set the council's reserve at £1million.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr P. May, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the budget for 2023-24, to approve the 2023-24 objectives with the removal of either the multi-use games area or the children's play area to be decided at a later date, and to approve the five-year financial plan 2023-28 and the impact on the council's forecast reserve over that period.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve a precept of £132,779 for 2023-24.

22/43/SF Office Options Appraisal Scoping Report

The deputy town clerk said he wanted to make absolutely certain the options appraisal for the office was what the members expected as this work was going to take a lot of time, and it would inevitably involve outside consultants and expertise, which would cost money. He said he had tried to set out in the report his understanding of what he thought members wanted, which was a report looking at both the existing office and St Michael's Business Centre, but also included commentary on the availability of other premises to rent or buy and other new build options.

The deputy town clerk said he would recommend the report included commentary on new build options because it didn't need to involve a large amount of work, just a quantity surveyor's estimate of what a new build office would cost on either land the council owned or privately owned land.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if any thought had been given to putting the Guildhall to more use, as the mayor's parlour wasn't used very often, for example. He felt the location of the current office in relation to the Guildhall should be borne in mind as an alternative building could be some distance from the Guildhall.

The deputy town clerk said a door between the office and the Guildhall had previously been considered, although this had received a negative response from the conservation officer. He said there had also been discussions about changing the layout of the building, including an extension, but this had never been tested through the planning process. He agreed one of the issues that needed to be picked up was the proximity of whatever option the council may be considering to the current meeting facilities; however, he didn't feel the Guildhall was a good meeting room, so when looking at other options, members may also want some commentary on other potential meeting venues.

The deputy town clerk said there was also the potential to improve the environmental performance of the current or any other building, although initial discussions indicated solar panels would not be allowed on the roof. However, there was an option to replace the existing slates with photovoltaic slates.

Cllr M. Ellis said there were plans drawn up many years ago to extend Guildhall Cottage.

The deputy town clerk confirmed this and said this would be factored into the report, either for improving the office or a development opportunity as part of the value of the office and the site.

Cllr C. Aldridge said all the staff would not fit in at Unit 1A in St Michael's Business Centre.

The deputy town clerk said if only Unit 1A was available, the council would have to look at different ways of working and more flexible working, possibly more homeworking, because all staff could not be accommodated at the same time. However, he said there was a neighbouring unit available.

Proposed by Cllr G. Turner and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to agree the scope of the requested appraisal of options for the council's office accommodation.

22/44/SF Warm Café

Cllr C. Reynolds said the request for funding should be made as a community grant, especially as there were other warm cafes being run at the library and at the Talking Café, but they were not requesting funding. She said Lyme Regis Development Trust (LRDT) had offices at the Hub, where the warm café was running, and she found it difficult to agree to any more funding when the council already gave the Hub £10k a year.

Cllr D. Sarson said he was a volunteer at the warm café and the input from volunteers was enormous. He said the warm café was held at a time when the room was unused so it did get very cold. He clarified that the room for the warm café was downstairs, which was separate from the offices and not normally heated.

Cllr R. Smith said he understood the council had a grant-giving process, but people needed to be kept warm now.

Cllr M. Ellis was concerned that awarding the funding would set a precedent and other groups running warm spaces would also request funding. She said this funding was unbudgeted.

Cllr B. Larcombe said £2k was a modest sum and it had been requested at a time of need, but if other groups wanted funding, let them approach the council. He said the Hub was also a central building with good access.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to awarding a grant of £2,000 to assist the provision of a warm café at The Hub.

The meeting closed at 9.38pm.