

# LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

## STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 22 MARCH 2023

#### Present

**Chairman:** Cllr M. Ellis

**Councillors:** Cllr B. Bawden, 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:** M. Green (deputy town clerk), A. Mullins (support services manager),

22/61/SF

#### Public Forum

##### **D. Bowstead**

D. Bowstead said he was speaking in relation to agenda item 11, Market and Performance Areas' Hire Charges for Traders. He thanked the council for bringing this matter to the meeting for consideration and said he appreciated the time members had given him and other traders at a previous meeting and for being invited back. He said at the previous meeting, he introduced himself, his business and his concerns, he felt there wasn't much more he could add and everything raised in his original letter had been covered in the report on the agenda. D. Bowstead said the day rent for traders had been increased every year for the four years they had traded in Lyme Regis and after last year's rise of £25 per day, they did their best to absorb this. However, he said the significant increase in daily charges this year of £100 would render their small business untenable so they were encouraged it was being re-visited. He said they hoped 2023 would continue to allow them to carry on trading, to book dates and dedicate themselves and their business to Lyme Regis.

##### **L. Pritchard**

L. Pritchard spoke on the same agenda item. She thanked the council for extending its previous meeting to allow her the opportunity to speak and for subsequently being open minded to re-consider hire charges for the shelters. She said with the council's final decision being imminent, this was her last chance to secure her future trading in Lyme Regis. She said the report on the agenda mentioned very valid points, which she hoped the members' decision would be based upon, including costs and the current economic climate. L. Pritchard said it would be very welcome if the price agreed could be fixed for 24 months, providing her business with the opportunity to budget and forward plan through the current cost of living crisis. She said she hoped her business would be back in Lyme Regis in the not-too-distant future and she could welcome back visitors and residents.

##### **T. Shoemark**

T. Shoemark spoke in relation to agenda item 13, Hair Braiding and Henna Tattooing Concession. She said she had worked at the stall for nearly 10 years and had worked alongside other jobs. She said she loved working there in the summer and she was very passionate about it. She said she would love to run the stall in the same

professional and friendly way that it had been run for many years. She said she intended on using the same sustainable and eco-friendly products the stall currently used. T. Shoemark said being there for many years, she had seen families return for their service every year and she would love to keep the attraction open to the public so they could keep their yearly summer holiday tradition. She said she was currently serving in the Navy and was due to leave this year and having a concession would be a great opportunity for her. She said the stall was in an amazing place and it was an attribute to the beach. T. Shoemark said she hoped she could continue to uphold the great reputation and the concession could be changed to her name.

**22/62/SF Apologies for Absence**

Cllr C. Aldridge – holiday  
Cllr R. Doney  
Cllr T. Webb – illness

**22/63/SF Minutes**

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr P. May, the minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2023 were **ADOPTED**.

**22/64/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

Cllr D. Sarson declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 12, Bowling Club Parking Permits, as he was a member of the bowling club.

**22/65/SF Dispensations**

There were none.

**22/66/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 1 February 2023**

The deputy town clerk said the government's Levelling Up Bill, which would allow councils to charge council tax premiums on second homes, was unlikely to be enacted in time for any change in Dorset Council's (DC) policy to be implemented on 1 April 2024.

*Cllr B. Bawden arrived at 7.07pm.*

Cllr B. Bawden said DC's Full Council meeting had been brought forward to March so if DC had agreed the council tax premium, it would have been in time to give a year's notice to start charging the premium from 1 April 2024. However, there was a suggestion the Full Council meeting would be cancelled because this was the main item of business. She said the earliest the council tax premium could now be enacted was 1 April 2025.

**22/67/SF Update Report**

It was noted there was a confidential update on outside seating at The Kiosk and this would be discussed in exempt business.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, 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.

**22/68/SF Review of Arrangements with other Local Authorities, Not-For-Profit Bodies, and Businesses**

Members noted the report.

**22/69/SF Draft Corporate Plan 2023-28**

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the Corporate Plan 2023-28.

**22/70/SF Climate Action Plan Budget**

Cllr B. Bawden said the funding for the 2030 Vision project had not been spent from this budget because funding had been secured from the Together for Our Planet lottery fund.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the idea of rolling over unspent money was appropriate or else there might be a haste to spend the funding, which seemed like a waste of money. He said he would rather the council rolled over the funding to the next financial year and target where it could be usefully spent.

Members discussed the period to which the funding related as the original resolution was unclear. As there were only two years left in this administration but the funding was intended to apply over three years, it was agreed the final year's funding should roll over into the first year of the next council administration.

Cllr B. Bawden said the installation of solar panels on the amenities hut wasn't really what the funding was intended for because other funding was available for this, but she wasn't going to object to it as the money was there. However, she asked if officers could check if other funding was available, with Low Carbon Dorset being one possibility. She clarified that she felt the climate action budget was intended to help the community transition to net zero and it wasn't for the town council's own operations.

Cllr M. Ellis said the funding was intended for the council's climate action plan. Although she agreed it should be used for some community work, the budget wasn't intended solely for the community.

Cllr R. Smith said he was working on something, although he couldn't give details yet, which would mean this could benefit the community as well.

Proposed by Cllr G. Stammers and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to carry over £10,543 of the funding allocated

to carry out the council's climate action plan from 2022-23 budget to 2023-24, and that the third year of the funding rolls into the first year of the new council administration.

## **22/71/SF Market and Performance Areas' Hire Charges for Traders**

Cllr D. Ruffle said as the council had no bookings for the areas for the foreseeable future, which was solely due to the increase in charges, he would like the charges to go back to £150 for the market area and £200 for the performance area or perhaps even lower at the previous year's rates, as it was pointless having an area no one was using.

Cllr C. Reynolds agreed the charges should at least be decreased to the previous levels, especially given the current economic climate.

Cllr B. Larcombe noted the increase of 30% was way above inflation and couldn't understand how members had arrived at the charges.

Cllr M. Ellis agreed the charges should be decreased to 2022/23 levels but she wouldn't want to see them go any lower as any future increases would then be seen as a big jump.

Proposed by Cllr R. Smith and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that commercial hire charges for 2023-4 are set at £125 for the market area and £175 for the performance area.

## **22/72/SF Bowling Club Parking Permits**

Cllr R. Smith asked if the council gave permits to any other clubs for events.

The deputy town clerk said this was the only arrangement of its kind with users of the Monmouth Beach area.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the bowling club was an important feature of the town and he would like the council to do anything it can to help the club.

The support services manager said if members were inclined to agree to the permits continuing, members may wish to consider the amount charged; the permits had been charged at £25 for many years but the parking charges had been increased numerous times during the same period.

Members agreed an increase was reasonable and Cllr M. Ellis suggested £30 per permit.

Proposed by Cllr C. Reynolds and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to continue to provide 12 parking permits for visitors attending Lyme Regis Bowling Club's annual tournament and to increase the price of the permit to £30.

## **22/73/SF Hair Braiding and Henna Tattooing Concession**

Members agreed that as the concession had already been awarded and had two years left to run, there would be no issue in re-assigning it to a new name.

Proposed by Cllr G. Stammers and seconded by Cllr P. May, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to re-assigning the hair braiding and henna

tattooing concession to Tia Shoemark for the remainder of the concession, i.e. 2023 and 2024, under the same terms as the original.

#### **22/74/SF List of Payments**

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the schedule of payments in January 2023 for the sum of £99,819.24 and February 2023 £141,748.31, respectively.

#### **22/75/SF Investments and Cash Holdings**

Cllr P. May said higher interest rates were outlined at a previous meeting and he asked why the council's investments hadn't been moved to take advantage of those rates.

The deputy town clerk said the report was just a snapshot as of a particular date in February and the money had been subsequently moved and the current interest rate was around 3%.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked that the finance manager looked at Unity Bank for the council's investments as he was aware many other local authorities used this bank.

#### **22/76/SF Office Options Appraisal Report**

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, 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.

#### **22/77/SF Park and Ride 2023 and Outturn 2022**

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, 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.

#### **22/78/SF Debtors**

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, 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.

**22/79/SF Exempt Business**

**a) Update Report**

Cllr B. Bawden asked what the council charged The Kiosk for the wooden benches.

The deputy town clerk said the lease allowed the business to have benches, so there was no additional charge for these.

Members noted the charges for the deckchairs which had been agreed between the town clerk and the owner of The Kiosk and gave their endorsement.

**b) Office Options Appraisal Report**

The deputy town clerk said he had tried to provide members with his view of the realistic options available, including likely costs and potential income, but he was conscious members may require more information, such as the certainty of a long-term arrangement with Lyme Regis Development Trust for Unit 1A, the value or likely interest in the current office, and detailed plans, costs and ground condition tests of a new build. He said he was reluctant to go that far without member approval because the council would start incurring external professional fees at a rapid rate.

Cllr B. Larcombe agreed more information was needed, along the lines the deputy town clerk had suggested, because although it would incur costs, it could save the council from making a possible mistake in the long-term. He said he was unsure about a new build at Woodmead car park due to it being situated on a hill and he was concerned that holding meetings in the same venue would make the Guildhall redundant. He felt the council needed to use the Guildhall a lot more than it currently did, even if the office remained in its current location or moved to Unit 1A. He added that St Michael's Business Centre was a sound building but he agreed there needed to be a better idea of long-term security in the unit.

It was proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe to obtain more information about the certainty of a long-term arrangement with Lyme Regis Development Trust for Unit 1A, the value or likely interest in the current office, and detailed plans, costs and ground condition tests of a new build.

Cllr C. Reynolds said she felt the offices should remain where they were and further information should be obtained about refurbishment costs. She was concerned what the building could otherwise be converted into and felt the council should protect it for the town.

Cllr G. Turner asked about the length of time the road would need to be closed for to allow the works to the office to take place.

The deputy town clerk said it was entirely possible the road would need to be closed for two months, bearing in mind it was closed for five weeks just for works to the Guildhall window. He said the works required to the office, particularly the roadside frontage, were significant. He said Dorset Council (DC) would previously only allow a road closure for five weeks at an absolute maximum and a contractor who had looked

at the office building had doubted whether the works could be completed within this timescale and was not willing to tender on that basis.

Cllr P. May asked if there had been any input from staff on the options as they should at least be consulted with.

The deputy town clerk said staff hadn't been consulted formally but he was aware the front office staff would be concerned about a move to Unit 1A because it needed to be the right environment to engage with the public. He said a new build option hadn't been discussed with staff. He added that no matter how much money was spent on the current building, it would remain an old building that was not intended as an office, it would have considerable shortcomings regardless of how the conditions were improved, and it would be more difficult to incorporate improved environmental standards.

Cllr B. Bawden asked if the option of adding an extension at the back of the current office was considered.

The deputy town clerk said there were previous plans which showed how this could be done. However, this would be costly and the extra space wasn't actually required; the problem with the existing office wasn't a shortage of space, it was the configuration.

Cllr G. Stammers said when she had recently been in the office, she and Cllr D. Sarson went to the attic room where the floor was dangerously bowing. She said they had spoken to staff who said they were not comfortable in the office and the opinion was they wanted to move.

Cllr M. Ellis said if the council was to pursue Unit 1A, she would like to look into whether it could buy a bigger share in the property so there was no annual rent payable. She felt a new build at Woodmead car park was possible if the bus route was changed to include the road. She was aware staff didn't like being split over two levels and agreed the way the office was currently configured was not working. She felt the council should not only be doing what it felt was best for the residents, but also for the staff and their wellbeing.

Cllr B. Larcombe said staff came and went but members had to think about the legacy to the town and the decision members made for the long-term was the most important.

Cllr G. Turner said Woodmead car park was made-up ground so he didn't think a new building could be put there. He was also concerned about the loss of parking income if a new build was put on Woodmead car park.

The deputy town clerk said the area suggested for a new build could accommodate around 40 cars but it was virtually never used, only on weekends and Bank Holidays and by a few permit holders and local businesses with large vehicles. He said a new building would only require a quarter of the space and if the rest was tarmacked and properly marked out, he believed the council would get more income from it.

Cllr G. Stammers said if the ground at Woodmead car park wasn't suitable, that was fair enough, but there was no way of knowing without doing further investigations. She said members needed as much information as they could possibly get before making a decision.



Cllr B. Bawden said if the preference from staff was to be on one floor, perhaps the current office could be extended on the ground floor to accommodate all staff and the top two floors be rented out.

The deputy town clerk said this would be too complicated; the extension would be an issue in the context of the Grade II\* Listed Guildhall. He said the council would need to be careful about letting property for residential use and demand for office use was likely to be relatively low.

Cllr R. Smith said the staff seemed to really dislike being in the current building so if it was retained, it needed to be built to a high standard that staff were happy and proud to work in. However, he acknowledged it was an old building and it was difficult to build to high standards because of planning rules.

The deputy town clerk said if the current office was refurbished, there was no way staff could be retained in the office while the work was taking place. He agreed the building could be made more pleasant but he asked members to consider whether they wanted to spend that much money and take that much time. He emphasised the difficulty in getting a road closure for more than five weeks and said the views of the DC ward member may help in this matter.

Members asked the support services manager what the feeling was among staff.

The support services manager said although staff didn't have a clear idea of what the solution was, one thing everyone agreed on was they did not want to remain in the current office due to its condition. She said the biggest issue was that staff were split over two levels and this had caused a significant divide in the team and affected morale.

Cllr B. Larcombe said it wasn't a problem having staff split over two levels and it was just a matter of putting the right staff together.

*Cllr P. May left the meeting at 8.25pm.*

Cllr M. Ellis asked how many square feet of office space was required for the amount of staff working in the office.

*Cllr P. May returned to the meeting at 8.26pm.*

The deputy town clerk said the amount of space on the ground and first floors reconfigured was sufficient. He said he wouldn't want to contemplate any layout that considered putting staff on the top floor because it was completely unsafe to do so.

The deputy town clerk said if there was a significant number of members who felt there was no option they would support other than remaining in the existing building, there was no point in asking him to spend money on getting further plans and details. He said only if members were still open-minded about the final decision should they spend that money.

Cllr M. Ellis said members needed to be open-minded in case anything else became available in the town which may be more suitable. She also felt officers should have tentative talks with Lyme Regis Development Trust about whether it would be willing for the council to buy a greater share of St Michael's Business Centre.

Cllr B. Larcombe said he agreed the council needed to have unit 1A as its fall-back if the refurbishment of the existing building was a non-starter.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to regard the existing council office as the first option for the office accommodation and to cost the works, but if this option is out of the question, the council will consider St Michael's Business Centre.

The deputy town clerk said the previous plans drawn up for the office were done by Reed Holland Architects but the council ended that commission, so it might not be this firm which took the project forward. He said he didn't think a road closure outside of autumn and winter would be agreed by DC and he felt a start date in autumn 2024 was realistic.

**c) Park and Ride 2023 and Outturn 2022**

The deputy town clerk said the impact on income due to the use of concessionary passes and people travelling on a group ticket even though they were not together was significant. He strongly supported running the service again this year but suggested the concessionary pass facility was removed and the cost of a group ticket was increased.

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to:

a) approve the appointment of First Group as the operator for the 2023 park and ride service, using a similar three-bus system and covering both Lyme Regis and Charmouth as in 2022, with a timetable operating between 10.30am and 7.30pm to a service frequency of approximately 13 minutes and at a daily cost for three buses and drivers of approximately £1,100 (precise figure still to be finalised) and incorporating the revised fare tariff set out below:

- Adult single - £2
- Adult return - £3.50
- Child single - £1.50
- Child return - £2.50
- Group (up to 5 people, not more than 3 adults) - £10.00
- Concessionary passes NOT accepted

b) approve the operation of the 2023 park and ride service on the following dates:

- 1 April to 16 April inclusive (every day, including weekdays) to cover Easter and school half-term
- 29 April to 1 May to cover any Fossil Festival and bank holiday
- 6 May to 8 May to cover the coronation weekend
- 27 May to 4 June inclusive (every day, including weekdays) to cover school half term
- All other June and July weekends from 10/11 June to 15/16 July inclusive
- 22 July to 3 September inclusive, i.e., the entire school holiday period (every day, including weekdays)

- c) approve the deployment of the same AA advanced signage as used in 2022 at an estimated total cost of approximately £1,000 + VAT
- d) approve the renewal of the licence for the use of the privately-owned park and ride site at Charmouth Road at an annual licence fee for 2022 of £10,825.05.

**d) Debtors**

The deputy town clerk said since writing the report, debt had reduced by almost £6,000 and the remaining debt relating to 2022 site fees had reduced to £1,700.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if all caravan and chalet leases had been signed.

The deputy town clerk said there were two outstanding.

Members asked that the finance team be thanked for all their hard work in reducing the council's current recordable debt to such a low level.

*The meeting closed at 9.01pm.*