

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10 MAY 2023

Present

Chairman: Cllr M. Ellis

Councillors: Cllr C. Aldridge, Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr S. Cockerell, Cllr R. Doney, 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), A. Mullins (support services manager), J. Wright (town clerk)

22/79/SF Public Forum

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

22/80/SF Apologies for Absence

None.

22/81/SF Minutes

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr P. May, the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2023 were **ADOPTED**.

22/82/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr B. Bawden declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 12, Project Proposals as she lived opposite the proposed site for the multi-use games area.

22/83/SF Dispensations

There were none.

22/84/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 22 March 2023

Office Options Appraisal Report

Cllr D. Sarson asked if there was any idea of the programme of works if the council went for the option of office refurbishment.

The town clerk said the council had already chosen the option of office refurbishment and the deputy town clerk intended to take a report to the next Town Management and Highways Committee meeting.

22/85/SF Update Report

There were no updates.

22/86/SF Strategy and Finance Objectives

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the work to the harbourmaster's store could be completed before the target date of March 2024 as this seemed a long way off and the council had been aware for some time that it would be vacated by Dorset Council (DC).

The town clerk said the deputy town clerk would take an outline programme to the Full Council meeting on 17 May 2023 but the work depended on various factors, such as availability of contractors and the extent of the work, and the timing of the work was an issue because it could be affect the summer season. However, if officers felt the work could be completed earlier than March 2024, they would inform members.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked which committee would consider the detail and management of the works and what plans had already been developed.

The town clerk said if the Full Council approved the programme, the management would be delegated to the Town Management and Highways Committee. He said the money for this project had only been available since April 2023.

Cllr M. Ellis said this was not the only project being dealt with; officers were managing lots of others.

Cllr B. Bawden said the town council insisted DC vacated the store because it wanted to do the work straight away so it had caused some annoyance from DC that the work hadn't started yet.

Cllr M. Ellis said there was more work required to the store than envisaged.

The town clerk said he couldn't recall officers saying the work would start immediately and reminded members the town council had been trying to get the building back from DC for over three years.

22/87/SF Review of Standing Orders

Cllr R. Smith asked if there was any way new councillors could vote on committees before having to wait for Full Council approval and suggested this could be provisionally approved by the mayor, town clerk and committee chairman.

The town clerk said the Full Council had to receive the declaration of acceptance of office and the Full Council was responsible for approving committee membership, at which point new members could be appointed to committees.

Cllr C. Aldridge said at the moment, draft minutes were not seen by the committee chairman until they were presented to the committee so there was no opportunity to comment on them. She also asked if the council could consider changing the rules around recorded votes, as currently any individual councillor could request a recorded vote but she felt it should be something that's voted on.

The support services manager said the standing order relating to recorded votes was a mandatory clause so this couldn't be changed.

The town clerk said officers could let chairmen see draft minutes but in the past they had found some chairmen didn't get them back in time.

The support services manager said there had also been issues with some chairmen re-writing minutes.

Cllr B. Larcombe said some minutes were extensive and almost included verbal exchanges between members, whereas others were quite brief. He felt it would also be useful if the minutes could contain an actions column as it made it very clear who was going to do what and when, as recommendations went forward to Full Council but there were other things the committee could take away as an action.

The town clerk said he wasn't aware of other councils presenting minutes in this way as recommendations had to go to Full Council but if an action needed to be brought forward because of a deadline before the Full Council, this was pointed out to members and a consensus was sought. He said he would like members to be clear when they asked officers to do something to avoid ambiguity.

The town clerk said at the chairmen's meetings, officers summarised all the actions from the previous cycle of meetings. He said he would be happy to circulate the actions to the rest of the members.

Cllr B. Bawden asked if members could see the minutes much sooner after the meetings.

The town clerk said there were some practical issues and other priorities which meant the minutes might not be available straight away but officers would endeavour to do this. He said if minutes were sent to chairmen and made available to other members, they would be for information only; it wasn't an early opportunity for members to propose changes or debate their content by email ahead of the meeting.

Cllr R. Smith asked for clarification on the difference between recommendations and resolutions and whether recommendations could be made if there was no report on the agenda.

The town clerk said committees made recommendations to the Full Council and then the Full Council made resolutions to approve the recommendations.

Cllr M. Ellis said members couldn't debate and make recommendations on things that were not on the agenda because the public wouldn't have been made aware that the issue was to be debated and have an opportunity to attend the meeting.

The town clerk said if members drifted away from the agenda item but there was a consensus that officers should action something, they would reasonably pursue this direction. He said several members had asked for more governance training and this was scheduled to take place during the day on 5/6 June 2023. The town clerk said an evening session would be organised for those who couldn't attend.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the revised standing orders.

22/88/SF Review of Financial Regulations

Regarding paragraph 8.6, External Borrowing, Cllr B. Larcombe wanted confirmation there would be no borrowing without a decision from the council.

The town clerk said any borrowings were reported regularly to the council. However, any decision to borrow money, as with investing money, would be the council's decision and officers would then action it.

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the revised financial regulations.

22/89/SF The Annual Review of the Communications/PR Policy and Procedure

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the council could make more use of its noticeboards to share information as this had been raised by a resident at the annual meeting of electors. He said the agendas had to be displayed on noticeboards and asked if this was done.

The town clerk said it was no longer a legal requirement to display agendas on noticeboards, the council's website was sufficient. He said it wouldn't be possible to display a whole agenda in a noticeboard as it was too big, but the front cover could be displayed, with a note inviting people to contact the council for more details.

Cllr B. Bawden said at the annual town meeting it was specifically requested that the noticeboard in the middle of town was used as the one under the Guildhall was difficult to access and not many people walked past it.

Cllr G. Stammers suggested the noticeboards could also include information about the public attending meetings and speaking in the public forum.

Proposed by Cllr D. Ruffle and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the revised Communications/PR Policy and Procedure.

22/90/SF Project Proposals

The town clerk said this led on from the public consultation on objectives and the council now needed to develop project proposals for a spend of up to £150k with a focus on a youth facility; the suggestion was either a multi-use games area (MUGA) or playground equipment. He said the starting point was either a MUGA at Anning Road playing field or a play area in the pitch and putt area, specifically aimed at younger children.

Cllr D. Sarson said he would prefer the council built a MUGA as there was already a large play area at Anning Road. He said he didn't think many parents with young children would walk with their children to the gardens to use the play equipment.

Cllr C. Reynolds said a lot of children used the old BMX humps at the playing field and asked if these would need to go to make way for a MUGA.

The town clerk said there was no need to get rid of the humps as the MUGA would be in the bottom corner playing field. He said officers believed a decent sized MUGA

could be fitted there, and stressed it was important the MUGA was big enough to be of use for activities such as five-a-side football and basketball. He said a MUGA at the playing field would principally be used by residents and a play park in the garden would principally be used by tourists.

Cllr C. Reynolds said she understood the middle of the playing field belonged to DC and she asked how the covenant on the field would affect its use. She also had concerns that a new facility there would give rise to complaints from residents, who had complained previously when the teen shelter was there.

The town clerk said the whole field belonged to the town council. He said the covenant restricted part, not all, of the field to under 15s. He acknowledged there would be the potential for young people to congregate there and there would be noise from the activities, so this was a consideration.

Cllr C. Aldridge said she supported the idea of a MUGA as there would be combined facilities at Anning Road and she felt it would be a shame to use an area of the gardens with great views for a children's play area.

Cllr B. Larcombe also supported the idea of a MUGA at Anning Road as it was surrounded by residents who could keep their eye on what was going on there, it was easily accessible and would be suitable for children of all ages.

Cllr B. Bawden asked if the MUGA would only be for the use of children under 15 due to the covenant and if the facility would include floodlights.

The town clerk said he believed the area was outside the covenant but if members chose to proceed with this project, officers would confirm this. However, the council could still restrict its use to certain ages if it wished. He said covenants could also be lifted because they were there for the benefit of people who imposed them. He said the facility would not be floodlit.

Members discussed some other potential uses for the pitch and putt area but the town clerk advised concentrating on this project right now and if there was any money left, the council could consider other projects.

It was noted the children at St Michael's Primary School had asked for more facilities at Anning Road playing field so this would demonstrate the council had listened, but there was still some support for a play area in the gardens.

Cllr M. Ellis said if the council made a decision to pursue one project, this didn't rule out doing the other project at a later date.

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to pursue the project to install a multi-use games area at Anning Road playing field.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the project would be delegated to the Town Management and Highways Committee once the equipment and costings had been agreed.

The town clerk said there would need to be a further discussion at this committee in relation to costings and the covenant, but the management of the project would eventually be delegated to the Town Management and Highways Committee. He said

the council would also need to do some public consultation, including talking to local schools, and if the pitch needed to be moved slightly, this would involve talking to others.

Cllr B. Bawden asked if officers had also looked at the area at the top of the playing field between the pavilion and play park as a potential site and she asked if bookings would be taken for the use of the MUGA.

The town clerk said this area was on a slope. He added, officers had looked at all potential locations at the playing field, and the one proposed was the most suitable. He said bookings for the MUGA wouldn't be taken, i.e., it would be free for all to use at any time.

22/91/SF Seafront Evening Litter Bin Collections

The town clerk said members did consider this issue when setting the budget and decided they didn't want any additional provision on the seafront over the summer. He said funding for this provision had not been included in the budget because in the previous two years, DC provided the funding as part of the Covid recovery fund, which was no longer available.

The town clerk said if the council wanted to provide this additional cover for up to nine weeks in the height of the season, it would cost around £4k. He said it would also mean the toilets could be left open later as the evening staff could close them.

Cllr B. Larcombe felt the council had an obligation to provide additional cover; he said people were paying to park in the town and the income should go towards the upkeep of the town.

Cllr G. Stammers said on the seafront attendant's days off, there would be no one working beyond 6pm so toilets would have to be closed and bins wouldn't be emptied; as such, she felt more cover was needed.

Proposed by Cllr G. Turner and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, members agreed **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to introduce seafront evening litter bin collections for the 2023 summer season.

Cllr D. Sarson asked if there were plans to have security guards on the seafront this summer; although this was unbudgeted, he felt it was necessary.

Cllr M. Ellis said the security guards were also funded from DC's Covid recovery fund.

The town clerk said if there was an issue with anti-social behaviour, the council could re-visit the issue of security.

22/92/SF Mary Anning Scholarship Legacy Fund

Cllr B. Bawden was involved in the scholarship legacy fund and said no one from the council had approached them to follow up what was happening with the fund and a lot of work had been done at the time the funding was awarded. She felt they should have been notified the council was reviewing it.

The town clerk said there had been no contact from the applicant since the funding was awarded three years ago and although it was chased up at the time it was allocated, there had been no response. He said members were keen he looked into whether there was a way of spending the £5k to support the objects agreed three years ago, i.e. to support young women and girls into science, and an obvious option was to speak to local educators.

Cllr R. Doney said nationally, encouraging young women and girls into science and engineering was desperately needed. He said the money was a donation, it wasn't the council's money, and if the schools wanted to progress an initiative, the money should be put to good use.

The town clerk said the schools would be asked to come up with specific proposals for the council to consider.

Cllr B. Bawden said the funding was originally intended for girls going on to a degree course and at the time, Mary Anning Rocks were interested in the scheme.

The town clerk said there had been no approach from Mary Anning Rocks so in the meantime, at the request of members, he had tried to find an alternative way of allocating the funding.

Cllr R. Smith asked if the council could be gender specific; at the time of considering the funding allocation, the council used a more general definition to include those under-represented in science.

The town clerk said the discussion did take place at the time, but he didn't think that position wasn't formalised. He suggested members wait and see what proposal the schools came back with.

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to re-allocate, in principle, the £5,000 Mary Anning Scholarship Legacy Fund to The Woodroffe School, St Michael's Primary School and Mrs Ethelston's Primary School to develop a proposal to support girls and young women into science, subject to further proposals being considered by the Strategy and Finance Committee.

22/93/SF Dog-Related Public Space Protection Order

Several members felt there shouldn't be any relaxation of the current rules relating to front beaches as there had been incidents caused by loose dogs involving children and there were plenty of other beaches and fields in and around Lyme Regis where dogs could be exercised off the lead.

Cllr B. Larcombe agreed and said the current rules had become established and nothing had changed in the problems dogs created.

Cllr R. Doney asked for clarity on whether the council was asking for the current rules to remain in place, i.e., dogs allowed on the beach on lead during the winter, or whether its position was the same as in 2020, i.e., a total ban on dogs on the beach during the winter. He felt the council should ask again for a total ban.

Cllr M. Ellis felt the council shouldn't accept any lesser restrictions than those currently in place but she would favour a total ban.

Cllr B. Bawden asked if there was any scope in extending the 'winter' period because dogs were currently allowed on the beach over Easter. She said the issue of dogs on the beach had a vocal lobby group that bent the information to its own ends but didn't reflect the views of the majority of people in the town. However, she supported the idea of dogs being allowed on the beach in the winter on leads to help with social isolation.

Cllr C. Aldridge said every beach was different so the idea of having a uniform approach across Dorset didn't work; the size of Lyme Regis beach and the number of people who used it provided the council with a case for pushing for firmer restrictions.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the council was intending to include Church Cliff Beach in the restrictions as there was a campaign to redesignate it as a bathing beach.

Cllr P. May said the River Lim Action Group, which was seeking the redesignation, had made it very clear they had no wish for the current rules for dogs to change and they should continue to be allowed on Church Cliff Beach. They felt it would make the project a lot more difficult.

It was proposed by Cllr R. Smith and seconded by Cllr B. Bawden that the council supports a ban on dogs on front beaches in the summer (1 May to 30 September) and dogs on leads on front beaches; and has dogs on leads on front beaches in the winter months (1 October to 30 April).

This motion was not carried.

Proposed by Cllr R. Doney and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to respond to Dorset Council that the council would like a total ban on dogs on front beaches all-year-round.

Cllr R. Doney asked if the Public Space Protection Order relating to the feeding of seagulls was also due for review.

The town clerk said he would check and report back to members.

22/94/SF Toilet Cleaning Contract

It was proposed by Cllr C. Reynolds and seconded by Cllr P. May that the council continues with the current public toilet cleaning contract with Glen Cleaning.

This motion was not voted on.

The town clerk said he felt members needed more information before considering this, including how much the contract was worth. He said even if other contractors didn't quote for work, officers could do some benchmarking to determine if the council was getting value for money. He suggested another report was brought back to this committee with more comparative data.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what DC's arrangements for toilet cleaning were and whether the council could benefit from tying into this.

The town clerk said the council could potentially get better value this way but the obstacle was the town council's frequency of cleaning which was greater than DC's. He felt the ideal situation would be for DC to hand over to the town council the management of all its toilets in Lyme Regis and a local workforce could then be employed to clean both town council and DC toilets. He said the council had struggled to get DC to agree this and suggested Cllr B. Bawden could take this up. He added this would allow a service to be created that is bespoke to the town instead of one which is tendered for the whole county. The town clerk suggested any savings from such an initiative could be shared with DC.

Members wanted to know the value of the contract with Glen Cleaning but this needed to be considered in exempt business.

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

22/95/SF List of Payments

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the schedule of payments in March 2023 for the sum of £275,278.53.

22/96/SF Cash Holdings and Investments

The town clerk said when the reserve figure was last reported to members, the end of year forecast was £1.6million but it was greater than forecast due to prudent budgeting. He said the finance manager had secured the investments members had approved and they were now doing more work on cashflow to get short-term fixes on smaller amounts.

Cllr B. Larcombe said although the reserve was considerable, there were several projects with significant expenditure planned. He said business rates were also going up, it was unknown what would happen with DC services and environmental initiatives were planned, so it was right to be prudent.

The town clerk said a large amount of the reserve had been moved into this year to spend on projects, with a budget reserve of £1million for 2023-24. He said no projects had been identified for 2024-5 because the office refurbishment would probably take up all the council's spare funds and the wriggle room within the budget would start to reduce.

Cllr D. Sarson congratulated the town clerk and finance manager for breaking down and investing the council's money to earn at least £25k interest.

22/97/SF Debtors

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, 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.

22/98/SF Exempt Business

a) Toilet Cleaning Contract

The town clerk told members the value of the contract with Glen Cleaning.

Members discussed the possible options for toilet cleaning in future and it was agreed the town clerk would bring a further report to this committee to allow members to determine if the council was getting value for money and to consider other potential options for managing the service.

b) Debtors

Members acknowledged the low level of debt and thanked the finance manager for her continued work.

The meeting closed at 9.07pm.