

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 JULY 2023

Present

Chairman: Cllr P. May

Councillors: Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr S. Cockerell, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr P. Evans, Cllr B. Larcombe, Cllr C. Reynolds, 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)

23/01/SF Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

It was proposed by Cllr R. Smith and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe that Cllr P. May is chairman of the Strategy and Finance Committee.

It was proposed by Cllr G. Stammers and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds that Cllr M. Ellis is chairman of the Strategy and Finance Committee.

Cllr P. May was duly **ELECTED** as chairman.

It was proposed by Cllr G. Turner and seconded by Cllr R. Smith that Cllr B. Larcombe is vice-chairman of the Strategy and Finance Committee.

It was proposed by Cllr C. Reynolds and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers that Cllr M. Ellis is vice-chairman of the Strategy and Finance Committee.

Cllr B. Larcombe was duly **ELECTED** as vice-chairman.

23/02/SF Terms of Reference

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, the committee's terms of reference were **RECEIVED**.

23/03/SF Public Forum

There were no members of the public present.

23/04/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr C. Aldridge – holiday
Cllr R. Doney – holiday
Cllr D. Ruffle – illness

23/05/SF Minutes

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2023 were **ADOPTED**.

23/06/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr P. Evans declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 20, MUGA at Anning Road Playing Field, as he was a nearby resident to the proposed multi-use games area (MUGA).

Cllr B. Bawden declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 20, MUGA at Anning Road Playing Field, as she would be the closest property to the proposed MUGA.

23/07/SF Dispensations

There were none.

23/08/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 10 May 2023

Members noted the report.

23/09/SF Update Report

Harbourmaster's store, office and cemetery lodge

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if members would be presented at the Full Council meeting with a single named preferred contractor for these works or if members would have a choice.

The deputy town clerk said he would be disappointed if members didn't have several contractors to choose from, but in recent experience, the council had failed to generate interest.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the preferred contractor would be for these projects only or for subsequent projects.

The deputy town clerk said it would be for projects into the future as it was a way of going through a best value exercise once, rather than having to go through it for every project over the next two or three years.

23/10/SF Strategy and Finance Objectives

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the Strawberry Fields' option appraisal was vulnerable as there had been no progress on this objective.

Cllr P. May said progress couldn't be made on this until there was a firm long-term arrangement for park and ride at the Charmouth Road site.

The deputy town clerk said he was optimistic the council would have a long-term arrangement in place with the landowners for park and ride, which had been evidenced by their planning application for permanent infrastructure at the site. He said this included improved access, a larger hardstanding, a building to include toilets,

an information point and refreshments, a timetable noticeboard, and ground matting on part of the site.

Cllr B. Larcombe said he hoped the council would reciprocate the commitment the landowner had shown if the planning permission was approved, although it was noted the council's commitment to park and ride was dependent on there being a bus operator for the service.

Cllr B. Bawden suggested the town council could work with Dorset Council (DC) in trying to secure a longer-term commitment to a park and ride as it had experience of working with bus companies.

The deputy town clerk said he had already been in contact with the relevant officer at DC and he intended to bring a report to a future meeting to allow members to consider how the service should be funded generally, which may be a pay to park model; this would be simpler and provide more certainty and control.

Cllr D. Sarson asked if anyone was in post yet for the temporary role to support the deputy town clerk.

The deputy town clerk said it had not yet been advertised but he was hoping to do this by the end of the week.

23/11/SF Member Details on the Council Website

Cllr D. Sarson said he would prefer people to contact him by email as a phone call usually demanded a quick response and mistakes could occur. He said the alternative was to ask people to contact the council office.

Cllr C. Reynolds said residents should be able to contact members in the way they preferred and as some older people didn't have the internet, they had no option but to phone.

Cllr M. Ellis agreed that for many people, a phone call might be their only way of getting hold of members and as she had been voted by the public to be their voice, she should be available to them in whatever way they preferred. She said if she received calls from the press, she directed them to the office so there was a standard response issued.

Cllr G. Stammers asked what the expectation of members was in terms of the contact details they provided.

Cllr P. May said the details currently on the website were the status quo and this would only change if the council passed a resolution to do so.

Cllr B. Bawden said the proposal wasn't for members to not have a means of being contacted, but for members to choose what details were published. She said she didn't want her home address or telephone number on the website but she was happy to have the town council address. She said DC allowed this.

Cllr B. Larcombe said members' register of interests and election applications included their addresses. He said the public could go through the office to speak to a member but it was then reliant on the staff to relay those messages. He said having a council

email address on a council laptop was also a good way of being contacted because if someone ceased to be a member, their email address would also cease.

Cllr R. Smith said when a member was elected, they could expect people to contact them to make representations and he was happy to receive phone calls. However, he had some sympathy for members who found this to be a problem. He suggested the standard position was members remained accessible by having their phone number and home address on the website, but members could opt out if they found it unmanageable.

Cllr P. Evans said if a member had lived in the town for a long time, people would know their address anyway. Although he felt there should be an option to opt out of having personal contact details published, he felt it came with the territory of being a local councillor.

If it was agreed alternative contact details could be published, members discussed whether it was appropriate to direct enquiries to the office. Several members felt the office shouldn't be expected to field calls for members and this would create extra work for staff.

It was suggested business contact details or any other alternative contact details could be used, although it was noted not all members would have these alternatives.

Cllr M. Ellis requested a recorded vote on the following motion:

Proposed by Cllr R. Smith and seconded by Cllr S. Cockerell, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that the presumption is members should be contactable and have their personal details published on the council's website, but they should be allowed to opt out and provide an alternative phone number and address, which may be the town council telephone number and address.

Voted for – Cllr P. May, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr S. Cockerell, Cllr B. Larcombe, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr, B. Bawden

Voted against – Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr P. Evans

Abstentions – None

23/12/SF Review of the Safe Key Procedure

Cllr M. Ellis asked if there was a log kept of every time the safe was opened in case there were any discrepancies.

The finance manager said there was a log of which employees had safe keys but not a log of who went in and out of the safe; if there were any issues, anyone who had access to the safe would be involved in any investigation.

Cllr C. Reynolds said there was a log for signing the mayoral chains in and out and asked why it wasn't the same procedure for the safe.

The finance manager said the safe held a lot of different items and it was therefore accessed too often to realistically keep a log.

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the revised safe key procedure.

23/13/SF Budget Performance, 1 April – 30 June 2023

Members noted the report.

23/14/SF Rating Revaluation and changes to Rateable Value

Members noted the outcome of the 2023 rating revaluation and changes to the rateable value of the council's main property assets.

The deputy town clerk corrected an error in the report; he said the council was charged business rates of £2.5k on the cemetery. He strongly advised against appealing the valuations as it was likely the council would lose given the increase in both charges and income over the previous 5 years.

23/15/SF Dog-related Public Space Protection Order

Cllrs S. Cockerell, C. Reynolds and G. Stammers volunteered to complete the survey questions and report back to the Full Council.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that Cllrs S. Cockerell, C. Reynolds and S. Stammers consider Dorset Council's dog-related Public Space Protection Order and report their proposals to the Full Council on 26 July 2023 for approval.

23/16/SF Accreted Land at Monmouth Beach

The deputy town clerk said as there had been no feedback from Natural England, this item would be deferred to the Full Council meeting on 26 July 2023.

23/17/SF Land Stability at Monmouth Beach and Ware Cliff

Members noted the report.

23/18/SF List of Payments

Cllr M. Ellis said some of the payments had been listed in the wrong category and she had raised this with the finance team before the meeting.

The finance manager reassured members that all the payments had been coded correctly in the accounting system but as the list of payments was compiled manually, some of the categories had been incorrectly reported.

It was agreed the errors would be amended and the entire list of payments would be re-presented to the Full Council meeting on 26 July 2023 for approval.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what the £1,076 water meter issue was and why it was paid.

The deputy town clerk said the Monmouth Beach metering and connection issues were complex and there were also issues in places connected to land stability, so for many years the council had paid an external contractor to do this work on the council's behalf.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if the electric charges could be aggregated on the list of payments as he was concerned about increasing costs.

The finance manager said the expenditure category totals were shown at the bottom of the list but if members wished, the utilities category could be further broken down to show gas, electricity and water.

Cllr M. Ellis said there appeared to be lots of refunds for beach huts and suggested members should consider a fee for refunds.

The deputy town clerk said the council would be paying £16k rates on the beach huts so this all needed to be considered as part of the review of fees and charges at budget setting time.

23/19/SF Cash Holdings and Investments

Members noted the report.

23/20/SF MUGA at Anning Road Playing Field

Proposed by Cllr P. May 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.

23/21/SF Fraudulent Activity

Proposed by Cllr P. May 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.

23/22/SF Debtors

Proposed by Cllr P. May 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.

23/23/SF Exempt Business

Cllr B. Bawden and Cllr P. Evans left the meeting at 8.12pm in line with their pecuniary interests.

a) MUGA at Anning Road Playing Field

The deputy town clerk said the council could spend a lot of time and public money getting legal opinions about the enforcement of the covenants, but the first thing he would advise doing is speaking to the people who lived adjacent to the field.

It was proposed by Cllr D. Sarson to continue to support the multi-use games area on land specified at Anning Road playing field but to go to public consultation and engagement with the local community to gauge their reaction to the proposal, with any potential complaints that may emerge after discussion.

Members agreed there needed to be some public consultation on the proposal and discussed whether this should be limited to those who lived immediately surrounding the playing field or whether it should be extended to the wider town.

The deputy town clerk said he was happy to go to wider consultation as the council could ask for comments about location, design and uses of the MUGA. However, the council also needed feedback from immediate neighbours to address the legal issue and he said this mustn't get lost in the wider consultation.

The support services manager said two consultation processes could be run; she suggested a letter drop to every property surrounding the playing field and a wider public consultation via Lyme Voice, social media and the website.

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to continue to support the multi-use games area on land specified at Anning Road playing field but to consult with adjacent properties to gauge their reaction to the proposal and to also consult with the wider community.

Cllr B. Bawden and Cllr P. Evans returned to the meeting at 8.41pm.

b) Fraudulent Activity

Members discussed the issue regarding timesheets and asked questions about why payments continued to be made, how the discrepancy was picked up and what sanctions had been given.

It was noted a clocking in and out system was now being used for these staff and Cllr B. Larcombe asked if a similar system should be used for office staff so members had a sense of hours and attendance.

It was clarified there was a signing in and out board at the office but this was mainly for fire regulations; it wasn't a record of hours worked.

As the issues being discussed had human resources implications, it was agreed it would be referred to the Human Resources Committee for further discussion.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the discrepancies with timesheets, to

approve the management actions proposed to ensure further risk is minimised and to refer the issue to the Human Resources Committee for further discussion.

With regards to the debit card fraud, the finance manager confirmed the card never left the office and the bank did not believe the fraud was carried out by anyone within the council, so had refunded the amounts.

Cllr B. Bawden thanked staff for picking up the transactions so quickly.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the two fraudulent debit card transactions and approve the management actions proposed to ensure further risk is minimised.

c) Debtors' Report

Members noted the report.

The meeting closed at 8.59pm.