

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 24 JANUARY 2024

Present

Chairman: Cllr P. May

Councillors: Cllr C. Aldridge, Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr R. Doney, Cllr P. Evans, Cllr B. Larcombe, 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), P. Williams (acting operations manager), J. Wright (town clerk)

23/64/SF Public Forum

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

23/65/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr S. Cockerell – holiday
Cllr M. Ellis – charity commitment
Cllr C. Reynolds – illness

23/66/SF Minutes

Proposed by D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, the minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2023 were **ADOPTED**.

23/67/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

23/68/SF Dispensations

There were none.

23/69/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 29 November 2023

Sand harvesting and beach replenishment

Cllr B. Bawden said the dates for the work had been confirmed as 9 to 14 March 2024, which was after the winter storms but before the Easter holidays.

23/70/SF Update Report

There were no updates.

23/71/SF Strategy and Finance Objectives

Cllr C. Aldridge asked when members would consider a report on the council offices as it was not included on this agenda.

The town clerk said it was intended to include a report on this agenda but officers had been waiting to meet with Lyme Regis Museum about space at St Michael's Business Centre, so the report had been deferred to the Full Council meeting on 7 February 2024.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what the link was between GDPR and the digital office project and why it was taking so long to comply with GDPR.

The town clerk said a lot of work had been done in digitising transactions but there was still a backlog of paper documentation to be digitised which required senior management input. However, this was not a priority, although the council conformed to the minimum standards. He said it would be progressed when staff moved out of the council offices.

23/72/SF Internal Audit Report, Visit One 2023-24

In response to a member question, the finance manager said the salary underpayment was due to a formula error but this had been picked up and rectified.

Proposed by Cllr G. Stammers and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the internal auditor's report and approve the management responses.

Cllr P. May suggested if members had questions about the report, they raised them with officers before the meeting so they could come prepared with an answer.

23/73/SF Grant Requests

Cllr B. Larcombe said given the council had an annual, well publicised round of grants, he found it hard to understand why organisations made funding requests outside of this process, unless it was a very desperate situation.

Cllr B. Bawden said where organisations were trying to secure external funding, it was an advantage to show match funding from the town council, but they didn't know when those funding opportunities would come up and they might not fit into the council's annual grants' timetable.

Cllr D. Ruffle said the council always had an option to say no to any request.

Cllr C. Aldridge said the current system was too inflexible and organisations should be allowed to make requests at any time, with perhaps some money ring-fenced to meet requests.

Cllr R. Smith felt having time constraints or a policy not to accept requests outside of the timetable may mean the council loses opportunities to fund things that were of benefit to the community. He said he trusted councillors to make the right decisions, this committee and the Full Council had the opportunity to consider applications and the principles of term grant funding could be held against applications.

The town clerk said there used to be a medium grant of up to £5,000 but organisations aimed their applications at this amount because they knew the council had the budget. Similarly, if the council held a reserve for ad-hoc grant requests, organisations would aim for that pot because they would know it was available. He said organisations had a right to ask for requests to go on council agendas and although the council could instruct him to reject all funding requests, he would expect members' support for this policy. Alternatively, members could consider each request on its merits and with reference to the council's current financial performance, although he stressed funding should not come from the reserve.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the council needed to limit the amount of money it gave away to local organisations because it was public money and asked if there would be a cap on the amounts awarded.

The town clerk suggested members could consider grant requests, regardless of when they were made, as part of its own budget process so they would sit alongside the council's own priorities for the next year. However, he acknowledged there would still be emergency requests that would need to be considered in-year.

Cllr C. Aldridge said as some members felt there was a very hard line in terms of when grants should be considered, it would be helpful if the council could accept some flexibility within the rules to deal with one-off requests.

Cllr P. May said most members seemed to support the status quo but if possible, requests should be considered as part of the budget-setting process so the council could decide if it could afford them. He said members recognised there was a grants' cycle and this should be observed where possible, but there may be exceptions.

23/74/SF Local Council Elections 2024

Cllr B. Bawden asked how many members had signed the code of conduct.

The town clerk said every member had signed the code of conduct but there was also a voluntary code, which only some members had signed. However, he didn't think this was relevant to the election.

It was agreed individual members would be notified if they had signed the voluntary code but it wouldn't be shared more widely.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if candidates still had to submit a hard copy of their nomination papers.

Cllr B. Bawden said nomination papers still had to be delivered by hand, either by the candidate or someone else on their behalf.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the details of the local council elections on 2 May 2024 and the role of the town council in the process, and approve the amendment of the date of the annual meeting of the council from Wednesday 8 May 2024 to Wednesday 15 May 2024.

23/75/SF Standing for Office

Cllr B. Larcombe asked why it had been discovered now members could stand for office when not present at a meeting when there had been times in the past nominations had not been taken for this reason.

The town clerk said it had been the accepted way of doing things, which he adopted when he came into the post and no one had challenged this position. He said it was only when he was questioned by a member that he researched the issue and found an alternative position.

23/76/SF A National Park for Dorset

Cllr B. Larcombe said many of the issues that concerned the council in the past were still there, although the proposed area for the park had changed. He said the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) had a role to play in giving a collective response on behalf of individual parishes and he intended to bring this up at DAPTC's next western group meeting.

It was proposed by Cllr R. Doney that the town council establishes the extent of the current proposal for a national park; formally establishes Dorset Council's policy position on a national park; the council's DAPTC members formally raises the issue and requests that DAPTC co-ordinates the development of policy position; the town clerk raises the issue at the Dorset Society of Local Council Town Clerks' meeting; considers setting up a public meeting to gauge support within the community when proposals for a National Park for Dorset firm up; and reaffirms its opposition to a national park with the Dorset and East Devon National Park team.

The deputy town clerk said the National Park Team's latest newsletter also suggested a maritime component to the proposal and he suggested this was raised at the next Harbour Consultative Group meeting so the members were aware this could affect them.

Cllr P. May felt the council should be more open to receiving further information to help form a view and he suggested this was pursued through the DAPTC.

Cllr B. Bawden agreed it would be helpful to hear arguments on both sides before forming an opinion.

The town clerk said the National Park Team moved very quickly so it was important the council was on the front foot and didn't get overtaken by events. He said in the past, silence was considered to be consent.

Cllr P. May asked Cllr R. Doney if he would consider amending his proposal so the council does not reaffirm its opposition, but instead asks for further information before stating its position.

Cllr R. Doney said he wasn't sure what other information members wanted. He felt the council should reaffirm its position of opposition but make it clear it was prepared to be convinced otherwise.

Proposed by Cllr R. Doney and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that the town council establishes the extent of the

current proposal for a national park; formally establishes Dorset Council's policy position on a national park; the council's DAPTC members formally raises the issue and requests that DAPTC co-ordinates the development of policy position; the town clerk raises the issue at the Dorset Society of Local Council Town Clerks' meeting; considers setting up a public meeting to gauge support within the community when proposals for a National Park for Dorset firm up; and reaffirms its opposition to a national park with the Dorset and East Devon National Park team.

23/77/SF Parish Online

Members asked the deputy town clerk for his views of Parish Online as he had used it previously.

The deputy town clerk said it worked well but its usefulness depended on the user and how many users there were as it was a good resource if it was used widely. He said the council had a subscription to Ordnance Survey, which allowed maps to be printed, but Parish Online would allow far more. He said the biggest limitation would be that the council's printers couldn't print larger than A3.

Proposed by Cllr B. Iarcombe and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to take out an annual subscription of Parish Online.

23/78/SF Land Movement at Ware Cliff

The deputy town clerk confirmed a retrospective application for consent to Natural England for the emergency works would be required.

Members agreed officers had made the right decision in carrying out emergency works to minimise the risk to property and thanked the deputy town clerk and acting operations manager for dealing with the situation so quickly.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the recent land movement at Ware Cliff and the emergency works undertaken to protect properties; to approve the unbudgeted expenditure of £2,400 + VAT incurred in undertaking the emergency works; and to retrospectively approve the exception to standing orders in the appointment of Axminster Excavations to carry out these works because of the specialist nature of the works and their ability to mobilise and complete the works at very short notice.

23/79/SF Achievements

The town clerk said the appendices detailed almost £3 million investment in the town, in addition to what the council did on a daily basis. He said a summary would be produced and included in the next residents' newsletter. He hoped members agreed it was an impressive list of achievements, made even more difficult to achieve due to Covid-19, and he felt members should be proud of this.

Cllr P. Evans said the council celebrated its 50th anniversary this year and this investment was a tremendous achievement, which he hoped would be publicised to the town. He thanked the staff for the part they had played in delivering the achievements.

Members echoed Cllr P. Evans' thanks to staff and asked that this was passed back to them.

Cllr B. Larcombe said although Covid-19 was a challenge, the council still spent £1.9 million during this time and he felt it used the crisis as a way of improving ways of working and making positive changes.

23/80/SF List of Payments

Cllr B. Larcombe noted the payment for public toilets at Woodmead Halls was listed as a grant but given the earlier discussions about grants, he suggested it should be re-categorised.

The finance manager confirmed it was a service level agreement and it was only listed as a grant in the accounting system.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the schedule of payments in November & December 2023 for the sums of £296,953.94 and £129,612.27, respectively.

23/81/SF Investments and Cash Holdings

Members noted the report.

23/82/SF Replacement Mini-Golf Building

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, 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.

23/83/SF Park and Ride 2024

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, 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.

23/84/SF Debtors

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, 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.

23/85/SF Exempt Business

a) Replacement Mini-Golf Building

Cllr B. Bawden said she still felt the replacement of the mini-golf building was a good idea and she would feel uncomfortable with minor repairs. She felt she needed to better understand where this fitted in, in terms of storage and rest facilities as there was also the potential for the Langmoor Room to be used and whether the cadet hut would still need to be used.

The town clerk said the replacement of the mini-golf building was being driven by the local placement of staff. He said the cadet hut was currently being used for storage.

Cllr B. Larcombe was concerned about the cost and suggested an off-the-shelf solution for the mini golf function and for the Langmoor Room to be used for rest facilities. He said the room was in the right location, it had all the facilities staff needed and the broken lift wasn't an issue for them.

Cllr R. Smith said although the quotes were significantly over budget, he asked how long the life of the building was expected to be because proper investment on a well-built building spread over time made sense. He asked if there was provision for solar panels and other environmental details on the building.

The deputy town clerk said the design did include photovoltaic panels and the building would be expected to last for a minimum of 25 years.

Cllr G. Stammers felt the council should be investing in its staff and this would be the ideal location for a purpose-built building.

The deputy town clerk said although he could negotiate with the lowest tenderer, it would not reduce the cost significantly, if the council wanted to retain the existing size and design.

As any overspend was unbudgeted, Cllr R. Doney asked if this would affect other planned projects or whether the overspend would come from reserves.

The town clerk said the council had agreed to review the priority two objectives on 6 March 2024 when the year-end financial position would be better known and said there was scope to defer a decision on the mini-golf building until then. He said if members decided to proceed with the mini-golf building, they could choose to delete some of the priority two objectives to allow for this.

The deputy town clerk confirmed the quotes were sufficiently long enough to allow a deferral until that date; provided members made a decision at the meeting on 6 March 2024, the prices quoted would remain the same.

Cllr P. May suggested officers could look in the meantime at whether an off-the-shelf design could be suitable.

It was proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe that officers examine the downscaling of the amenities hut to be the unit for mini golf and to accommodate staff at the Langmoor Room, with any necessary adjustments made for its use.

This motion was not seconded.

Proposed by Cllr D. Ruffle and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to defer a decision on the replacement mini-golf building until 6 March 2024 and explore options for a similar scale building in the meantime.

b) **Park and Ride 2024**

Cllr R. Doney said the council should choose the service that would minimise the loss to the council, which would be a two-bus service provided by First.

Cllr B. Larcombe said although it was a nice idea to extend the service to Charmouth, he didn't feel it would get a lot of use and the impact on the timings of the buses and the potential financial loss was beginning to feel disproportionate.

Cllr R. Smith said although Stagecoach would use environmentally-friendly buses, they would still be doing longer trips from the depot in Exeter so it cancelled out this benefit.

The deputy town clerk confirmed the passenger numbers from Charmouth were not enough to cover the extra bus so it would increase the shortfall. However, the service had been well received by Charmouth in the past, including the holiday parks.

Cllr B. Bawden said traffic greenhouse gas emissions needed to be reduced and getting people out of cars was one of the main ways to do this. Therefore, if the council could encourage better public transport links between communities and get funding from holiday parks in Charmouth, she felt it was worth considering a third bus.

The deputy town clerk said although Charmouth Parish Council had given a contribution to the service in the one year it ran to the village, none of the holiday parks were willing to make a financial contribution.

Cllr G. Stammers said the public bus ran between Lyme Regis and Charmouth anyway and people could take advantage of the current £2 fare.

Proposed by Cllr R. Doney and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to appoint First to operate the 2024 park and ride service for Lyme Regis, with a service comprising two buses serving solely Lyme Regis, and to approve the ticket pricing arrangements as follows:

- Adult single - £2.00
- Adult return - £3.50
- Child single - £1.50
- Child return - £2.50
- Group return (up to four people, not more than two adults) - £10.00

- Group return (up to five people, not more than three adults) - £12.00
- Concessionary passes NOT accepted

c) Debtors

Cllr B. Larcombe asked for an update on the debt related to the Monmouth Beach garage.

The town clerk said the garage still needed to be cleared but a relative of the deceased owner had contacted the council and this was being followed up. He said ideally a member of the family would authorise the clearing of the garage to minimise the risk to the council.

The meeting closed at 9.31pm.