

## LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

### STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

#### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2017

##### **Present**

**Chairman:** Cllr Mrs. M. Ellis

**Councillors:** Cllr J. Broom, Cllr B. Larcombe, Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds, Cllr S. Williams

**Officers:** Mr M. Green (deputy town clerk), Mr K. Wilson (finance manager), Mr J. Wright (town clerk)

##### **17/63/SF Public Forum**

##### **Mr J. Moseley**

Spoke on behalf of Lyme Regis Bowls Club. He emphasised the benefit of the club to the town and the value of the voluntary contributions to the running of and fundraising for the club. Without this voluntary, effort the club would not be able to survive financially, even based on current levels of expenditure. He felt that this was saving the council money, something which was not currently being acknowledged.

##### **Mr C. Barber**

Spoke on behalf of the Lyme Regis Bowls Club. He stressed the need for the town council to be reasonable in its dealings with the club and asked that dialogue and discussions with the club continue and be broadened to include councillors. He emphasised the club's rights under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 in relation to the lease of its premises, including the option of independent arbitration if no agreement could be reached.

##### **Mr A. Nabarro**

Spoke on behalf of the Lyme Regis Bowls Club. He referred to the need for the council to be transparent in its dealings with the club. He did not agree that any potential loss of parking income to the council should be based on 24 spaces, nor did he agree that any rent payable by the club should be based on 50% of that figure. He referenced other agreements such as the skate park at Charmouth Road where he felt a different methodology had been applied. He was confident that alternative options would come forward through discussion; e.g., a summer-only arrangement.

##### **Mr P. Moffatt**

Spoke on behalf of the Lyme Regis Bowls Club. He referred to a scale plan of the parking area which he had prepared. Applying currently recommended design standards, he felt that the maximum loss of car parking spaces to the council was 11, not the 24 claimed. He looked forward to further discussions with the council on the subject and explained that he and his colleagues present at the meeting had been

appointed to liaise with the council. He asked that two councillor representatives (one on each 'side' of the debate) be appointed to continue the dialogue.

### **Mr M. Potter**

Pursuant to discussions which had taken place at both the Town Management and Highways Committee meeting on 4 October 2017 and at Full Council on 1 November 2017, Michael Potter, the collision reduction team manager at Dorset Highways, had been invited to the meeting to answer any questions members might have in relation to local traffic and road safety issues in general and a potential one-way system in particular.

Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds read out a letter from Cllr S. Miller about a potential one-way system incorporating Silver Street, Pound Street and Pound Road which he felt would address many of the highway and pedestrian safety issues currently affecting that area of the town.

Cllr B. Larcombe emphasised that this proposal represented one view and that he had concerns with it, particularly the safety of the required right-turn manoeuvre at the 'bottom' of Silver Street. He stressed the need to look comprehensively at the whole network, including signage and HGV access through the town, and to properly consider the impact on emergency services and local residents and businesses.

Other members expressed various views, including the need for expert advice, the potential need for traffic surveys and modelling, alternative solutions to the 'bottleneck' in lower Silver Street, the need to look again at HGV access through the town centre and the need to reach a view that was widely supported.

Mr Potter explained that, in the absence of a clear 'plan', he could only make a number of general comments:

- One-way systems often raise their own safety-related issues; including a tendency to increase vehicle speeds.
- There were no obvious safety grounds to justify major expenditure in the Silver Street area. Only one minor non-injury accident had been recorded and that was alcohol-related.
- That the suggested measures for Silver Street would not reduce overall demand for network capacity.
- That it was very difficult to measure improvement from a zero baseline.
- That vehicle priority measures were used sparingly by the highway authority and careful consideration was required in relation to carriageway widths and the distance between features if new problems were to be avoided.
- That consideration of the wider network would require extensive survey and modelling work. This was possible but raised issues of cost, resources and priorities.
- That, whilst it was potentially possible to ban vehicles from an area by size, enforcement of moving traffic offences was a matter for the Police. They were a primary consultee and it was unlikely that any proposals would be taken forward without their support.

Members agreed that the matter should be referred back to the Town Management and Highways Committee for a more detailed and comprehensive discussion and with a view to reaching a consensus about the best way forward.

**17/64/SF Apologies for Absence**

Cllr S. Miller  
Cllr R. Doney  
Cllr D. Hallett – illness  
Cllr P. Hicks  
Cllr S. Larcombe  
Cllr O. Lovell – personal reasons  
Cllr P. Ridley – personal reasons  
Cllr J. Scowen – personal reasons  
Cllr G. Turner

**17/65/SF Minutes**

Proposed by Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2017 were **ADOPTED**.

**17/66/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

There were no pecuniary interests declared relating to the business of this meeting.

**17/67/SF Dispensations**

There was no grant of dispensations made by the town clerk in relation to the business of this meeting.

**17/68/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 18 November 2017**

Members **NOTED** the report.

**17/69/SF Update Report**

**Site licences**

In response to questions from Cllr S. Williams, the deputy town clerk explained that some leases were still to be sent out but that their despatch was imminent. The finance manager explained that the options of immediate payment and payment by direct debit were being offered but all 'owners' were being asked to pay the current year's fees by the end of the 2017 calendar year wherever possible.

**17/70/SF Assets-on-and-around Monmouth Beach Car Park Working Group**

The minutes of the working group held on 31 October 2017 were **RECEIVED** without comment.

## 17/71/SF Internal Audit Report, Visit One 2017/18

The town clerk explained that the council's current internal auditor had initially been appointed through a competitive process and the suggestion was that this appointment should be extended for a further two years; after which the service would be re-tendered.

The finance manager drew attention to the auditor's five recommendations; only one of which, relating to the need to ensure that market rents were charged, was categorised as high priority. This particular recommendation might be relevant in the council's consideration of how best to deal with the bowling club lease.

Cllr S. Williams noted the auditor's comments about market rents and referred to what he considered to be inconsistencies and anomalies in how the council dealt with the rent charged to the bowls club and for the trailer park.

The town clerk explained that the rent charged for the trailer park was part of the wider discussions with West Dorset District Council (WDDC) and would be dealt with in that context.

Proposed by Cllr Mrs M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that the internal auditor's report and management responses relating to visit one 2017/18 be noted, and the existing provision of internal audit services with Darkin Miller be extended for a further two years to include 2018/19 and 2019/20.

## 17/72/SF Financial Regulations

The town clerk explained that the council currently used model financial regulations. This did not mean that they could not be improved upon to better meet particular local issues and needs, particularly in areas where they were 'silent' on matters which might arise in dealing with the procurement of goods and services.

He emphasised that many of the issues and breaches identified in the report were of a 'technical' nature and there was no suggestion that any impropriety had taken place. He stressed that all of the important questions about process and procedure should be asked prior to any procurement taking place.

In response to questions from members, the finance manager explained that the council had raised 180 purchase orders during the preceding three years. Despite the relatively small number involved, it was still important to follow best practice and to ensure value for money at all times; even when the value of the goods or services fell below the threshold for obtaining quotes.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that the reported breaches of financial regulations be noted and that the management actions set out below be approved and reviewed in 12 months' time:

- The threshold for obtaining three quotes is raised from £250 to £500 for goods and to £1,000 for services.
- For regular purchase items, the council enters in to a relationship with a preferred supplier for a period of up to three years in order to remove the

requirement to continually obtain quotes for routine purchases and to maximise the opportunity to obtain discount for bulk orders.

- To consider purchase requirements alongside routine maintenance activities and programmed work and to store products locally where possible.
- To review major purchase decisions before orders are placed to help ensure the council doesn't inadvertently enter into a contractual relationship or unreasonably raise an expectation with a supplier.

## **17/73/SF Lister Gardens: Café and Toilets**

The town clerk explained that his report was part of an ongoing commitment to bring information to members about this project as and when that information became available. He referred to potential sources of external funding which might help reduce the capital cost to the council. Nonetheless, it was a very major project which would have the effect of reducing the council's reserves; although he emphasised that these were currently at a high level, having been built up over the last year or so.

He mentioned that the figures contained in the quantity surveyors report did not include professional fees and that these might add a further £45k to the total cost.

In response to questions from members, he explained that he was not proposing a mass consultation exercise about the project but would provide a business case to Full Council on 13 December 2017 setting out the income and expenditure, return on capital deployed and other relevant information for the options considered at this meeting.

The finance manager explained that the council could 'opt to tax' for the purposes of reclaiming any VAT incurred on the project; but only if the property were subsequently leased out. This had no implications for the council but might for any tenant; especially if not registered for VAT.

Cllr B. Larcombe questioned the value of the asset being created and drew attention to its apparently modest rate of return. He emphasised the importance of being able to convince residents that it was a sensible thing to do; especially given the potential impact on this council of impending local government re-organisation. He was concerned that it would become a commitment rather than an asset and would shackle any future administration.

Cllr S. Williams questioned the need for another café in the town and drew attention to what he considered to be better uses of such significant funding; including facilities for the elderly and the potential to develop the site at Strawberry Fields.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis emphasised that the proposed café and toilets had the potential to be a valuable assets for the town as well as provide an improved facility for the council's amenity staff, whose current wooden hut would need to be replaced soon in any event. This view was supported by Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds.

Cllr J. Broom drew attention to the stated level of preliminaries and the absence of any obvious contingency within the budget figures. He was concerned that the actual costs could easily exceed the indicated figures.

**17/74/SF Budget and Precept, 2018/19 and Medium-term Financial Plan 2018-2022**

The town clerk explained that the proposed budget and plan was based on members' objectives for next year and for the subsequent 3 years. It assumed that grants be ceased from 2019/20 onwards. If everything contained within the budget were to be delivered, then it would reduce the level of reserves from 74% to 53% This was still an acceptable level of reserves, but members should enter into such a commitment knowingly.

The finance manager responded to questions about increased staffing costs and explained that it was partly down to the creation of approved new posts and partly to increased pension contributions; which had risen from 15% to 22% from January 2017.

Proposed by Cllr Mrs M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that the proposed 2018/19 budget be approved, the precept for 2018/19 be set at £120,708, and the medium-term financial plan for 2018-2022 be noted.

**17/75/SF Unitary Authorities**

The town clerk explained that his report was a summary of the latest position with local government reorganisation in Dorset. He felt that things were likely to move rapidly over the next few months; especially in terms of the transfer of assets and services. It was important that this council could engage and react promptly to any new developments.

The subject was top of the council's risk register and he emphasised his view that the main risk to this council was in engaging with the process, not in failing to engage.

Cllr B. Larcombe urged caution on the council in its wider spending commitments until the full implications of the move to unitary authorities was better understood. He was concerned that this council, as the 'local' authority, would be blamed locally if things failed or services ceased to be delivered as a result of the planned changes.

Proposed by Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that the remit of the council's working group on West Dorset District Council's assets and services be extended to include Dorset County Council assets and services and that the working group has monthly scheduled meetings.

**17/76/SF Bowling Club Lease**

Cllr S. Williams questioned the need to deal with this matter with the press and public excluded. He referred to the council's standing orders and indicated that he would complain to the monitoring officer if the matter were dealt with 'in camera'.

Members discussed the most appropriate way of dealing with the matter and concluded that because the report dealt with the council's negotiating position in relation to the lease of the bowling club, it was appropriate to consider the matter with the press and public excluded from the meeting.

Proposed by Cllr Mrs M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds, 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 information relating to the financial or business affairs of a 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.

**17/77/SF West Dorset District Council Programme Board**

The town clerk explained that the next meeting of the programme board was scheduled to take place on 8 December 2017 and it was important that this council's working group met before then. He also emphasised the need for consensus if he and the nominated member representative were to present a clear view on behalf of the council.

He intended to diarise a monthly meeting of the working group for the initial period at least.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that this council's participation in the West Dorset District Council Programme Board be approved and its's terms of reference be noted, and this council sets up a working group, to meet monthly in the first instance, to consider this council's position on relevant issues and to inform the engagement of the town clerk and Cllr S. Miller with the programme board.

**17/78/SF The General Data Protection Regulation**

The town clerk explained that he intended to bring a more detailed report to the January meeting of the committee.

**17/79/SF Investments, Cash Holdings and Loans**

Members noted the report.

**17/80/SF List of Payments**

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the schedule of payments for October 2017 in the total sum of £124,440.39.

**17/81/SF Debtors' Report**

Proposed by Cllr Mrs M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr Mrs C. Reynolds, 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 information relating to the financial or business affairs of a 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.

**17/82/SF Exempt Business**

**(a) Bowling Club Lease**

The town clerk reminded members that the council had already agreed its broad position in terms of how to approach discussions about the way forward with this matter. He ran over the history to date.

There was a wide-ranging discussion about options for grant support for the bowling club and a variety of other issues.

Proposed by Cllr Mrs. M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr Mrs. C. Reynolds, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that consideration of the bowling club lease be referred back to the Assets-on-and-around Monmouth Beach Car Park Working Group for further and more detailed consideration to include the current capacity and configuration of the car parking area and the number of public spaces which could be achieved within that area at current recommended space standards and having regard to the existing and potential layout of the wider area, including any constraints imposed by the adjoining footpath; and that a further meeting be arranged with the bowling club, to include member representation.

**(b) Debtors' Report**

Members discussed the debts, how officers were dealing with them and supported the actions suggested by the finance manager.

*The meeting closed at 9.35pm.*