

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present

Chairman: Cllr B. Larcombe

Councillors: Cllr Ms B. Bawden, Cllr J. Broom, Cllr Miss K. Ellis, Cllr Mrs M. Ellis, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr J. Scowen, Cllr Ms G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr S. Williams

Officers: Mr M. Green (deputy town clerk), Mrs A. Mullins (administrative officer), Mr J. Wright (town clerk)

Absent: Cllr L. Howe

19/18/SF Public Forum

There were no members of the public present.

19/19/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr R. Doney
Cllr D. Sarson

19/20/SF Minutes

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr Ms G. Stammers, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2019 were **ADOPTED**.

19/21/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

19/22/SF Dispensations

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

19/23/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 10 July 2019

Minutes of the Dorset Council working group meeting held on 11 June 2019

The town clerk said he would be responding to the email he had received from Ken Buchan, Dorset Council's head of environment and wellbeing, outlining the town council's position, what the council believed its interests were in the land, and what the council could do with that land. He added that he would expect to respond to Ken Buchan by mid-October.

Cllr S. Williams was concerned this matter was taking so long to resolve and no members had been involved in meetings with Dorset Council.

The town clerk said he was instructed by the council to have a meeting with Dorset Council and he had reported back from that meeting, but he couldn't force Dorset Council to respond. He said if the council felt it wasn't getting an adequate response, there were things it could do as freeholder, although he felt the council was some way away from that point.

The town clerk said he would arrange another meeting of the working group to allow members to discuss this further. He suggested the Dorset Council officer could be invited to the meeting, which members agreed with.

It was noted the Dorset Council member was aware of the issues.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked that any response from Ken Buchan was circulated to members.

Bowls club

The town clerk said the bowls club wanted an amendment to the council's resolution and if this was the case, the matter would need to come back to the council.

Church tower

It was noted the scaffolding had gone up for the works to start.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis said the church was continuing to apply for grants to make up the funding shortfall. She said she was arranging a fundraising evening and would provide details to members in due course.

19/24/SF Update Report

Dorset National Park

Cllr B. Larcombe said in addition to the public meeting the council would facilitate, it was important the council had its own view on the proposed national park. He asked if there was any indication of a timescale for consultation.

The deputy town clerk said it was clear there would be further rounds of consultation but there was no indication of when that might be.

As there was already a lot of information in the public domain from those in favour of a national park, Cllr Ms B. Bawden asked how the other point of view would be put across during any public meeting. She suggested an alternative viewpoint could be offered by the New Forest and she agreed to make an approach.

The town clerk said officers had also had discussions with someone who could provide an alternative viewpoint.

19/25/SF Annual Governance and Accountability Return and the external auditor's certificate for the year ended 31 March 2019

The town clerk said the council had received a clean bill of health from the external auditor, with no comments or qualifications attached to the certificate. He said this was in spite of the office going through a difficult period in the past year without a finance manager and he congratulated staff for getting through the year and achieving a clean bill of health.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve and accept the certified Annual Governance and Accountability Return and the external auditor's certificate (Notice of Conclusion of Audit) for the year ended 31 March 2019; to note the actions required at the conclusion of the review have been undertaken; and to thank staff for their hard work.

19/26/SF Committee Structure

The town clerk said the only real change proposed by the working group was for environmental matters to sit with the Strategy and Finance Committee, and when specific tasks were identified, they would drop down to other committees.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis felt the environment had a better fit with the Tourism, Community and Publicity Committee.

Cllr J. Scowen said he felt the environment should be part of every committee's remit, rather than sitting with one committee. He said it was right that the strategy sat with the Strategy and Finance Committee, but the detail fell to committees.

The town clerk said the working group's rationale for adding environment to the remit of the Strategy and Finance Committee was to recognise the importance of the environmental agenda and to have a committee to drive it forward. He said all the environmental objectives would then fall to the committees.

Cllr Ms B. Bawden felt a committee should have specific responsibility for the environment as the driver of the climate emergency declaration. She said a lot of the environmental issues and projects the One Planet Working Group (OPWG) was looking at were complex and sat well with the Strategy and Finance Committee.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis suggested the Tourism, Community and Publicity Committee was the principal link with the OPWG, which could then pass issues to other committees.

Cllr B. Larcombe said major expenditure would have to go to the Strategy and Finance Committee but many of the suggested environmental projects did not sit with that committee.

Cllr R. Smith agreed each committee had its own remit but if ambitious projects come from OPWG, they should go to the Strategy and Finance Committee.

Proposed by Cllr J. Scowen and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that environmental matters are incorporated into each committee's remit and terms of reference are amended accordingly.

Proposed by Cllr Mrs M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that the Tourism, Community and Publicity Committee is the principal link with the One Planet Working Group.

19/27/SF Recruitment of the Internal Auditor

The town clerk said although the council had received a good service from Darkin-Miller, he would strongly recommend re-appointing an internal auditor after six years. He said there was no reason the council shouldn't appoint Darkin-Miller again but it should test the market.

Proposed by Cllr Mrs M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to agree to enter into a process to appoint an internal auditor for 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, with the option to extend the contract for a further two years.

The town clerk said this would be reported back to the council to endorse the appointment.

19/28/SF The Process for Approving the 2020-21 Budget and Five-Year Financial Plan

Members noted the report.

19/29/SF Objectives 2015-2025

The town clerk said setting objectives was integral to the budget-setting process and five-year plan. He said objectives didn't need to be set now, but the council needed to start a series of discussions about major pieces of work over the next five years, as well as talking to the public about what the council intended to do.

Members discussed the timing of the public consultation event. Several members felt the council should give the public the opportunity to put their own ideas forward before the council firmed up its objectives.

Several other members felt it was too early to go to public consultation in mid-October, as suggested in the town clerk's report, and the council should have a firmer list of ideas with likely costs before it consulted the public.

Cllr B. Larcombe said there were projects the council needed to consult with the public on, but there were many other suggested projects which the council could get on and do as part of the business operation which didn't require endorsement from the public.

The town clerk said there were many suggested objectives from members which needed to be costed, as well as some ideas which were for Dorset Council or OPWG to pursue, rather than the town council. As there had been a long debate about process, the town clerk suggested the consideration of the objectives was deferred to another session.

Cllr Ms B. Bawden said Bridport Town Council had divided their objectives into four categories: direct, indirect, collaborations and lobbying. She suggested this model could be used to simplify the process, which members agreed with.

Cllr Miss K. Ellis left the meeting at 8.55pm.

The town clerk suggested the discussion on specific objectives was deferred until the member session scheduled for 29 October 2019, when the list of proposed objectives could be categorised in the suggested way. He said the council would need to form a view from that meeting on what the objectives were likely to be, which would form the basis of the discussion with the public.

Cllr Miss K. Ellis returned to the meeting at 8.58pm.

The town clerk said he would extend the time for members to suggest objectives to 21 October 2019. As most of the suggested objectives had been put forward by Cllr Ms B. Bawden and Cllr R. Smith, it was agreed they would have input into categorising the suggestions to present to the 29 October session.

The town clerk said in the meantime, officers would also start developing a public consultation exercise and begin to cost out the ideas.

19/30/SF Programme for Refurbishment of Council Offices

The deputy town clerk said he had tried to put together a realistic programme, which took into account the council's rules on procurement and a road closure while significant works took place. He said there was scope to take some time out, but not a significant amount. He added that the council hadn't agreed a scope of works, so the programme was based on assumptions of what the work may involve.

Cllr B. Larcombe said there was a six-month window after serving notice on Dorset Council for the tourist information centre to develop the scope of works. He said he was concerned by the number of people the deputy town clerk had suggested were involved in the project.

The deputy town clerk said the appointed architect would carry out all the roles. He said the council's financial regulations stipulated the need to go out to tender for architectural services. However, if the council waived the rules, this could save time in the programme, but he would caution against it because he didn't believe there was good reason to do so.

Cllr J. Broom suggested architectural services were on a fixed fee to avoid escalating costs.

The deputy town clerk said he agreed it should not be linked to estimated contract value, but it would be reasonable to look at a capped percentage fee.

The deputy town clerk said there was time in the programme to put together the scope of works and this would need to be signed off by members before any contract was let for any element of this work.

Cllr R. Smith requested a single paragraph from officers about what the vision for the office would be.

The deputy town clerk drew members' attention to the fact the offices were not currently opted to tax, and if the council was looking to procure services soon, the council needed to make the election sooner rather than later.

Proposed by B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the high-level initial programme for the planned refurbishment of the council's offices, give authority to procure the required detailed external and other surveys, together with architectural services; to include the roles of lead designer, planning agent, contractual procurement and contract/site manager, and elect to opt to tax for the purposes of VAT in respect of the property known as Council Offices, Guildhall Cottage, Church Street, Lyme Regis, Dorset, DT7 3BS and its associated curtilage.

19/31/SF Blue Sea Café Roof Quotes, Letting, Opting to Tax and Budgetary Approval

Cllr J. Scowen asked what the rationale was in asking prospective tenants to pay an ingoing sum without stating what that amount was.

The deputy town clerk said there was clear advice that the best way of marketing the property was to create certainty around the level of ongoing rent and to invite proposals for an ingoing sum. He said the level of ingoing sum would be one of the factors members would consider when choosing a preferred tenant.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Scowen, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the preferred quote for the repairs to the roof of the Blue Sea Café, the latest position with the marketing of the premises, agree to opt to tax so that VAT can be recovered on the cost of the works, and approve the unbudgeted expenditure so that work can commence in mid-November as planned.

19/32/SF Park and Ride 2019 and 2020

Cllr B. Larcombe said the council needed to establish a pattern of opening hours more clearly to meet people's expectations of when they would hope to find it open.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis said the major events needed to be covered and event organisers needed to notify the council of their event dates.

The deputy town clerk said the planning permission was for a fixed period of the year between March and September, and it also limited the operation to 84 days in any one year. He said the council needed to be in a position to tell the bus company the operating times by the beginning of 2020 because it was a registered service approved by the traffic commissioners, which required 56 days' notice. He added that if a timetable was set at the beginning, it was very difficult to react to requests made at short notice.

Cllr D. Ruffle asked if boarding at the westbound drop-off point at Cobb Gate car park could happen on an official basis in the future.

The deputy town clerk said there were some concerns about safety but he had reached an agreement with the managers of the bus company that people could board at this location.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the information about the usage of the 2019 park and ride service, authorise officers to negotiate terms with First Group for a 2020 service based on the 2019 far structure and operating period (plus May Bank Holiday and into early-September to incorporate any major events), and approve the use of the Charmouth Road park and ride site for 2020 at the 2019 price plus RPI.

19/33/SF Committee Objectives 2019-20

Cllr B. Larcombe asked why the only external works' expenditure was being examined as he felt this should apply to the whole organisation.

The town clerk said this was an objective set for him by the Human Resources Committee. He said officers had looked at other parts of the business incrementally and now attention was being turned to the external works' budget and procurement.

The meeting closed at 9.44pm.