

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE 2020

Present

Chairman: The Mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe, MBE

Councillors: Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr J. Broom, Cllr R. Doney, Cllr K. Ellis, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr L. Howe, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr S. Williams

Officers: M. Green (deputy town clerk), A. Mullins (support services manager), M. Russell, (finance manager) J. Wright (town clerk)

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe read out the protocol for virtual meetings and ensured all participants could hear each other.

19/170/C Public Forum

Mr A. and Mrs J. Robinson (read out by Cllr C. Reynolds)

Mr and Mrs Robinson said they unreservedly supported the mayor's condemnation of acts of abuse towards second homeowners since 23 March, and also recognised that scenes of crowding in Lyme Regis on 21 March felt to many like a kick in the face by the visiting public, who had been asked to stay away. They said they equally condemned the actions of second homeowners who defied clear government advice to reside in their primary home location by coming to Lyme. Mr and Mrs Robinson said the effects of these actions did a great deal to foster resentment among some local people and had led to an unresolved hiatus in relations between many locals and visitors. They said they noted with concern if such second homes were able to be identified, allowing for a letter of welcome to be put through the doors, why a letter inviting visitors to stay away, or return home, when government guidance was telling them this was a social duty, was not. They felt much local resentment may have been avoided by doing so. They said it appeared Dorset Council (DC) had acted in a balanced way towards all its voters in deterring visitors through the 'lockdown' period. However, they were dismayed that Lyme Regis Town Council had solely acted in support of the pecuniary interests of local business, not always locally owned, and had failed to recognise and address the deep concerns of local residents who did not have a direct pecuniary interest in tourism, but felt that their willingness to welcome people to share the town had been abused. Mr and Mrs Robinson said social media comments regarding 'NIMBYs', 'yocals' and 'inbreds' had been equally unacceptable, in the face of genuine fears of the potential to harm the town's predominantly elderly population and most likely, reflected a deeper understanding of the true nature of the community. They said they recognised the vital importance of the local economy, however, many local residents felt their concerns had been left unaddressed and that pecuniary interests were the only concerns that gained the ear of the town council. Mr and Mrs

Robinson said others felt the actions of the town council had left them overly exposed to danger from opening up the town to people mixing from across many communities, with many groups of up to 12 people now being observed on the parade. They asked for an explanation as to why there had been such a disconnect between the actions of Dorset Council, Chris Loder MP, and Robert Buckland QC MP, clearly telling people to stay away, while the town council had opened car parks and toilets to facilitate visitors. They also asked why the town council had consistently failed to act equitably towards the concerns and interests of the wider voting public, in favour of the often loudly expressed pecuniary interests of a few.

The town clerk said in all its actions, the council had tried to act in line with government advice. He and the mayor had been involved in several video conferences with the local MP, in which they discussed co-ordinating actions. He said he had also had fortnightly meetings with the chief executive of Dorset Council to co-ordinate activities.

The town clerk said the council had tried to balance the competing interests of the local community and local businesses.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe clarified that he had sent his letter to holiday let owners, not second homeowners, distributed via a local letting agency.

S. Miller

S. Miller asked that given the substantial capital expenditure entered into this year by Lyme Regis Town Council, what pressure had that now evidenced with the impact of Covid-19 substantially reducing the council's income streams, not least from car parks. He asked what modelling had been undertaken and mitigation measures put forward to maintain the council's reserves in positive territory and with those models in place. He asked if the council believed it had the capacity to maintain its financial integrity and asked if the council was at risk of becoming insolvent or bust.

The town clerk said it was difficult to do financial forecasting because it was too early and things were changing all the time. He said the current forecast showed a surplus of £67k at the end of the financial year, but this could vary significantly as some of the assumptions needed to be firmed up.

The town clerk said mitigation measures included ceasing all non-contractual expenditure and entering into the furlough scheme for the majority of staff. He said the council had spoken to the local MP and DC about any financial support which may be available but there had been no firm commitments.

The town clerk said members would be having a single-issue discussion within the next two weeks about what the council could do to strengthen its financial position.

19/171/C Dorset Council Matters

There was no report.

19/172/C Apologies for Absence

There were none.

19/173/C Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr M. Ellis declared a pecuniary interest in any matters relating to the Woodmead Halls as she was an employee.

19/174/C Dispensations

There were none.

19/175/C To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 19 February 2020

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 19 February 2020 were **ADOPTED**.

19/176/C Planning Committee

Cllr B. Bawden pointed out titles had been dropped before members' names and she had been referred to as 'Mrs'.

Proposed by Cllr G. Turner and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, it was **RESOLVED** to receive the minutes of the Planning Committee held on 10 March 2020 and note the committee's comments made on planning applications since the meeting.

19/177/C Human Resources Committee

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, it was **RESOLVED** to receive the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 26 February 2020 and adopt the recommendations, as follows:

19/51/HR –Town Clerk's Annual Appraisal

RESOLVED: to approve the town clerk's progression to spinal column point 45 and note the remainder of the report.

19/53/HR – Operations Manager, Spinal Column Point Progression

RESOLVED: to approve the progression of the operations manager to spinal column point 30 from 1 April 2020.

19/55/HR – Staffing Panel Recommendations

RESOLVED: to approve the re-grading of the deputy town clerk to SCP 33-26, with progression to SCP 34 on 1 April 2020, and the Pay Review Panel reconvenes to review the grades of the support services manager and assistant finance manager posts.

19/56/HR – Health and Safety Diploma Training

RESOLVED: not to approve health and safety diploma training for the operations manager.

19/178/C Strategy and Finance Committee

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Ruffle, it was **RESOLVED** to receive the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee held on 18 March 2020 and adopt the recommendations, as follows:

19/103/SF –To receive the minutes of the Dorset Council working group meeting on 25 February 2020 and consider the recommendations therein

RESOLVED: to have a survey carried out of the accreted land at Monmouth Beach to establish exactly how much land the town council owned and to get a sense of its value, with a view to leasing the land to Dorset Council at a realistic rent, and the report the findings directly to the council.

RESOLVED: that the town clerk informs Dorset Council the town council intends to take back the harbourmaster's store, and instruct the town clerk to progress discussions on the garage next to Woodmead car park.

RESOLVED: to no longer maintain an interest in the land opposite the Harbour Inn and end the lease with Dorset Council.

19/104/SF – Draft Corporate Plan

RESOLVED: to approve the draft Corporate Plan 2020-25 and delegate any amendments to the final version of the plan to the town clerk, in consultation with the mayor.

19/105/SF – Internal Audit Report, Visits Two and Three 2019-20

RESOLVED: to note the internal auditor's report of visits two and three 2019-20 and approve the management responses.

19/108/SF – VAT and Option to Tax (for VAT)

RESOLVED: to opt to tax (for VAT purposes) all the council's currently non-opted 'commercial' properties.

19/109/SF – Coronavirus (COVID-19)

RESOLVED: to agree:

- To suspend meetings of the Full Council and committees as of 18 March 2020
- To add a statement to the scheme of delegation, giving the town clerk delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of the council where

such a decision cannot reasonably be deferred and must be made in order to comply with a commercial or statutory deadline.

- To temporarily amend financial regulation 3.4 to raise the limit to £150,0000
- To postpone the annual meeting of electors scheduled to take place on 17 April 2020 to a date on or before 1 June 2020
- To cancel the park and ride service until the beginning of the school summer holidays and review in advance
- To defer all capital projects that aren't contractually committed, with the exception of the office refurbishment project, which is progressed to the design and consent stage

19/110/SF – Grant Allocation to Recipients of ‘Ammonite’ Filming Money

RESOLVED: to approve Axminster and Lyme Cancer Support's use of a beach hut on Marine Parade from 1 April 2020 until 31 March 2025 for a rent of £0.00 per annum, and that for the duration of the arrangement the town council maintains the beach hut and Axminster and Lyme Cancer Support allocates the hut.

RESOLVED: to approve the release of a £5,000 grant to Mary Anning Rocks.

19/111/SF – Renewal of Lease for Power Boat Club, Monmouth Beach

RESOLVED: to obtain legal advice about the separation of the leases for the power boat club and instruct an alternative valuer if appropriate.

19/179/C Tourism, Community and Publicity Committee

Proposed by Cllr K. Ellis and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, it was **RESOLVED** to receive the minutes of the Tourism, Community and Publicity Committee held on 11 March 2020 and adopt the recommendations, as follows:

19/49/TCP – Green Dog Walker Scheme

RESOLVED: to support the Green Dog Walker Scheme by promoting it on the council's website and social media.

19/50/TCP – Town Signage and Branding

RESOLVED: to replace the 'welcome to Lyme Regis' signs, with the town shield replacing the fossil, the addition of one plastic-free logo, and the addition of twin town Jamestown, and mock-ups should be taken back to the Tourism, Community and Publicity Committee.

19/52/TCP – Community Engagement

RESOLVED: that Cllrs D. Sarson, C. Reynolds and B. Bawden work with the administrative officer to develop proposals on community engagement for consideration by this committee on 29 April 2020.

19/180/C Town Management and Highways Committee

Cllr B. Bawden pointed out she was not at the meeting as the minutes suggested.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, it was **RESOLVED** to receive the minutes of the Town Management and Highways Committee held on 4 March 2020 and adopt the recommendations, as follows:

19/84/TMH – Water Points

RESOLVED: to install water points on the seafront at the performance area and Marine Parade toilets and to select design 5 (as per the original report) at a cost of £50 per unit.

19/85/TMH – The Provision of RNLI Lifeguards

RESOLVED: to approve a five-year agreement for RNLI lifeguard provision, with annual increases of 2%.

19/86/TMH – Church Railings Replacement

RESOLVED: to accept the quote from CIS Street Furniture for the replacement of the railings to the side of St Michael's Parish Church and for officers to seek further clarification about whether the new railings should include spear tops.

19/87/TMH – Beach Nurdle Trommel

RESOLVED: to allow trommelling with a quad bike and towed trommel on the sandy beach on the weekend mornings of 18/19 April 2020 before 8am.

19/88/TMH – Request from Cancer Research UK

RESOLVED: to support the request from Cancer Research UK to sell draw tickets every weekend from June to September at the Jubilee Pavilion and to charge £15 a weekend.

19/89/TMH – Marine Parade Lift

RESOLVED: to defer a decision on the replacement of the Marine Parade lift until the council has considered the strategic use of the roof and Marine Parade Shelters' rooms before determining what needs to be done to facilitate it.

19/181/C Review of Interim Governance Arrangements

The town clerk said the purpose of the report was for members to think about how they wanted to govern themselves in the immediate future, and to also open discussions about long-term governance arrangements, as several members had expressed a desire to review this. As such, he was proposing a single-issue discussion on 30 June 2020.

Cllr R. Doney said he had concerns about the way the council had been forced to operate during the coronavirus pandemic and he was keen for the council to return as soon as possible to the normal democratic process, using video conferencing instead of physical meetings. He said he had no objection to a single-issue discussion as it was a complex subject and he believed this was an opportunity to examine how the council could run its committees and operations more efficiently. Cllr R. Doney said he also felt there should be elections for the mayor and deputy mayor for this council year.

Several members agreed there should be an election for mayor and deputy mayor to allow a democratic vote.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis suggested fortnightly or monthly virtual council meetings in the immediate future to discuss important issues and so the public could see the members were working.

Several members agreed with regular Full Council meetings as they felt they hadn't been involved in decision-making.

Cllr J. Broom asked if the meetings would be virtual or physical.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said at the moment it would have to be virtual meetings but he didn't think it would be long before physical meetings could take place, perhaps at Woodmead Halls as Cllr G. Turner had previously suggested, when the restrictions permitted. He believed it was better to wait until the council could physically meet before discussing the committee structure.

Several members disagreed and wanted the discussion to take place sooner rather than later, but there were also concerns about the difficulty in reading information on screen and printed copies were preferred by some.

The town clerk said providing information electronically was the way forward but support could be provided to members who needed it.

Cllr Mrs M. Ellis said if the council moved to electronic agendas, members needed to be provided with the equipment but the council didn't have the budget for this at the moment.

Members discussed the earlier suggestion to hold elections for mayor and deputy mayor and the town clerk said it would be necessary to hold an annual meeting within the next few weeks to facilitate this. However, he said the council also

needed to decide how it wanted to operate over the next few weeks as the delegation arrangements previously put in place had ceased at this meeting.

Cllr B. Bawden asked for a recorded vote on the following motion:

It was proposed by Cllr R. Doney and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis to hold elections for mayor and deputy mayor.

Voted for – Cllr K. Ellis, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr L. Howe, Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr R. Doney.

Voted against – Cllr S. Williams, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr J. Broom, Cllr B. Larcombe

Abstentions – None

The vote was tied so the mayor used his casting vote and voted against the motion.

The town clerk asked members to consider how decisions would be made in the immediate future and he suggested leaving in place the existing arrangements until more permanent decisions were made about the council's governance arrangements.

Proposed by Cllr K. Ellis and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members **RESOLVED** to hold monthly council meetings but in between meetings to delegate authority to the town clerk to make decisions in consultation with the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the council and committees.

19/182/C Internal Audit Report, Visit Four 2019-20

The town clerk highlighted the three main areas in which the internal auditor said more work needed to be done: income (debtors), bank reconciliation, and public rights. He said issues with bank reconciliation had been reported to members and this task was now up-to-date in this financial year.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said the report showed there had been improvement as the council came to the end of a difficult year.

Cllr M. Ellis queried the dates of the final visit and how the audit was undertaken as it took place during the lockdown.

The town clerk said they were virtual visits and all the information had been supplied to the auditor electronically.

Cllr D. Sarson asked if any progress had been made in getting an audit trail of the website.

The town clerk confirmed all the documents that needed to be made public for the previous financial year were displayed at the correct time and the auditor had confirmed this. However, the requirement for a website audit trail had been introduced after the event and there was currently no built-in audit trail on the website.

The support services manager said discussions were taking place with the website company about putting an audit trail function in place, but it was unlikely this could be done retrospectively.

19/183/C Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2020

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members **RESOLVED** to approve the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the year ended 31 March 2020 and authorise the mayor and town clerk to authorise and sign the document on behalf of the council.

19/184/C Financial Forecast 2020-21

The town clerk said it was difficult to provide a forecast at the moment as assumptions were changing. He said the current forecast showed a surplus of £67k at the end of the financial year, and this would reduce the council's reserve significantly; the council shouldn't allow the reserve to fall below 25% of the projected income. the town clerk said measures needed to be put in place increase the forecast year-end reserve.

The town clerk said there were things the council could do to strengthen its financial position and he proposed a single-issue discussion on 8 July 2020.

Cllr M. Ellis said the council should stop the office refurbishment project for now and only carry out the immediate work required on the window lintel until members had had the opportunity to have a proper discussion about the savings which could be made.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said as an employer, the council had an obligation to its staff to ensure social distancing and the work to the office could be a minimum approach at a reduced cost.

The deputy town clerk said the lintel work had to be done and it made sense to do this work before staff returned to the office, which would cost £2-3,000. He said there was no intention of committing to the refurbishment, for which a total budget of £300k had initially been allocated. He added that an architect had drawn up plans and the invoice for this work was less than 2% of the budget.

Cllr D. Sarson queried why the opening balance on supplier payments was so high and asked if the council benefitted from any income.

The finance manager said supplier costs had reduced because the council had not been operating as normal. It was recognised that as the town begins to re-open and the council's activities increase, further costs would be incurred. He said expenditure had progressively increased but it was still less than what the council would normally spend.

Cllr R. Doney said as there was a real concern the council could run out of money, members needed to think about the possibility of a public loan. He said the council needed to think about how low it was prepared for the reserves to go before it took out a loan.

Cllr M. Ellis said she felt the council's finances were such an important issue that the discussion should be held before the proposed date of 8 July 2020.

The town clerk said the discussion could be held on 1 July 2020 after the Full Council meeting, which members agreed.

It was agreed an email would be sent to members confirming the dates of meetings within the next fortnight.

Members also discussed the over reliance on income from the tourism industry and how the council needed to think about other income streams.

The meeting closed at 8.51pm.