

## LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL EXTRAORDINARY FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2020

#### **Present**

**Chairman:** The Mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe, MBE

**Councillors:** Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr J. Broom, Cllr R. Doney, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr S. Williams

**Officers:** M. Adamson-Drage (operations manager), N. Cleal (assistant finance manager), M. Green (deputy town clerk), A. Mullins (support services manager), J. Wright (town clerk)

**Absent:** Cllr L. Howe

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

A prayer was given by the Rev. Chris Martin.

#### **19/299/C Public Forum**

##### **N. Ball**

N. Ball said he was disappointed with the money spent on the shelters roof and the result of the works. He said some members had been aware of the issues but he didn't know if they had received a report on this or if the issues would ever be put right.

N. Ball also spoke in relation to agenda item 10, Objectives and noted the large amount of money intended to be spent on objectives in the three priority lists, including £113,000 on vehicles. He urged members not to spend this amount of money as the council already had enough vehicles and was trying to move to green energy. He said £60,000 had been earmarked for a new tractor but it wasn't in use at this time of year so some of that would be dead money. N. Ball said some of these things were not a priority and vehicles should be renewed when they came to the end of their lives. He said he became frustrated when he heard phrases like 'we are where we are' or 'let us do the worrying for you', but he was a member of the public and he voted the members in, while officers were officers of the council. N. Ball said he was frustrated the council didn't listen to the public and he never got answers to his questions at meetings. He said he was passionate about the town and the council couldn't afford to spend this amount of money. He also referred to the council's high wage bill and his concern there had not been a town meeting this year for the public to have their say. He said some members felt disillusioned but none of them stood up and said anything, and the members and staff should be

working together with the public to get resolutions to issues and get answers to people. N. Ball said in these times, everyone needed to pull together and provide answers to questions when they were asked.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said responses were not normally given at meetings. Regarding the objectives, he said they had been listed in order of priority so some things would not be done straight away and would be subject to further member discussion. He added some estimated costs were on the prudent side so they may not cost as much as outlined.

**M. Stainer (read out by the mayor)**

M. Stainer thanked councillors for the time they gave up for the town in these difficult times.

M. Stainer said at the last Full Council meeting, the town clerk was encouraging members to apply for a long-term loan facility of £650,000. He said this week officers had put forward a five-year financial plan, excluding objectives and asset sales, that demonstrated no requirement for a loan. He asked how officers reconciled the turnaround in the town's projected finances in such a short space of time.

M. Stainer also spoke in relation to agenda item 9, Review of Charges, specifically relating to VAT on memorial benches. He said the supply of memorial benches was zero rated and the officers were in receipt of written advice supporting this position. He said it was not for the council to choose whether to charge VAT; it was a confirmed treatment by HMRC. He said the council had therefore overcharged all those who had purchased memorial benches in the past by the amount of VAT within the charge. M. Stainer said this was equivalent to £216.67 per bench based on a £1,300 gross charge per bench. He said HMRC should allow these sums to be claimed back by the council for up to six years prior to the claim and these amounts could be passed on to the previous buyers of memorial benches at no cost to the council. He asked if the council would do this and going forward, would the council ensure VAT is zero rated on memorial benches. He said this would also make the benches more affordable to those buying them.

**19/300/C Dorset Council Matters**

Cllr D. Turner sent his apologies but the mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said members could submit questions to him by email.

Cllr C. Reynolds asked for clarification of whether members had to notify Cllr D. Turner in advance of any questions they intended to ask at meetings.

**19/301/C Questions from Councillors**

There were none.

**19/302/C Apologies for Absence**

Cllr K. Ellis – exam  
Cllr R. Smith – work commitment

**19/303/C Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

There were none.

**19/304/C Dispensations**

There were none.

**19/305/C The Process for Approving the 2021-22 Budget, Five-Year Financial Plan and Objectives**

The town clerk outlined the process for approving the budget, five-year financial plan and objectives and how the following reports on the agenda fitted together.

**19/306/C Statement of Internal Control, Risk Management Policy and Annual Risk Assessment**

The town clerk said this was his assessment of where he thought the council was and what the risks were, with the major risks currently being Covid-19 and how the council may be impacted by the pressures DC were under. As the council operated in a fairly stable environment, he said many of his observations remained the same as the previous year and were broadly in line with what you might find in any local council or small organisation.

The town clerk said the council had in place all the expected control systems, and information systems would be strengthened with the introduction of IT for members.

The town clerk said there were occasional disagreements within the council but these were managed better than they had been historically, and health and safety had been strengthened. However, he said exposure to Covid-19 had been a drain on operational activity and officers struggled to deliver some objectives.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe felt the requirement for homeworking had impacted on the council's effectiveness and the way it operated. However, he and the town clerk had maintained a good level of communication with each other and with DC and other councils since March 2020.

Cllr D. Sarson said in the risk register under 'Partnerships', there was no mitigation or control under business community.

The town clerk said this was an oversight and more information could be provided in the members' briefing.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** to note the statement of internal control, approve the risk management policy and the standard risk assessment for 2020/21.

Proposed by Cllr C. Reynolds and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members **RESOLVED** to approve the risk register, with a mitigation/control to be added to business partnerships.

## **19/307/C Budget and Precept 2021-22 and Five-Year Financial Plan 2021-26**

The town clerk said the council's financial position had strengthened, with a year-end reserve of £560k being forecast, compared to £300k a few months ago. This was partly due to car parking income in September and October being around 50% higher than normally expected, as well as the recovery of some significant debts.

In the draft budget, the town clerk said officers had made an assumption there would be a 10% increase in the precept, generating an additional £13k, but this was for members to consider.

The town clerk said officers had detailed areas of expenditure where they believed savings of £128k could be made, but he advised members some of the financial codes had been changed to better reflect levels of expenditure in a more modern structure. The two main areas identified for savings were the external works and office expenses' budgets.

The town clerk said most of the office expenses were consultant fees, particularly legal fees, and officers felt this could be reduced if members were more inclined to take the advice of himself and the deputy town clerk.

The town clerk said the budget assumed a 2% pay increase for staff, but since writing the report, officers had become aware of a pay freeze in the public sector. This would be worth an additional £15k to the council but there was a commitment to pay £250 to lower paid workers and the majority of the council's employees fell into this bracket; this would cost £4k.

In the past, the assumption had been that when an employee left the organisation the vacancy would be filled, but the town clerk said this would not necessarily be the case in future as it would need to be determined if the work could be covered in another way.

If the council carried out no projects over the course of the five-year plan, the town clerk said the council should have £940k in the bank, based on very prudent assumptions. He said he wasn't suggesting the council held a reserve at that level in 2025/26, this was just to give members an idea of how quickly money builds up and to allow them to think about how much to release for objectives.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe felt the council had reason to be optimistic given the improved financial position and the encouraging increase in car parking income, which was likely to continue as travel was still allowed under current Covid-19 restrictions and the potential for more people to holiday in the UK.

Cllr R. Doney said he had real trouble in supporting the budget but stressed this was nothing to do with the officers drawing up the budget as they had done the best they could and the council had to set one. However, during the pandemic, he said many organisations had realised now was the time to re-organise themselves and change the way they worked, but he felt members were not prepared to address this. He felt running costs could be reduced further and the recently agreed calendar of meetings had not been reviewed to make the council more efficient.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said any organisations should look at continuing improvements and efficiencies, and the ongoing requirement to self-examine how the council did things wasn't necessarily prompted by the budget-setting process.

Cllr B. Bawden was concerned there didn't appear to be any reflection in the budget of the council's climate and environmental emergency declaration and felt it was business as usual despite being in a global pandemic. She said there was no mention of climate, environmental or social risks in either the risk register or the budget.

The town clerk said officers had stripped everything out of the budget and this was members' opportunity to put things back. He said he would strongly recommend increasing the reserve to £800k in 2021/22 but after that, there would be excess reserve to allow the council to carry out projects and objectives.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members **RESOLVED** to approve the 2021-22 base budget and five-year financial plan and, in doing so, approve the budget savings identified.

## **19/308/C Review of Precept and Charges**

### **Precept**

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said the income this council received from the precept was modest and a very small part of the overall council tax bill, so to generate a substantial increase, the percentage would need to be quite high, although the actual increase was quite low.

The deputy town clerk said in providing some illustrations, officers had to assume the number of Band D properties in the town remained the same, although more houses had been built in Lyme Regis, so the actual increase would be slightly less.

Cllr C. Reynolds said the council had always prided itself on holding the precept but had increased it last year. She said following a challenging year and with many people struggling, it would be better to hold the precept. Several members agreed with this.

Cllr M. Ellis there had been no recognition in the past of the council freezing the precept, but there was a backlash as soon as there was an increase. She said if the council didn't increase it now, it may need to increase it in future, but she understood the reasons for not increasing it this year,

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe agreed and said increases little and often were better than all at once.

Cllr G. Stammers said if the council looked to increase income through other means, such as beach hut charges or parking, people had a choice whether to use those amenities, whereas residents didn't have a choice whether or not to pay the precept. For that reason, she felt it should be held next year.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members **RESOLVED** not to increase the precept in 2021/22, but with no assumption it remains the same in future years.

### **Cart Road beach hut hire**

It was proposed by Cllr S. Williams to increase 2022 prices for Cart Road beach huts by 10%.

This motion was not seconded.

The deputy town clerk drew members' attention to the discrepancy between the daily charge in early-July and the weekly rate for June and the whole of the summer holiday.

The support services manager said demand for the summer season package had dropped.

Cllr M. Ellis suggested a weekly rate of £80 in July before the summer holidays and to decrease the number of summer season packages from six to four.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** to decrease the number of summer season packages from six to four in 2022 and set 2022 Cart Road beach hut prices as follows:

	<b>Daily Rates 2022</b>	<b>Weekly Rates 2022</b>
January– Easter	£4	
Easter Holiday		£55
April– Spring Holiday	£10	
Spring Holiday		£60
June		£55
July (before summer hol)		£80
July (start of summer hol)- August		£140
September	£12	
October	£7	
November- December	£5	
Christmas & New Year		£80 (2-week booking)
Winter Season	£170	
Summer Season	£1,100	
Annual	£1,700	

### **Alfresco licences**

Members noted the government notification to charge a flat rate of £100 per business due to Covid-19, which was set to expire in September 2021.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members **RESOLVED** to hold alfresco licence charges for 2021/22, as follows:

	<b>Price 2021/22</b>
Covers	£130
Single Chairs	£12

### **Website advertising**

It was noted the advertising charges had already been agreed for 2021 so no further decisions were required at this point.

### **Bell Cliff advertising**

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** to hold Bell Cliff advertising charges for 2021/22 at £120 inclusive of VAT.

### **Marine Parade Shelters**

Cllr M. Ellis said as most charities hadn't been able to fundraise this year, they would benefit from using the shelters to fundraise and should be given higher priority than organisations from outside the town.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe felt £125 was too cheap for the market area as it was a prime location to trade from and other businesses in town had to pay business overheads. He suggested a charge of £150.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr S. Williams, members **RESOLVED** to set the 2022/23 rate at £150 for the market area and £200 for the performance area.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** to hold the remaining charges for the Marine Parade Shelters for 2022/23, as follows:

## Charites, Schools and Not-for-Profit Organisations – per area, per day

Categories	2022/23
DT7 postcodes	£15
Within a 10-mile radius of the offices	£20
Outside a 10-mile radius of the offices	£25
National charities (per hour)	£20
Not-for-profit community events and festivals hiring the shelters	At the discretion of the town clerk

### Commercial or private hire

Area	2022/23
Langmoor Room (per hour)	£15

### Amenities

Cllr M. Ellis suggested the discount for groups of 10 or more and Gateway Card holders was reduced from 33% to 25%.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members **RESOLVED** to set 2021/22 charges for the amenities area at adult mini-golf, £4, child mini-golf, £2, and table tennis, £2, and the discount for groups of 10 or more and Gateway Card holders is reduced from 33% to 25%.

### Weddings

The support services manager said bookings were steady but there were other venues in town which had had an impact on bookings.

Cllr M. Ellis suggested leaving the prices the same to draw people in.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said the prices had remained the same for five years so this actually represented a decrease, as it wasn't keeping up with inflation.

It was proposed by Cllr G. Turner to set the 2022/23 charges for weddings and civil marriages at £325 for Mondays to Fridays and £425 for weekends.

This motion was not seconded.

It was proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson to set the 2022/23 charges for weddings and civil marriages at £325 for Mondays to Fridays and £450 for weekends

This motion was not carried.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** to hold the 2022/23 charges for weddings and civil marriages at £300 for Mondays to Fridays and £400 for weekends.

### **Parking permits**

It was proposed by Cllr S. Williams to set the 2021/22 charges for parking permits at £500 for non-residents and £800 for holiday accommodation, but to hold the residents' permits at £175.

This motion was not seconded.

It was proposed by Cllr G. Turner to set the 2021/22 charges for parking permits at £350 for non-residents and £700 for holiday accommodation, but to hold the residents' permits at £175.

This motion was not seconded.

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members **RESOLVED** to set the 2021/22 charges for parking permits at £400 for non-residents, £700 for holiday accommodation, but to hold the residents' permits at £175.

### **Car parking**

Cllr S. Williams felt the council should be charging for parking after 6pm.

Cllr M. Ellis said charges applied until 9pm in the summer and the idea of not charging after 6pm in the winter was to encourage people into the town in the evenings.

It was also noted charging until 9pm in the winter would require the enforcement officers to work later hours.

Proposed by Cllr G. Turner and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** to hold the 2021/22 car parking charges, as follows:

	<b>2021/22</b>
<b>Cabanya</b>	£1.40 per hour
<b>Monmouth Beach</b>	£1.40 per hour
<b>Woodmead</b>	£1.00 per hour
<b>Woodmead – three-day ticket</b>	£25.00
<b>Woodmead – weekly ticket</b>	£50.00

### **Penalty charge**

Cllr G. Turner asked how many penalty charges went unpaid.

The town clerk said this information could be provided in the members' briefing.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members **RESOLVED** to hold the car parking penalty charge at £60, with a reduced rate of £40 if paid within seven days.

### Cemetery

Cllr C. Reynolds was concerned the council allowed non-parishioners to be buried in Lyme Regis Cemetery when there was limited space. She asked for a report to be brought back to the council to allow members to review this.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members **RESOLVED** to hold the cemetery charges for 2021/22, as follows, with double fees applying to non-parishioners:

Inter still born child or under 2 years	Inter child under 16 years	Inter over 16 years	Inter cremated remains	Exclusive right of burial in earthen grave	Exclusive right of burial of cremated remains	Installation of headstone/footstone/tablet
No Charge	No Charge	£225.00	£50.00	£455.00	£276.00	£90.00

Installation of vase	Additional inscription on memorial	Scattering ashes on existing graves	Scattering ashes beneath turf of existing graves	Genealogy searches	Certified copy of entry in burial books	Double interment fee
£45/£60	£30.00	£20.00	£20.00	£25.00	Not Offered	No Extra Charge

### Site licences

It was noted the site licence charges would be increased by RPI, as per the lease/licence.

### Memorial benches

The town clerk said officers were required to bring the auditor's recommendation to members regarding the treatment of VAT. He said the council had historically charged VAT and passed the cost on to the purchaser, but the members could choose how it would treat VAT in the future.

It was noted there was currently no space for more benches and it was unlikely there would be in the near future.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr C. Reynolds, members **RESOLVED** if space becomes available for a memorial bench, to charge the going rate at that time.

*The meeting adjourned for a break at 9.19pm.*

*The meeting resumed at 9.24pm.*

## **19/309/C Objectives**

The town clerk said the forecast surplus of £400k would take the reserve to £960k in 2021/22, a prudent estimate which officers were confident would be exceeded if everything remained the same. He said officers had tried to identify things which had previously been set as objectives or had come to officers' attention and put them in priority order.

The town clerk said the council could consider releasing £110k in 2021/22, although it was anticipated it would be closer to £200k. He said the cadet hut had been placed in priority one, but since writing the report, it had been confirmed there was no asbestos. Although the urgency had gone, there was structural damage to the hut which meant the building would probably have to come down in the future.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe suggested an alternative location could be found for the building.

The town clerk said the use of the harbourmaster's store could inform what happens with the cadet hut site in future and officers had begun to think about its value.

Cllr R. Doney asked why the town bus was in priority three as he felt it was a vital service for the town.

The town clerk said the council was committed to the town bus but the unknown variable was the school bus contract, which informed the viability of the town bus service. He said the position would be reviewed in May 2021 when DC awarded the schools' contracts. He added the £13k identified in priority three was related to a previous proposal to make the bus a completely free service, which would be in addition to the sum the council already paid for the current service.

The mayor, Cllr B. Larcombe said he hoped the office refurbishment would cost less than the £100k identified.

The deputy town clerk said the survey on the building identified £75-80k of repairs that were needed in any event, and some of those issues had gotten worse recently. However, he said the work could be separated over more than one financial year or phased, depending on their priority.

Cllr G. Stammer asked if the cadet hut was still leaking.

The operations manager said the roof was still leaking but it didn't prevent the external works' team from working out of the building, and it was felt it couldn't be repaired as it would involve going onto the asbestos roof.

Cllr J. Broom said the roof could be repaired using a cherry picker, although the operations manager said he believed most contractors would want to remove the entire roof. He also questioned whether the council wanted to spend money on repairing a building which would need to be removed anyway.

It was agreed officers would have a further look into what was required to repair the roof and take a report to the Town Management and Highways Committee.

The town clerk said officers would look to carry out the objectives in priority order but come back to members with another list for members to consider this time next year.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members **RESOLVED** to support the list of objectives in the proposed priority order and officers will bring back to members any issues which might affect the list.

### **19/310/C Ideas to Generate Additional Income or Receipts**

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, 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.

*Cllr R. Doney left the meeting at 10.01pm.*

### **19/311/C Exempt Business**

#### **a) Ideas to Generate Additional Income or Receipts**

The deputy town clerk said officers wanted an indication from members if any of the ideas should be taken forward, although nothing would happen immediately as it would have to be the subject of a more detailed report.

The town clerk said these discussions were not critical in terms of setting the budget and suggested a separate meeting could be arranged to discuss the ideas in more detail.

Members broadly supported the kinds of ideas which had been proposed and it was agreed a separate meeting would be arranged in early-2021.

*The meeting closed at 10.13pm.*