

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH 2026

Present

Chairman: Cllr P. Evans

Councillors: Cllr C. Aldridge, Cllr S. Cockerell, Cllr M. Denney, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr D. Holland, Cllr P. May, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr A. Wood

Officers: A. Mullins (assistant town clerk), J. Wright (town clerk)

25/157/C Public Forum

A. Ball (read out by an officer)

A. Ball said concerns surrounding the handling of outside seating charges on Marine Parade raised significant questions about administrative oversight, communication, and accountability. He said reports that businesses may have been overcharged or potentially charged for provisions that were not legally required pointed to a failure of due diligence by officers. Basic regulatory checks should have been undertaken before fees were imposed. He said this lack of scrutiny suggested either a misunderstanding of the permissions framework or a failure to coordinate with the licensing authorities. He was also concerned about the conduct and tone of officers in dealing with businesses and the public, with responses to questions appearing defensive rather than transparent. He said public bodies had a responsibility not only to administer rules correctly but to engage respectfully and constructively with those affected by their decisions. He believed officers appeared dismissive or unwilling to acknowledge potential errors, which undermined confidence in the council. He criticised public statements on the issue for their ambiguous language and careful phrasing, aimed at minimising responsibility instead of a clear explanation. The public expected clarity on what decisions were taken, on what authority, and whether the decisions were correct. He said if mistakes had been made, they must be acknowledged plainly. He advised the council to carefully manage potential refunds or corrective action, and said reimbursement must be transparent, consistent, and prompt. Attempts to delay, complicate, or partially address refunds could further damage trust. He said the issue raised questions about governance and oversight within the council and that internal review mechanisms should be in place to prevent officers from implementing policies or charges without a sound legal and administrative basis, or otherwise strengthened. He said there needed to be accountability if responsibility rested with decisions or advice provided by officers. He said the issue extended beyond the financial impact of outside seating but also on the reputation of the town and the credibility of the council. He referenced the importance of public confidence and the need for acknowledgement of what went wrong and a commitment to ensuring similar mistakes were not repeated.

The mayor, Cllr P. Evans said there was an assertion officers had been responsible for the overcharging for outside seating. He pointed out there had been four successive councils that had approved the charges and accordingly delivered the decisions. He said local councils expected to get criticism but the amount of criticism officers had received over this issue was inappropriate.

25/158/C Apologies for Absence

Cllr G. Caddy – away
Cllr N. Hampton-Rumbold – holiday
Cllr S. Larcombe – work commitments

25/159/C Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

25/160/C Dispensations

There were none.

25/161/C Outside Seating on Marine Parade

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, 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.

25/162/C Exempt Business

a) Outside Seating on Marine Parade

Members considered the options for repayments and agreed each business should be repaid the amount it had paid since April 2012; this was schedule A in the papers.

Members discussed whether to refer the claim from Largigi's to the council's solicitor Porter Dodson due to its complexity and to therefore deal with it separately to other businesses.

The town clerk said he had met with the majority of affected businesses, who had been understanding of the situation. He had had the opportunity to explain the situation from the town council's perspective and had committed to making any repayments as swiftly as possible once the council had made a decision. Each business would be asked to sign a settlement agreement to that effect.

Members were concerned there had not been a public statement clarifying the council's position and felt this would be beneficial as there was a lot of misinformation in the public domain.

The town clerk suggested the council should also refund legal costs incurred by businesses in the past, when challenging the fees.

It was proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge that having noted the report on outside seating on Marine Parade, particularly the relevant legal considerations, to approve an unbudgeted sum to cover schedule A of payments, with the exception of Largigi, which will be dealt with separately.

This was not voted on as a member was concerned about approving an unlimited budget sum and suggested a limit of £100k.

The town clerk confirmed the repayments would total c.£90k, plus legal disbursements, excluding Largigi, so the suggested £100k would be sufficient.

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr C. Aldridge, members **RESOLVED** that having noted the report on outside seating on Marine Parade, particularly the relevant legal considerations, to approve an unbudgeted sum up to a maximum of £100k to cover schedule A of payments, with the exception of Largigi, which will be dealt with separately.

Proposed by Cllr P. May and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, members **RESOLVED** that due to the complexity of the claim from Largigi's, to instruct the town clerk to refer the claim to the council's solicitor Porter Dodson for advice and a final settlement, to be brought to the Full Council for approval.

It was noted there were other issues affecting Marine Parade that still needed to be discussed with Dorset Council, such as memorial benches, events in the shelters, maintenance and lighting.

Cllr P. May left the meeting at 8.11pm.

The town clerk said there were other provisions within the Tripartite Agreement that might come unstuck and further discussions were taking place with Dorset Council.

Cllr P. May returned to the meeting at 8.12pm.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm.