

## LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

### STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

#### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2020

##### Present

**Chairman:** Cllr B. Larcombe MBE

**Councillors:** Cllr B. Bawden, Cllr J. Broom, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr R. Smith, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr S. Williams

**Officers:** A. Mullins (administrative officer), Mr J. Wright (town clerk)

**Absent:** Cllr L. Howe

##### 19/96/SF Public Forum

There were no members of the public who wished to speak.

##### 19/97/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr K. Ellis

Cllr M. Ellis

Cllr R. Doney – self-isolating

Cllr C. Reynolds – self-isolating

Cllr D. Sarson – self-isolating

##### 19/98/SF Minutes

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2020 were **ADOPTED**.

##### 19/99/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

##### 19/100/SF Dispensations

There were none.

##### 19/101/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 5 February 2020

###### Bowling club

The town clerk said he had a copy of the draft lease, which he would provide to the bowling club for consideration. He believed there was nothing contentious within the lease as the outstanding issues had been resolved but the club still needed to agree the terms.

## **Service level agreement with Woodmead Halls' Management Committee**

The town clerk said it was intended to have a meeting with the committee by the end of this month but due to the current situation, this may not be possible.

## **Progress report – climate and environmental emergency declaration**

Cllr R. Smith said he could give the town clerk with a steer on someone who could carry out the environmental audit.

### **19/102/SF Update Report**

#### **Sea sports and adventure centre proposal**

Cllr B. Larcombe emphasised that any business proposal would be received by the council without prejudice due to an outstanding issue at Monmouth Beach.

The town clerk said the Monmouth Beach area was a valuable asset so the council shouldn't be led by one organisation and should think about the best use of it on behalf of the whole town.

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

Cllr S. Williams said he would prefer to see a five-year lease with Dorset Council for the accreted land so the next council administration could decide what it wanted to do with it.

The town clerk said a seven-year lease was preferable as it switched obligation away from the town council to Dorset Council.

Cllr B. Larcombe agreed and added that any lease would need approval from the town council before being agreed.

With regards to the recommendations, the town clerk said officers would normally wait for Full Council approval but in this case, he didn't want to delay things for too long and proposed to act immediately to get the survey of the accreted land done.

Members agreed it should not be held up, acknowledging that Dorset Council would welcome a quick decision because the season in the harbour was approaching.

Cllr S. Williams said he had asked the town clerk for figures from the car park ticket machines but he had not received this.

The town clerk said Cllr S. Williams had not asked him for car parking income but he could provide this.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** 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.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** 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.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** 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**

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr B. Bawden, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** 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**

The town clerk said officers were happy the comments within the report reflected where the council was at the moment. He said there was still work to do but compared to the previous audit, the council was returning to the status quo.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to note the internal auditor's report of visits two and three 2019-20 and approve the management responses.

**19/106/SF Finance Progress Review**

The town clerk said officers had done everything they said they would do, with particular credit due to the interim finance manager, the finance assistant and the admin assistant.

The town clerk said the deputy town clerk had been in discussions with the council's solicitor about collecting some of the debts and legal action would be pursued with those who had not paid 2019/20 fees relating to the chalet and caravan park.

As the issues in the finance team were being resolved, the town clerk said the council would be able to receive four budget reports every year and monthly management accounts would be produced.

**19/107/SF Budget Performance, 1 April – 31 January 2020**

The town clerk said due to the roof works starting in January 2020 instead of November 2019, this impacted on expenditure and strengthened the position in terms of the forecast. However, he said there were a number of unexpected items of expenditure in 2019/20, such as the church tower grant, the beach rake, and the Blue Sea Café. He said all these variances had been reported and were properly recorded decisions of the council.

However, it was pointed out that the report stated there was no budget set aside for the beach rake, but it was believed there was £40,000 in the budget, which would mean an overspend of £11,000, not £51,000 as stated in the report.

The town clerk said he would check this.

Cllr B. Bawden asked if the variance on consultancy fees was unforeseen or these costs were not included in the budget.

The town clerk said the budget had been stretched because most of the year a consultant finance manager had been in place, which accounted for much of the cost.

Members questioned the forecast overspend related to the play park, which the report stated was not in the 2019/20 budget, but it was understood section 106 funding had been used for the project and the council had underspent, with funds left over for another project.

The town clerk said he would also check this.

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

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, 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.

#### **19/109/SF Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

Cllr B. Larcombe said the virus put the council, like any other in the country, in an unusual position, which required it to think about what measures it needed to put in place to maintain its core activities. He said this may include raised delegation and video conferencing, with consideration given to issues which still required council consent and how members could be involved.

The town clerk said members needed to consider how the council would continue to make decisions and maintain its finances, which would involve temporary changes to the scheme of delegation and financial regulations, as follows:

Scheme of delegation – During any period of restricted activity in the UK declared by the Government, such as the COVID-19 virus, and in the event it is not possible to convene a meeting of the council in a reasonable time, the clerk shall have 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. This will be carried out where possible by consultations with members by electronic means or telephone. The clerk will further consult with the mayor for guidance, as necessary. The delegation does not extend to matters expressly reserved to the council in legislation or in its standing orders or financial regulations. Any decisions made under this delegation must be recorded in writing and must be published in accordance with the relevant regulations. The delegated authority ceases upon the first meeting of the council after the council meeting at which the delegation was put in place.

Financial regulation 3.4 – The clerk may incur expenditure on behalf of the council which is necessary to carry out any repair, replacement or other work which is of such extreme urgency that it must be done at once, whether or not there is a budgetary provision for the expenditure, subject to a limit of £10,000. The clerk shall report the action to the council as soon as practicable thereafter. Should expenditure above this limit be anticipated before authority can be obtained at the next scheduled council meeting, the chairman of the council should convene an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council to seek authority for the expenditure. Where possible, the council will maintain a reserve to cover such eventualities.

The town clerk said members would be provided with a daily briefing and developments would be publicised on the council's website and social media.

The town clerk said there may be an impact on the annual meeting of electors in April and the annual council meeting in May, for which there were some legal obligations, but the national bodies had been contacting the government on behalf of local councils about setting aside legislation. At this point, he said he would recommend postponing the annual meeting of electors until 1 June 2020 at the latest, i.e. the last possible date it could legally be held.

The town clerk said the possibility of virtual meetings was also being legally progressed by the national bodies.

The town clerk said the virus could potentially have an impact on the council's revenue as approximately half the income, i.e. £800,000 related primarily to car parking and to a lesser extent the amenities area, most of which was generated in the first six months of the year.

Members discussed the need to protect the council's finances.

The town clerk said if the council deferred capital works with no contractual commitment, the council's reserve would increase from £460,000 to £700,000.

Cllr R. Smith asked if the council was eligible for any government grants.

The town clerk said the government would provide financial support to local councils but he believed this would be the principal authorities.

Cllr B. Bawden said she was concerned about the community support group and asked if there was anything the council could do in terms of guidance and support for the volunteers so there was clear information available. She said there needed to be guidelines to protect the volunteers as much as the residents.

The town clerk said the council didn't want to be seen to stifle the community initiative but he had had some discussions with Dorset Council about what gaps the town council could fill if things got worse. He said the town council wasn't the strategic authority, so its role was likely to be to assist others when requested.

The town clerk talked about following the government guidance where staffing issues were concerned, which included closing the council office and working from home, closing the amenities' facility as staff there were most vulnerable, re-deploying staff in other roles so they had less contact with the public, and external workers keeping their

distance from the public. However, he said there might be a time when these arrangements would have to change in line with government instructions.

To prepare, the town clerk said he would discuss the situation with the tourist information centre as it was based in the same building, re-issue staff contact details, and share notices and information on council noticeboards.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** 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

It was acknowledged these recommendations would be approved retrospectively by the council as meetings would be suspended for the foreseeable future.

#### **19/110/SF Grant Allocation to Recipients of 'Ammonite' Filming Money**

Proposed by Cllr G. Stammers and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** 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.

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr G. Turner, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the release of a £5,000 grant to Mary Anning Rocks.

*The meeting adjourned for a break at 9.15pm.*

*The meeting resumed at 9.23pm.*

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

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.

**19/112/SF Exempt Business**

**a) VAT and Option to Tax (for VAT)**

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to opt to tax (for VAT purposes) all the council's currently non-opted 'commercial' properties.

**b) Renewal of Lease for Power Boat Club, Monmouth Beach**

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr R. Smith, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to obtain legal advice about the separation of the leases for the power boat club and instruct an alternative valuer if appropriate.

*The meeting closed at 9.55pm.*