

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 31 MARCH 2021

Present

Chairman: Cllr B. Larcombe MBE

Councillors: Cllr J. Broom, Cllr K. Ellis, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr C. Reynolds, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr G. Turner, Cllr S. Williams

Officers: M. Adamson-Drage (operations manager), A. Mullins (support services manager), M. Russell (finance manager), J. Wright (town clerk)

20/17/SF Public Forum

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

20/18/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr B. Bawden – ill
Cllr R. Doney
Cllr R. Smith – work commitments

Cllr B. Larcombe reminded members they needed to give a reason for their absence.

20/19/SF Minutes

Proposed by Cllr J. Broom and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, the minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2021 were **ADOPTED**.

20/20/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr M. Ellis declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 13, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority – Consultation of Draft Community Safety Plan, as her husband was a firefighter.

20/21/SF Dispensations

There were none.

20/22/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 17 March 2021

Members noted the report.

20/23/SF Update Report

Bowling club lease

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what the reason was for the delay in the signing of the lease.

The town clerk said there were some amendments to the plans and these were being talked through with the club but it would hopefully be completed soon.

20/24/SF Councillor Code of Conduct

Cllr B. Larcombe said the council needed to be careful about adding in its own wording to the model code as it would have been checked legally. He also felt there was sufficient reference in the code to equality and diversity so there would be no need to add in extra references as suggested.

The support services manager said the council's existing code was based on the model provided by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) so members could have some assurance that any additions to the model would be legally sound.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the code could be applied to staff too.

The town clerk said there was another code of conduct for staff but this could also be reviewed, probably by the Human Resources Committee. He agreed that if the code applied to members, it should also apply to staff where appropriate.

Cllr J. Broom said the council should stick to the model provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) with no additions.

Cllr C. Reynolds asked if there were any essential sections of the existing code which officers felt should be added into the model.

The support services manager said sections on fraud and use of financial resources were important, but sections on how the council specifically dealt with dispensations, the voluntary code of conduct and sanctions were particularly important.

Cllr M. Ellis said it would be helpful to see the model code with the suggested additions so members could check there was no duplication before it was agreed.

It was agreed the completed document would be taken to the Full Council meeting on 14 April 2021 for final approval.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked how often the code would be reviewed.

The support services manager said the LGA had committed to an annual review and it would be brought to members for any amendments as required.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to adopt the model councillor code of conduct from the Local Government Association, with sections from the existing code included as local amendments, but without the suggested section on equality and diversity.

20/25/SF Community Governance Review

The town clerk suggested up to three members went through the document relating to DC's community governance review and formed a view on whether the council should respond to it, with any suggestions to be reported to Full Council.

The town clerk said other than reviewing the number of members on the council, he didn't believe there would be anything else the council would want to consider. He said the council should write to DC to outline its position as it was an important part of the county's governance structure. He added there was plenty of time to respond as the review wasn't due to start until July 2021.

Cllr M. Ellis said the council should be looking again at reducing the number of members from 14 to 12 as there were less people coming forward for elections.

Members generally agreed with the principle of reducing the number of members, although Cllr C. Reynolds suggested it was an uneven number.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the council needed to carefully consider what the optimum number should be as it wouldn't take much for some committees to become inquorate and members would end up being on every committee.

Members agreed the following were not considerations for this council:

- Creating, merging, altering or abolishing parishes (grouping or de-grouping parishes)
- Creating ward boundaries or changing existing warding arrangements
- Changes to parish names
- Correcting minor boundary anomalies.
- Changing a parish council into a parish meeting

Although it was not a specific question asked, Cllr M. Ellis said residents on the new housing estates at Garmans Field and Woodberry Down were asked to go to Woodmead Halls for voting but this was not their nearest polling booth. She suggested this was included in any response to DC.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that a report is taken to the Strategy and Finance Committee to consider reducing the number of members on the council as part of Dorset Council's community governance review.

20/26/SF Review of Insurance Cover

As the premium was set for three years on the basis no large claims were made, Cllr M. Ellis asked what Zurich classed as a 'large claim'.

The finance manager said he couldn't comment but he didn't think it was necessarily related to value.

Cllr D. Sarson asked what the current value of the assets was and whether the council was informed of each claim.

The finance manager confirmed the council was informed of each claim.

The town clerk said the purchase value of the assets was known but they were now worth significantly more. He said officers could estimate the current market value and report back to members.

Regarding cyber security, the town clerk said officers were reasonably sure other organisations, such as DC and the banks, would be covering risk for the council but they couldn't say with absolute certainty. He said officers would be having further discussions with the relevant organisations about the extent and level of cover.

Cllr J. Broom asked what the excess was on each claim. He also asked if all the assets were listed in the policy as there may be a risk of the council being under-insured.

The finance manager said all the assets were listed on the policy with a value attached; the values were linked to an index percentage rate, which was added each year. He gave several examples of the excess amounts: buildings and contents, £250, money, £50, and public liability, £100.

Cllr J. Broom suggested the council considered paying a higher excess to get the cost of the premium down.

20/27/SF Requests for Outside Seating

Cllr B. Larcombe asked how the council would ensure tables and chairs would not take over the whole of the seafront.

The town clerk said if a business was asking for too much space and it would impinge on pedestrian and emergency vehicle access, officers would not approve the request. He said the letter from the Secretary of State was very clear local councils must allow these requests, providing there was still reasonable access.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked officers to keep a tight scrutiny on this. The town clerk agreed members would be informed every week through the briefing if any decisions were made.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to delegate authority to the chairman of the Town Management and Highways Committee in conjunction with officers to organise the details of allowing further outside seating licences during the temporary legislated period, currently until 30 September 2022.

20/28/SF Request for Funding

Cllr C. Reynolds declared a pecuniary interest in this item as she had claimed for a set of ink cartridges in relation to work for Lyme Regis Community Support (LRCS). She said the group had now run out of money and was in the process of registering as a community interest company (CIO).

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what kinds of things the money would be spent on and the reasons for becoming a CIO.

Cllr C. Reynolds said the money would be spent on things like petrol for the volunteers, transport to medical appointments, and soup runs, with all expenditure being approved by herself and administered by the town council's finance team. She said becoming a CIO would give the group more kudos, it would have trustees and opportunities to apply for more grants.

Cllr M. Ellis asked if this request was in addition to the application for a community grant.

Cllr C. Reynolds said the community grant application was submitted before the group ran out of money and she was aware it could only be for specific projects, not running costs. If she had to choose between the two, she felt running costs were more important.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve funding of £1,000 to Lyme Regis Community Support.

Cllr C. Reynolds abstained from voting.

As LRCS had run out of money, the town clerk suggested the committee authorised an advance of £200 ahead of Full Council approval, which was agreed.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the council's granting of funding didn't mean it was open for other requests; this was an exceptional request.

Cllr M. Ellis left the meeting at 8.09pm in line with her pecuniary interests.

20/29/SF Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority – Consultation of Draft Community Safety Plan

The town clerk said if several members were delegated to respond to the consultation, the response could be brought back to this committee on 12 May 2021. He said the council probably needed to consider a mechanism for keeping consultations away from the main committees as it was quite onerous.

The issues which members felt were relevant included the importance of a local service because of the distance from other major towns, and concerns paramedics on the fire service were no longer being deployed.

Proposed by Cllr K. Ellis and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** that Cllrs B. Larcombe, J. Broom and C. Reynolds draft a response to Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority's consultation on its Draft Community Safety Plan for submission to the Strategy and Finance Committee on 12 May 2021.

Cllr M. Ellis returned to the meeting at 8.15pm.

20/30/SF Investments and Cash Holdings

The town clerk said as the end of the financial year was approaching, the council's financial position had significantly improved, for two reasons: officers had made

prudent assumptions so there was no shock at the end of the financial year, and the finance team had been successful in chasing up debts.

The town clerk said the year-end reserve would be c.£800k, with a surplus of c.£380k in the new financial year, which meant the council would be in a position early in the financial year to release funds for projects and objectives as already agreed.

As it was the last day of the financial year, the finance manager confirmed as of today's date, there was £850k in the reserve.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the council still needed to keep things tight and continue to make savings where possible in case the unexpected happened.

20/31/SF List of Payments

Cllr M. Ellis queried why £1,400 had been spent on keys and padlocks. She said it was pointless having them if the gates were regularly being left open and said those leaving them open should have their keys taken away.

The operations manager said the locks on all barriers had been changed, of which there were at least 20.

Cllr B. Larcombe queried a payment of £851 to Screwfix as payments to the company seemed to come up every month. He asked if the employees had to have authority from the operations manager to purchase goods.

The operations manager said either he or the operations supervisor placed the orders. He said they used Screwfix regularly as they supplied a wide variety of items and could deliver the same day.

Cllr B. Larcombe queried the payment of £1,220 to Metric.

The operations manager said the payment was for maintenance of nine parking machines, which was part of the contract with Metric.

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr M. Ellis, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the schedule of payments for February 2021 for the sum of £102,724.57.

20/32/SF Debtors' Report

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, 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.

20/33/SF Exempt Business

a) Debtors' Report

Cllr M. Ellis asked for confirmation that chalet and caravan owners who had not paid their debt would not be given the discount related to Covid-19 as today was the deadline for payment.

The town clerk said there were two main debtors remaining and officers would take a pragmatic view if the payment was expected imminently if it meant the debt was settled.

The finance manager said the main commercial debt had been paid and another commercial tenant owed two quarters.

The finance manager said now the majority of historical issues surrounding chalet and caravan leases had been resolved, the residents no longer had any reasons not to pay so he couldn't see any reason why they would withhold payment in the future.

The meeting closed at 8.48pm.