

# LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

## STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 MAY 2021

#### Present

**Chairman:** Cllr B. Larcombe MBE

**Councillors:** Cllr J. Broom, Cllr M. Ellis, Cllr D. Ruffle, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr G. Stammers, Cllr S. Williams

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

#### 20/34/SF Public Forum

##### M. Stainer (read out by an officer)

M. Stainer spoke in relation to agenda item 8, Review of the Fixed Asset Strategy. He said the council had recently repaired the flat roof above the three retail units and toilet on Marine Parade, at a cost of nearly £800k, including all fees, but these funds were paid for out of general reserves, not from any sinking or maintenance fund. He said the Guildhall now needed repairing, as did the council offices and various other assets. He asked what the council's policy was with respect to earmarking funds for asset repairs and maintenance. M. Stainer said the council's fixed asset register included assets that were not on its insurance schedule, and the insurance schedule included assets that were not on its fixed asset register. He asked if the council reconciled these two documents. If so, he asked if the reconciliation could be included on the council's website before the end of the month. M. Stainer said there was no value attributed to the significant roof spend on the flat roof above SWIM on the fixed asset register and he had been advised by the council this was because there was no element of improvement. He said he found the "no element of improvement" comment surprising given comments to the contrary at a previous Full Council meeting where the significant spend on bespoke balustrading and glass was acknowledged as an improvement. He said the full cost of the Marine Parade toilet repairs, at under £100k, was included in the fixed asset register, yet nothing had been included for over half a million pound spend on the flat roof.

#### 20/35/SF Apologies for Absence

Cllr B. Bawden – attending another meeting

Cllr R. Doney – personal reasons

Cllr K. Ellis – illness

Cllr C. Reynolds – self-isolating

Cllr R. Smith – attending another meeting

Cllr G. Turner – personal reasons.

**20/37/SF Minutes**

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr D. Sarson, the minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2021 were **ADOPTED**.

**20/38/SF Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

Cllr M. Ellis declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 16, List of Payments as it included a payment to the Woodmead Halls, which was her employer.

**20/39/SF Dispensations**

There were none.

**20/40/SF Matters arising from the minutes of the Strategy and Finance Committee meeting held on 31 March 2021**

**Requests for outside seating**

Cllr M. Ellis said she was concerned there was a trailer in the gardens outside the Oyster and Fish House as she didn't believe this was part of the council's agreement for outside seating. She didn't believe a trailer constituted outside seating, especially as the council had agreed no trailers would be allowed on the flat roof.

The town clerk said the trailer was part of the request that was submitted by the owner, Mark Hix, but he would discuss this with him.

Several other members agreed they were concerned about the trailer and felt permission had not been given for it.

**20/41/SF Update Report**

**Survey of accreted land**

Cllr J. Broom asked what date the survey would be carried out.

The town clerk said no date had been set yet.

**20/42/SF Review of the Fixed Asset Strategy**

The town clerk said most of the council's projects were halted last year due to Covid-19 but the deputy town clerk was now looking to move forward with an asset and investment strategy.

Members noted the intention to review the fixed asset strategy later this year alongside the introduction of a new asset and investment management plan.

**20/43/SF The Annual Review of the Fixed Asset Register**

It was noted the asset values were not based on the current market value, but on the purchase price.

Members raised several inconsistencies with the register: the Guildhall lift was listed but the Marine Parade lift was not; the beach cleaning machine and surf rake were the same item; and the Town Mill steps and bridge had been handed back to Dorset Council (DC).

Cllr J. Broom asked what the Stanford seat and memorial was.

Cllr M. Ellis said the register did not appear to have been updated and she was concerned some items listed on the register were not listed in the council's insurance schedule. She felt the council should be approving the removal of any assets from the register.

The town clerk said officers would review the register again and bring it back to the next meeting. He added that the register didn't have to be the same as the insurance register.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked if future asset registers could include the month and year an asset was purchased to help members understand what had been added.

#### **20/44/SF      Review of Arrangements with other Local Authorities, Not-For-Profit Bodies and Businesses**

The town clerk said this was a useful report to see how things had changed. Since the last report in 2019, the major change had been that West Dorset District Council and Dorset County Council no longer existed and the unitary authority Dorset Council was now established.

Cllr B. Larcombe said DC had had budgetary constraints pre-Covid and further Government cuts were likely to have a further impact, with clear signs DC was going to review its spend in discretionary areas. He said this would form the backdrop to a lot of the issues outlined in the report.

It was noted the lengthsman's agreement had still not been signed off by DC, DC was setting up a harbour committee, and it had cut funding of £6k per annum to LymeForward. However, over the last year, the amount of dialogue with DC had increased significantly and the working relationship with the ward member was strong.

Cllr M. Ellis said the council needed a date for DC to vacate the harbourmaster's store as soon as possible. Under the Tripartite Agreement, she asked if DC's contribution to the seafront railings would be doubled as two of the organisations had merged into one.

The town clerk said the agreement only required the former Dorset County Council to contribute to the railings. However, DC would be reminded of this obligation.

#### **20/45/SF      Community Governance Review**

Cllr B. Larcombe said 14 councillors was in-keeping with other councils with the same level of activity as this council and as the recent election was keenly contested, this demonstrated there was interest out there. He said as the council was trying to encourage a mix of age groups and most younger people were working, reducing the numbers would add extra pressure.

Given the number of members who were unable to attend this meeting, Cllr J. Broom said he couldn't see how the numbers could be reduced as meetings would become inquorate.

Cllr G. Stammers said members already sat on most committees and reducing the numbers would put pressure on members to sit on more. She said the gender balance of members had improved and the council was trying to attract younger people but reducing the numbers would hinder this.

Members agreed there was no requirement to reduce the number of members on the council.

#### **20/46/SF      The Impact of Covid-19**

In addition to a financial cost in excess of £300k, the town clerk said there were some things which had worked well because of Covid-19, such as the zoning arrangements for external staff which had given employees a sense of pride and ownership in the areas they worked in.

Cllr B. Larcombe said the number of meetings he and the town clerk had had with Chris Loder had been another positive, as well as meetings with other seaside towns.

#### **20/47/SF      Budget Performance, 1 April – 31 March 2021**

The finance manager said the council was in a better financial position than it thought it would be at the beginning of the pandemic, being only £39k down on budget.

Cllr B. Larcombe wanted to pay tribute to members and officers for holding their nerve during the pandemic, finding savings and chasing debts, all of which put the council in a good position for the future.

The town clerk said the council's aim had been to hold in reserve 50% of its turnover, i.e. £850k, but the council was £30k in excess of this figure already. He said if all went according to plan and adding this to the £370k forecast surplus, the council would have around £400k to spend this year. However, he strongly suggested the council exercised caution and if there was money left over, it could consider paying off the loan to West Dorset District Council. The loan outstanding will be £157k at 31 March 2021.

The town clerk said he would bring a more detailed report to the next committee to suggest members approve works to the Guildhall and the replacement of the seafront railings. He said the expenditure for members' IT had been met in the previous year and a significant grant had been obtained for the electric vehicle charging points.

Cllr J. Broom felt the most important priority was to spend money on maintaining the council's fixed assets.

#### **20/48/SF      Beach Patrol Funding**

Cllr D. Sarson asked if all the CCTV was working.

The town clerk said officers had had discussions with DC about upgrading and adding to the existing system, with the potential to link up with the control centre in Dorchester

to enable live monitoring of the cameras. He said the police and crime commissioner (PCC) Martyn Underhill had given a personal commitment to support the infrastructure work to set this up and the appointment of a new PCC would not affect that funding. He added that officers hoped to come to members with a more detailed plan in several weeks.

The town clerk said officers were working on further applications to the Welcome Back Fund, a Government fund to allow towns to get back to normal, which would include potential funding for the beach accessibility matting, the sculpture trail and the park and ride.

The town clerk said he could invite the new PCC to a future meeting.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what 'ambassadorial support' meant in relation to the funding bid to DC.

The town clerk said DC was looking to establish a team of volunteers to promote locations across Dorset, although officers would rather have the funding to determine how it could be best spent to support the town. He said discussions with DC were ongoing.

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

#### **20/49/SF Investments and Cash Holdings**

The finance manager said at the end of April, the council held cash at £976k, although interest rates were negligible.

Cllr D. Sarson asked if the funds in the Lloyds Liquidity Manager account could be transferred to the Natwest Liquidity Manager account, as the Lloyds account generated interest of 0.01% compared to Natwest's 0.1%.

The finance manager said he would check the interest rate at Natwest as he believed it might also be 0.01%.

The town clerk said now the council had achieved greater financial reserves, it was probably a good time to look at where the council could best locate its money. He said a report would be brought back to the committee for further consideration.

The finance manager said there were higher interest accounts with Lloyds but they might not be instant access. He said he would talk to the council's account manager at Lloyds.

#### **20/50/SF List of Payments**

Proposed by Cllr B. Larcombe and seconded by Cllr J. Broom, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve the schedule of payments for March and April 2021 for the sums of £113,927.00 and £134,393.25, respectively.

#### **20/51/SF Receipt of Claim for Business Support**

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

## **20/52/SF Debtors' Report**

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

## **20/53/SF Exempt Business**

### **a) Receipt of Claim for Business Support**

The town clerk said SWiM had seen its level of profit drop significantly. He added the council had made some decisions in its favour, such as allowing 20 extra outside covers for £100, and deferring rent reviews until April 2022 which gave the business two years' benefit.

Cllr B. Larcombe said it was a Government instruction that caused the business to close and he didn't feel it was fair to use taxpayers' money to prop up the council's tenants. He didn't feel it would sit well with other businesses or residents.

Members agreed there should be no rent discount but the business should be given until the end of the financial year to clear its outstanding debt, while also continuing to make quarterly payments.

Proposed by Cllr M. Ellis and seconded by Cllr G. Stammers, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** not to give a discount on rent to SWiM but to allow the business to clear its outstanding debt by the end of the 2021-22 financial year, and to give officers delegated authority to agree the terms of the repayment.

### **b) Debtors' Report**

The finance manager said the overall debt was the lowest he had ever seen it and the deputy town clerk was working hard to recover the two main debts relating to the chalet park.

Cllr B. Larcombe praised the officers involved in chasing debts and getting the leases sent out.

Cllr M. Ellis asked if all the Marine Parade day huts had paid, as there were several which were in a very poor condition. She asked for an agenda item at a future meeting to discuss what should be done about them.

*The meeting closed at 8.48pm.*