

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee
Via Video Meeting
14:00 on 1 October 2020

MINUTES

Video meeting participants: Cllrs Sue Barnard, Alan Green (Chair), Graham Parker and Andy Pearce

Also participating: Shona Bendix (Clerk), James Cox (Administration and Finance Assistant) and Lauren Elliott (Committee Clerk)

14. Welcome

Councillors and members of the public were reminded of the right to report and the application of the video meeting protocol, and the meeting was welcomed.

15. Apologies for absence

There were none. Cllr Coleby had not provided apologies, but had let another Councillor know that he would not be able to attend the meeting. Cllr Barnard was in attendance as a substitute.

16. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

There were none.

17. Advance comments from the public on any matters on this agenda

There were none.

18. Noting Cllr Barnard's appointment by the Finance and Governance Committee as a substitute member of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee

Cllr Barnard was welcomed. Cllr Parker had been appointed as Deputy Chair in his absence and confirmed that he accepted this appointment.

There was no provision on the agenda to comment on the draft minutes of the meeting on 24 August 2020. Provision will be made on the next agenda to receive comments on those minutes and the minutes of this meeting.

19. The 2020 – 2021 Lowestoft Town Council Budget, including the following:

19.1 An appropriate budget provision for the professional development of staff – The Sub-Committee would like to ensure that staff are suitably trained to deal with the undertakings of the Council, especially with the plans to recruit more members of staff. The training budget is £30,000, which should be more than adequate, and the Sub-Committee may even wish to decrease this budget in light of the current economic situation and the likely reduction in the Council Tax base. Full Council has previously considered the plans for staff development and the budget allocated to new staff has been considered by this Sub-Committee, the Personnel Committee and the Finance and Governance Committee, but will need to be reviewed again as was initially based on there being more new members of staff. Should the Council decide it does not wish to progress the recruitment of more staff this budget can be reduced. When the precept was set last year, the Council made an in-principle commitment to support staff through to the completion of their studies, for periods of study which they had already embarked on which continued for more than one year. It was suggested that the Council should make this same commitment to the new staff it has recruited, but cannot make this commitment until the cost is known. The exact costs of known commitments will be brought to the next meeting, and provision will be made for a confidential discussion about individual staff training requirements and costs. It was agreed that it is important to ensure the Council has sufficiently trained staff, and this can present a cost saving in the long term.

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- 19.2 A 2.75% agreement on salary increases has been made and applies to all staff backdated to 1 April 2020 – It was noted that this is in line with the national agreement.
- 19.3 The cost of hampers to offer thanks to staff at Lowestoft care homes and staff in the James Paget Hospital's Intensive Care Unit – Regardless of the total cost, it was agreed that it would be appropriate for the expenditure to come from the Covid-19 grant fund. Staff have been researching hampers which are Fair Trade, climate emergency friendly (eg not excessive plastic packaging), and which do not contain alcohol or nuts. Staff have based research on existing Council policies but would like guidance to progress this as there are several different options at various prices. There will be around forty hampers in total, and the price per hamper is likely to be between £50 - £80. It was reiterated that the Council's intention is to offer its thanks to frontline workers, who have likely had to look after people taken ill with the virus. It does not mean that the Council has not recognised other keyworkers and that the Council is not grateful for their contribution during the pandemic. It was requested that the list of recipients identified to receive a hamper be circulated to the Sub-Committee in advance of the next meeting. The anticipated total cost is approximately £4,000, and it was agreed to use this figure as a working maximum budget. Cllr Pearce proposed to ringfence £4,000 within the Covid-19 grant fund as a maximum budget for the purchase of the hampers; seconded by Cllr Parker; all in favour. It was queried whether it is only care homes from within Lowestoft Town Council's parish boundaries which have been identified to receive a hamper. At the moment it is, but letters of thanks have been sent to supermarkets which are outside of the Town Council's boundaries, but which serve Lowestoft residents. If the list of care homes to receive hampers were to be extended to those outside the parish boundaries, this Sub-Committee would need to consider how the Lowestoft taxpayer would feel about this. It was recognised that Lowestoft residents are being cared for in homes outside of the boundaries, and the James Paget hospital itself is not in Lowestoft but serves the town. The Sub-Committee would like to consider the number of care homes outside the parish boundaries at its next meeting. It was suggested that the Town Council could liaise with neighbouring Parish Councils, or reference them in the accompanying letter of thanks. The Clerk, as Responsible Financial Officer, reminded the Sub-Committee that it is Lowestoft taxpayers who are meeting the cost of the hampers.
- 19.4 Earmarked funds for amplification improvements to Hamilton House – Full Council made an in-principle decision to progress this, but to explore it further in the new year. In order to do this a budget will need to be set. Two quotations came in between £14,000 - £15,000, but one was less, at approximately £10,000. Greater clarity over the differences between the quotations, and which best suits the Council's requirements is needed. It was agreed in principle to set a maximum budget of £16,000 for amplification improvement to Hamilton House, but further consideration will need to be given to where in the budget this expenditure will come from. This will be considered at the next meeting. Cllr Pearce proposed an in-principle agreement to set a maximum budget of £16,000 for amplification improvement to Hamilton House; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour.
- 19.5 The East Suffolk Norse analysis of the monthly Partnership Fee (confidential) – To be discussed during the confidential session.

20. The 2021 – 2022 Lowestoft Town Council Budget, including the following:

- 20.1 The Lowestoft Taxbase Forecast and its impact on the precept – There will likely be a reduction in the Council Tax base. The Council will need to consider how to manage this against maintaining its assets, services and visions for the future. This Sub-Committee has received the information East Suffolk Council has provided to date. The situation is ongoing and it is not yet known how long it will last or what will happen next. The

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Council may wish to freeze the precept, reduce it or only increase it in line with inflation. This Sub-Committee needs confirmation about which of its financial commitments are non-negotiable, as these will remain the same in any scenario. The Sub-Committee would need like to see an analysis of how different percentages would work out, and it is assumed the Council would want a limited precept increase. Detailed discussions about different areas of the budget are needed and it was agreed this Sub-Committee should hold more regular meetings no later than November. It was noted that Lowestoft Rising would like its request for funding – which was postponed earlier in the year due to the pandemic – to be considered by the Council. A full year contribution would be £15,000, which is a fifty percent increase to the figure quoted at the start of the year. With the Mayor's approval, Lowestoft Rising intend to provide a presentation to the Council in December.

21. Date of the next meeting

12 October 2020 10:00

22. Items for the next Agenda and Close

It was requested that Christmas lights be added to the next agendas of this Sub-Committee and the Finance and Governance Committee. Now that it has been confirmed that it is too late to progress Christmas lights for London Road South this year it was queried whether merging the London Road South contract with the existing contract for the High Street and Bevan Street East could be considered, as information received previously has suggested this could provide cost saving.

Cllr Pearce proposed moving the meeting into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Barnard; all in favour.

The Chair thanked those who had been viewing the meeting via live stream and the live stream was closed as the meeting went into confidential session. It was confirmed the meeting would end following the confidential session.

23. Resolution to close the meeting to the public

23.1 To consider any legal matters, including those above as required:

19.5 The East Suffolk Norse analysis of the monthly Partnership Fee (confidential) – Now that the second half of the precept payment has been received, it was requested that an item be added to the next agenda to consider investment options. There was a discussion regarding the Town Council's Covid-19 grant fund, and it is anticipated that next year there will be many organisations seeking financial assistance. The Council wants to contribute to pandemic recovery, but needs to consider what it can do, particularly with the likely budget constraints. The Council may wish to extend its Covid-19 grant scheme beyond March, or split the fund with the standard grant scheme. Local groups who are supporting the community during the pandemic need a source of advice, such as for safeguarding issues, etc, and Community Action Suffolk was suggested as a good source of advice. East Suffolk Council has been co-ordinating local efforts, which the Town Council has supported.

There was a confidential discussion regarding the East Suffolk Norse contract and partnership fee.

The Chair closed the meeting 15:24.

Signed: 12 October 2020