

Lowestoft Town Council
Extraordinary Meeting of the Finance and Governance Committee
First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
10:30 on 12 March 2024

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Sonia Barker (Ex Officio), Nasima Begum, Wendy Brooks, Andy Pearce and Bernadette Rappensberger

In Attendance: Sarah Foote (Acting Town Clerk), James Cox (Finance and Information Officer) and Taylor Williams (Committee Clerk)

Public: One member of the public in attendance (in person)

153. Welcome

The fire evacuation procedure and public right to report was explained and the meeting was welcomed.

154. To receive and consider approval of apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Coleby, Page and Parker with reasons provided. Cllr Pearce proposed approval; seconded by Cllrs Rappensberger; all in favour.

155. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

155.1. To receive declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests from councillors on items on the Agenda – Cllr Pearce declared he was aware of the intent to apply for grant funding per items 161.1b and 160.1f and in one case had made the applicant aware of the Town Council's grant scheme. Cllr Barker declared she had advised applicants of the grant process per items 160.1d and 160.1g. Cllr Begum declared she was the Lowestoft Town Council (LTC) representative on the Food Network and had guided the applicants of item 160.1g on the grant process. Cllr Rappensberger declared she was the LTC substitute representative on Friends of Fen Park and had been aware of their intention to submit a grant application.

155.2. To consider written requests for dispensations for Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and note dispensations granted – No written requests for dispensations had been received.

156. To consider the draft minutes of the meeting on 13 February 2024

It was agreed to defer approval to the next meeting pending addition of the finance table. Cllr Pearce requested a grammatical amendment to item 144.5.

157. Public forum

An opportunity for the public to make comments on any matters on this agenda, and to consider any advance comments from the public – The member of the public spoke on their grant application per item 160.1c which sought to develop their online memorial project into a book. On the query of accessibility with all age groups it was explained that the project could be expanded in the future to re-write the website entries and make it more accessible.

The breakdown of costs was queried as the labour costs seemed to indicate a salary payment and the print costs had not been provided. It was clarified that there was no upfront charge for the printing as the final cost was dependent on the number of copies produced.

It was agreed to bring item 160.1c forward in meeting.

160.1c. Ventura Cottage - £2,000 – Whilst supportive of the project a query was raised on this being the fifth grant from this particular applicant and the third grant for this specific project. It was not standard practice to give multiple grants for one project when each application has been submitted in isolation with no indication of the applications being submitted as part of a graduated project plan.

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Cllr Pearce proposed to defer this item to the April meeting, with clarification to be received at the standalone meeting scheduled with the applicant to discuss a separate project concerning the National Archives; seconded by Cllr Brooks who suggested the funding be allocated from an alternative budget rather than the grant budget; all in favour.

The member of public left the meeting at 10:58

158. Budget and Loan:

158.1. To monitor the budget for 2023 – 2024, including delegated Committee and Sub-Committee budgets – The Finance and Information Officer had resolved an error on the precept.

The £350,000 advance received from East Suffolk Council was not yet shown as credit in expenditure under the Town Hall budget. A total of £65,000 needed to be reallocated from the non-project Repair and Maintenance budget to the project budget.

A £65,000 virement from the Marina Theatre Capital budget needed to be reversed as it has been confirmed the expenditure did not need to be directly funded.

It was requested for these amendments to be resolved and presented in the finance papers for March Full Council. Cllr Pearce proposed the document be accepted as an accurate record; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

158.2. To note any bank reconciliations – Cllr Rappensberger had completed December 2023 and January 2024. February 2024 was underway.

158.3. To consider the Reserves Policy – The revised target date for attainment of General Reserves targets needed to be agreed and new appendices added for the new reserves, each with a statement of purpose and operation. Cllr Pearce proposed this item be deferred to the next meeting where a recommendation would be made to Full Council; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

158.4. To note the consideration of the year end EMR positions and any EMR transfers required, due to be discussed in April 2024 – Cllr Pearce proposed to transfer the £2,260.27 balance in Amplification Earmarked Reserves (EMR) to the IT EMR, on the basis that all amplification work in Hamilton House was completed, to clear the anticipated year-end deficit of £181.84 and leave an anticipated surplus; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

159. Payments and Receipts:

159.1. To note the income and expenditure reports for February 2024 and March 2024 to date, including payments made under delegated authority (see schedules) – Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the reports; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

159.2. To consider any payments for approval (see schedule) – There were no payments.

160. Grants & Sponsorships

160.1. To consider the following grant applications:

160.1a. The Seagull - £2,000 – Cllr Brooks proposed approval; seconded by Cllr Pearce with the approved amendment that the grant decision be communicated now, and the payment be made in April 2024 from the 2024-2025 Grant budget upon confirmation that the match funding has been secured; all in favour.

160.1b. Re-Utilize - £1,200 – Cllr Brooks proposed approval; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

160.1c. Ventura Cottage - £2,000 – This item was discussed earlier in the meeting.

160.1d. Waveney Domestic Violence and Abuse Forum - £510 – Cllr Brooks proposed approval and requested a representative be invited to a Committee meeting to present their work and initiate dialogue on future funding options from LTC;

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seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

160.1e. East Suffolk Travel Association - £174 – Cllr Pearce proposed approval; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

160.1f. Friends of Fen Park - £100 – Cllr Brooks proposed approval; seconded by Cllr Rappensber. Officers informed the Committee the policies and constitution had not been submitted.

Cllr Pearce proposed to approve the application in principle and request the supporting documents be sent to enable payment, alternatively a statement in lieu of the policies may be submitted; seconded by Cllr Rappensber; all in favour.

160.1g. F.I.S.H – Lowestoft Community Church - £1,500 – A query was raised on how much of the grant would be used for food provision compared to church activities and it was suggested to seek reassurance that the majority or all the funding would be used for food provision. Cllr Pearce proposed approval and for the funds to be allocated from the Food and Social Relief budget; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

160.2. To note the acceptance of £500 sponsorship from East Coast College in contribution to the Friday event on the Big Green Weekend – Cllr Brooks proposed LTC's formal thanks be conveyed to East Coast College; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

161. Other financial and governance matters, including:

161.1. Grounds Maintenance:

161.1a. To receive an update on the expenditure against budget for the changes to grounds maintenance operations from 2023/2024, including areas where the budget may be challenged (some aspects may be confidential) – This would be discussed at the next meeting in connection with the year-end balance work.

161.1b. To consider an alternative budget allocation for the ride-on mower should the Grounds Maintenance budget become challenged – On the basis of an anticipated £2,934 surplus in the Offices EMR at the end of 2023-2024, Cllr Pearce proposed there be no change to the allocation and this be considered with the year-end reserve work in April. This was agreed.

161.1c. To consider finance options for the purchase/hire of a tipper vehicle – £30,000 had been ringfenced in the 2024-2025 General Reserves for new lease rental agreements on vehicles, not including existing rentals that are budgeted for separately. Officers confirmed costs to hire both the tipper vehicle and small transit van would be £1,950 a month and £23,400 a year.

Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation be made to Full Council to proceed with that figure and approve the hire arrangements for both vehicles with the budget allocated from the ringfenced £30,000 in General Reserves 2024-2025; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

161.2. To consider the addition of contract or lease responsibilities to the Asset Management Officer job specification (some aspects may be confidential) – Cllr Pearce proposed the oversight and responsibility of tenancy leases and licenses be included on the specification, though they would still be expected to liaise with the Town Clerk, Finance and Governance and Full Council as appropriate with regard to any changes or renewals; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour. The final content of the specification would be decided by the Acting Town Clerk.

161.3. To receive an update regarding obtaining an updated prioritised and costed schedule of works for capital preventative repair work to a building in Sparrows Nest (some aspects may be confidential) – All condition surveys for the buildings in Sparrows Nest had been received and could provide recommendations on actions and costs. Officers were asked to share the 2020 chartered surveyor report with the grounds maintenance team and determine if they would be able to reproduce the report inhouse and undertake the

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works, or if an updated chartered surveyor report was required.

161.4. To consider the list of delegations – This item was deferred to the next meeting, and officers would consider which delegations were necessary for 2024-2025, with any comments from Committee members to be submitted in advance of the meeting. An extraordinary meeting would be considered if more time was required.

161.5. To consider budgeting considerations around the following (some aspects may be confidential):

161.5a. Transition from Hamilton House to Lowestoft Town Hall – The transfer to the Town Hall was likely to occur late 2025 or early 2026.

161.5b. Engagement of Procurement Consultancy services – This related to the construction contract for the Town Hall. A quote within £10,000 had been received where the services included advice on preparing tenders, dealing with clarifications from contractors and acting as an independent party to facilitate the evaluation process.

The anticipated 2023-2024 year-end balance in Consultancy & HR EMR was £29,212.84, of which £19,000 was ring-fenced to offset the entire 2024-2025 Consultancy budget, therefore there would be adequate uncommitted funds to engage the procurement advice.

Cllr Pearce proposed approval for the engagement of the services with a maximum budget of £10,000 to be ring-fenced from the uncommitted £10,212.84 in the Consultancy Reserve. Any further interim project support costs until the end of March 2024 would be allocated from the Staff Contingency. From 1 April 2024 the allocation would revert to the 2024-2025 Consultancy budget. Cllrs Brooks seconded the proposal and a vote was held with all in favour. Cllr Pearce clarified that his proposal included a delegation to the Town Hall Committee to appoint the Procurement Consultancy within the budget.

161.5c. Transition of initially Lottery-funded Town Hall posts to Town Council payroll – Posts such as the Heritage Manager would be lottery funded for the first five years, therefore the Committee needed to track when such roles are due to transition onto direct payroll.

161.5d. Ongoing transitional work around bringing of grounds maintenance operations in-house – The Finance and Information Officer would consider the format and layout of the budget document to map the transition prior to the budget review in September 2024.

161.6. To consider the following budget allocations:

161.6a. Refurbishment works to the Belle Vue Park porch entrance – Cllr Pearce proposed allocation to the Parks Repair and Maintenance 2023-2024 budget; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

161.6b. A storage unit for Friends of Fen Park – Cllr Pearce proposed allocation to the Parks Development budget; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

161.6c. Substation at the Town Hall – Cllr Pearce proposed this be allocated from the £350,000 advance from East Suffolk Council if sufficient funds are left after the strip out costs, degradation work, professional fees and other authorised pre-Permission to Start works. Any amount not covered by the £350,000 would be allocated from the Town Hall Repair and Maintenance budget (up to £40,000) with any further costs funded from the General Reserves, on the condition this be replaced once the first National Lottery Heritage Fund reclaim has been reimbursed. The Finance and Information Officer would confirm the final budget allocation to the Town Hall Project Committee or March Full Council. Cllr Brooks seconded the proposal and a vote was held with all in favour.

161.7. To consider the budget priorities from the Marina Theatre, including a quotation for replacement stage floor – Clarification was required on how often the stage would need

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replacement and be factored into the budget. It was requested that the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee consider building a reserve to cover this expense.

As the Marina Theatre budget had an anticipated year end of £33,900, Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council to approve the payment and allocate the funds from the Marina Theatre EMR cost code 1.

The Acting Town Clerk noted there was no immediate health and safety concern with the stage floor. A recent site visit had found that one of the speaker systems had failed (the quote to replace it was under £6,000), there were concerns about the fire doors and whether replacement was required and there were ongoing works with the emergency lights and the C3s on the maintenance programme. The Committee were advised to consider this item as part of the entire budget for Marina Theatre and consider other items of expenditure required from the budget.

Cllr Pearce amended his proposal for this item of expenditure funded from cost code 1 to be recommended to Full Council as a tentative proposal for authorisation, and for the Facilities Maintenance Officer to provide advice on whether the stage replacement required immediate attention and clarify what other works are needed from the budget; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

161.8. To consider the purchase of a painting and specify a budget allocation (some aspects may be confidential) – Cllr Brooks proposed approval and for the funding to be allocated from the Arts and Heritage budget.

Cllr Rappensberger had investigated that painting and found it listed elsewhere as ‘Rough Seas’. Cllr Pearce seconded the proposal and requested an amendment that its acquirement be subject to officers clarifying with gallery what steps had been taken to verify the authenticity of the painting and if satisfied then proceed with the offer of purchase. Cllr Brooks accepted the amendment and a vote was held with all in favour.

161.9. To consider a nomination of a representative to attend the Suffolk Archives Engagement Working Party – It was agreed for this item to be addressed at the East Suffolk Council Quarterly Liaison meeting to agree a joint response with East Suffolk Council to negotiate representation by users.

At 12:31 Cllr Brooks proposed to suspend standing orders for five minutes; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

Cllr Pearce proposed item 161.12, 161.13 and 161.14 be deferred to the April meeting and a zoom call with members of the tennis club be scheduled for item 161.10 and feedback be provided at the April meeting; seconded by Cllr Brooks who requested the Committee members meet prior to the meeting with the tennis club; all in favour.

161.10. To consider a proposal from Lowestoft Town Tennis Club and make recommendation to Full Council

161.11. To consider the draft tennis club licence and make recommendation to Full Council – This item would be deferred pending a meeting with the tennis club.

161.12. To consider governance terms for the Lowestoft Youth Forum/Council

161.13. To consider the merits of Lowestoft Town Council adopting a bespoke Code of Conduct

161.14. To consider the implementation of the Town Council’s IT Policy with regard to email correspondence

162. Date of the next meeting

9 April 2024 10:30

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Cllr Begum provided apologies for the next meeting.

163. Items for the next agenda and close

The items deferred would be earlier on the next agenda. Cllr Barker requested the supporting documents on youth councils be re-circulated for the next meeting.

164. To resolve that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, namely any employment matters and legal issues relating to the matters on this agenda, including the following:

164.1. Any legal matters, including those above as required – There were no resolutions.

The Chair closed the meeting at 12:36

Signed:

9 April 2024