

Lowestoft Town Council

Extraordinary Meeting

First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE

18:00 on Tuesday 11 December 2018

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Peter Byatt, Neil Coleby, Peter Collecott, Amanda Frost, Ian Graham, Alan Green, Peter Knight, Graham Parker, Keith Patience and Alice Taylor

In Attendance: Shona Bendix (Clerk), James Cox (Communications Assistant) and Lauren Elliott (Committee Clerk)

Public: There were no members of the public in attendance

447. Welcome

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

448. To receive and consider acceptance of apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Barnard, Barron, Bemment, Houghton, Lang and Pitts. Cllrs Alam, Carlton, Eastwood and Ford had not provided apologies and were absent. Cllr Green proposed acceptance of the apologies and noting of the absences; seconded by Cllr Coleby; all in favour.

449. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

The Clerk, Communications Assistant and Committee Clerk declared a pecuniary interest in the NJC 2019-20 national pay scales, to be discussed as part of the consideration of the 2019-20 budget.

450. Public Forum

There were no members of the public in attendance.

451. Consideration of the draft 2019/20 budget and to decide further work to be undertaken in preparation for Council's decision on 18 December

The last date for submission of the precept demand is Friday 25 January 2019, although it is anticipated the precept demand will be decided at the Full Council meeting on 18 December. It was queried whether Standing Orders could be suspended to allow Councillors to speak more than once on this matter this evening. Cllr Graham confirmed this only applies during debate and he will confirm once the meeting has moved into debate. It was queried whether this matter could be deferred until early January so that Councillors may clear their diaries. It was noted that there is a Finance and Governance Committee meeting on 13 December, Full Council meetings on 18 December and 22 January and another Finance and Governance Committee in the interim. As Chair of the Finance and Governance Committee, Cllr Green reminded Councillors that they are welcome to attend the Finance and Governance Committee meetings and comments can also be accepted in writing.

The draft budget was projected at the meeting. There were two options to consider. One was for the capital payment to be included with the precept, giving a total precept of £2.2million. The other was for the application of a loan to cover the capital payment, giving a total precept of £1.8million.

Each of the budget headings were discussed in turn. A meeting was held with Waveney Norse earlier today and additional information was received from their finance team just ahead of the

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meeting, which was given to Councillors at the meeting. A further meeting is being held on 14 December to discuss CCTV and the Clerk is seeking legal advice ahead of this.

Further information provided to Councillors included details of the Waveney Norse contract. The overall cost will remain the same but the way costs are apportioned within it may vary.

Condition surveys across Lowestoft Town Council's assets have highlighted the requirement for capital work totalling £589,000. This includes planned maintenance work for the Marina Theatre which is essential work highlighted by a condition survey paid for by Lowestoft Town Council. A discussion was held as to extent of Waveney District Council's knowledge of the required work. A meeting was held with the Marina Theatre yesterday to further discuss the most urgent works and associated cost. The survey has allocated the identified remedial work a 1 – 5 priority level, with 1 being the most urgent, requiring attention now, and 5 being work which will need to be addressed over a long period. It was queried whether the condition survey is available for Councillors to see. It is too large to circulate via email but a hard copy is available in the office and Councillors are welcome to see it. The survey has previously been scrutinised by the Assets, Inclusion and Development (AID) and Finance and Governance Committees.

Lowestoft Town Council has previously approached Waveney District Council regarding the work required at the Theatre. It was suggested this should be done again, with the backing of every Councillor, to publicly express Lowestoft Town Council's dissatisfaction.

It was queried why Lowestoft Town Council's logo is not displayed on the Marina Theatre's advertising material. Cllr Coleby will take this forward with them.

It was queried how much legally Lowestoft Town Council should have in reserves. The Council's current policy is four months' worth of the precept.

The options of a loan was discussed. The total amount would be £1,665,274 over ten years at a rate of 1.9%, with payments to be made on a six monthly basis. This would lead to an 15.4% increase on Council Tax. Options for grant funding may become available later on. The Council also needs to consider the lifespan of roofs and windows, etc, at all of its assets and ensure a suitable contingency is in place.

It was suggested that other areas of the budget needed to be cut and it was agreed to continue working through the budget to see where potential cuts could be made.

A new budget line of ponds and waterways has been introduced under the heading of open spaces. Lowestoft Town Council had condition surveys completed of the ponds at Gainsborough Drive and Uplands Road North which has identified required work which must be budgeted for.

Consideration is being given to re-introducing leisure fees, but introducing a grant awarding scheme alongside this to assist clubs who have been proactively using the leisure fee waiver to boost their membership and reinvest in their sport. This would bring the total grants budget to £80,000 and it was suggested that this figure is reviewed and reduced. This would demonstrate to the electorate that the Council is making reductions to the budget where it can to reduce the impact on Council Tax.

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It was queried whether there is a provision in the budget for adult gym equipment. There is a provision for play equipment but not gym equipment specifically. The budget for play areas includes £50,000 for refurbishment work, which was a policy decision of the Council.

Lowestoft Town Council's advertisement page in The Bugle was also discussed. This is on the agenda for the Finance and Governance Committee meeting on 13 December, but a decision has already been made by Full Council to continue the advertisement page for 2019-20.

Full Council has approved refurbishment work at the Fen Park and Sparrows Nest public conveniences, using Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding. Waveney District Council have paid to put timed locks on all of Lowestoft Town Council's public conveniences so that Waveney Norse do not have to go to each site to lock and unlock them each day. Lowestoft Town Council has figures on the usage of its public conveniences. It was suggested these should be reviewed and a public consultation opened regarding the future of the lesser-used sites.

The Clerk left the room 19:35

It was explained that the miscellaneous heading includes cyclical asset compliance costs, based on a spreadsheet created by the Facilities and Contracts Manager.

Cllr Byatt left the room 19:36

It was suggested that the provision for Christmas lights could be eliminated from the budget for 2019-20, as well as tablets for Councillors, as the current Councillors all have their own electronic devices.

Cllr Byatt returned 19:38

The Clerk returned 19:38

The provision of allotments was discussed and it was confirmed that the Town Council has an obligation to cater for the demand for allotments where it can.

Cllr Patience left the room 19:48

Other than the Marina Theatre, a large portion of the capital expenditure relates to required expenditure in response to a condition survey.

Cllr Patience returned 19:49

A portion of the capital expenditure is for work required at the Denes Oval. It was suggested that Waveney Norse should be contacted to see if they have the moulds for the walls.

As part of the office costs, money is being sent aside to try and pay the capital repayment within five years rather than ten, which was a policy decision of Full Council. To revisit this decision the Standing Orders and the original decision of the Council would need to be checked.

For the staff budget it was suggested that the provision for an apprentice is removed for 2019-20, but still include the line in the budget for future years. It was agreed that this would be a preferable option to completely removing the grants budget. The staff budget also includes provision for the NJC national 2019-20 pay scales.

The training budget includes a provision for the Deputy Clerk to embark on two year degree course. It also includes the provision for Continuous Personal Development (CPD) for Councillors and staff alike. It was agreed the need for the training budget is important.

In terms of anticipated expenditure, it was noted that 2020 will mark the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE Day), for which commemorative events will be taking place.

452. Consideration of how to meet the 2019/20 budget needs:

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452.1 Precept – This was covered by the discussion of item 451.

452.2 Service changes – This was covered by the discussion of item 451.

452.3 Potential loan

452.3a Consideration of applying for borrowing approval for a loan for capital works, including for the Marina Theatre - It was proposed by Cllr Taylor and seconded by Cllr Knight for the Clerk to explore every possibility of obtaining a loan; all in favour.

452.3b Consideration of the impact of any loan on the Council's budget and precept – This was covered by the discussion of item 451.

452.3c Consideration of any specific steps to be taken in relation to community engagement – This is linked to the process of applying for a loan. Consideration needs to include whether the project is worthwhile, whether getting a loan is a good idea and whether an increase to the precept for that purpose is a good idea. Community engagement is required. A community survey was already completed earlier in the year and the results of that will be considered again for this purpose. Any such community engagement would be advertised on the Town Council's website and Facebook page and through local press. A business plan is required and consultation on the loan, the amount of it, the purpose of it and the exact impact on the precept. It was suggested that the burden on the taxpayer should be as minimal as possible. It was agreed for the Clerk to do everything necessary towards obtaining the loan of £1,665,274 and commence the necessary community engagement in relation to that. This will be reported back to the Finance and Governance Committee and Full Council.

Cllrs Coleby, Graham, Green and the Communications Assistant can talk through the budget with the local press if necessary.

453. Date of the next meeting

18 December 19:30

454. Items for the next agenda

There were no items raised for discussion.

455. Resolution to close the meeting to the public

There were no confidential matters for consideration.

The Chair closed the meeting 20:13.

Signed:

18 December 2018