

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee
Via Video Meeting
14:00 on 16 November 2020

MINUTES

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

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

46. 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.

47. Apologies for absence

There were none.

48. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

Cllr Green declared a local non-pecuniary interest in item 53.1, although the purchase of new Mayoral robes would be to the benefit of future Mayors also.

49. Receipt of any comments and noting that the draft minutes of the meetings on 9 November 2020 will be considered at the next appropriate meeting

There were no comments and the draft minutes were noted.

50. Any advance comments from the public on any matters on this agenda

A comment had been received and was displayed. Regarding item 53.1, it was requested that consideration be given to ensuring any replacement Mayoral robes are vegan-friendly and locally produced. This Sub-Committee will only be considering the budget provision for the robes, not their design. Regarding item 53.4, it was requested that the Council does not overlook its smaller play areas.

51. Noting that the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee are considering Committee and Sub-Committee structures and Terms of Reference, and considering whether to submit any comments

The review will be taking place in January. This Sub-Committee would like to see a mechanism put in place with the other Committees and Sub-Committees going forward, to feed in their budget priorities and considerations to the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee at the start of the budget-setting process.

52. Consideration of the 2020 – 2021 Lowestoft Town Council Budget, including the following:

52.1 The adequacy of the Repairs and Maintenance budget (confidential) – To be discussed during the confidential session.

53. Consideration of the 2021 – 2022 Lowestoft Town Council Budget, including the following:

53.1 How and when to proceed with the purchase of replacement Mayoral robes – There are existing funds in the civic budget for this purpose. There has been a decision by Full Council to proceed with the purchase, and there has been a resolution to ensure the replacement robes contain no animal products. The Deputy Clerk has started researching options. It was agreed to carry this item forward to the next agenda.

53.2 Whether any charges will be imposed for the use of the Town Council's sports and leisure facilities – This Sub-Committee has already agreed as working premise not to reinstate charges. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to the Finance and Governance Committee not to impose charges for the use of the Town Council's sports and leisure facilities in 2021 – 2022, with the requirement that sports clubs benefitting

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- from the fee waiver must produce an annual report to the Council on how the funds saved have been reinvested; seconded by Cllr Coleby; all in favour.
- 53.3 A budget provision for making climate emergency related adjustments at Town Council owned assets – There have been no specific recommendations at this stage, but there have been discussions about replacing standard lightbulbs with LED ones instead, at premises owned by the Town Council. It was suggested that a general climate emergency budget, for progressing climate emergency and environmentally linked improvements, could be introduced, rather than incorporating individual allocations per cost centre in the budget. Although it was difficult to quantify these adjustments at present - as five-year plans for parks are still being discussed – it was agreed that an initial figure of £20,000 - £25,000 should be sufficient, and could be increased or decreased in future years as required. Could put in initial figure and see how it goes, then increase/decrease in future as needed. The Finance and Governance Committee has approved the decision to divert £7,000 from the electric vehicles and bicycles budget, £4,500 from the IT budget and £4,500 for the furniture and equipment budget to form the £16,000 budget for amplification improvements and recording/broadcasting provision for meetings at Hamilton House. It was confirmed that those budget headings should be included in the 2021 – 2022 budget and replenished, as this proposal was only made as those budgets were unlikely to be spent in the current civic year. Cllr Pearce proposed allocating £25,000 to climate emergency related adjustments in 2021 – 2022, under a separate budget heading, with any underspend being allocated to a climate emergency reserve; seconded by Cllr Coleby; all in favour.
- 53.4 The budget provision for play area improvements, including noting the Finance and Governance Committee’s consideration of the cost of improvements to Whitton Green – It is intended that there will be an open tender process should the project proceed. The Finance and Governance Committee has now put forward a recommendation to Full Council to ring fence additional funds in the play areas reserve. £50,000 has been provisionally included in the 2021 – 2022 budget for play area improvements, but the Council has not yet selected which play area to improve next. This Sub-Committee would like a steer from the Assets, Inclusion and Development (AID) Committee or the Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee. The cost of the Whitton Green project increased, and the pandemic may have an ongoing impact on the cost of materials and labour. Cllr Coleby proposed keeping the budget provision for play area improvements for 2021 – 2022 as £50,000 for now, but to consider increasing if there is any scope to do so as budget considerations progress; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour. Further to the comment raised by the member of the public, play equipment at St Margaret’s Plain should be repainted from the repairs and maintenance budget. There are two play areas in the Montgomery Avenue area. Gunton Community Park is owned by the Town Council and is relatively new and well equipped. There is another on Spashett Green which does not belong to the Town Council. It was reported that the play areas on Thirlmere Walk and Bentley Drive would also benefit from repainting, and a full renovation of the Sparrows Nest play area has previously been discussed. The AID Committee and Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee will further consider play area improvement works.
- 53.5 The decision of the Finance and Governance Committee regarding the diversion of funds to support amplification improvements and broadcasting and recording provisions at Hamilton House, and to ensure this is accurately reflected in the budget – Officers have made the necessary adjustments in the budget. The diverted funds will be replenished in the 2021 – 2022 budget.
- 53.6 The Administration budget contingency and general reserves contribution – Funds have generally been set aside each year to build up the Council’s reserves. The Council has

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achieved its target to maintain general reserves equivalent to four months' precept, and now has aspirations to maintain general reserves equivalent to six months' precept, although no specific target date has been set at this stage.

53.7 Whether to progress a loan application for capital works – Much of the work to be progressed under the loan application was for the Marina Theatre, although it is still not known when the Theatre can fully reopen. The Denes Oval perimeter wall was also to be included, along with another asset potentially, which will be discussed in more detail during the confidential session.

53.8 Any additional repairs costs, including the Fen Park bridge and pond – An environmental assessment of the pond is pending. No budget has been agreed yet for the bridge, and quotations are being sought.

Cllr Pearce temporarily left the meeting 14:41

There is also a wooden bridge in Kensington Gardens and it was suggested they should be assessed to give an estimated lifespan. The Fen Park bridge has recently had some strengthening work carried out and the cost of replacement of that bridge should give an indication of the costs for any others owned by the Town Council.

Cllr Pearce returned 14:44

53.9 The adequacy of the budget provision for The Ness (confidential) – To be discussed during the confidential session.

53.10 Information on which aspects of the budget are contractual and non-negotiable, and how this will inform the precept (confidential) – To be discussed during the confidential session.

53.11 The staffing budget, contingency and reserves (confidential) – To be discussed during the confidential session.

53.12 Future funding of the Marina Theatre (confidential) – To be discussed during the confidential session.

53.13 Future funding of the Norse contract (confidential) – To be discussed during the confidential session.

54. Date of the next meeting

Monday 23 November 2020 14:00

55. Items for the next Agenda and Close

There were no requests for items to be added to the next agenda.

Cllr Pearce proposed moving the meeting into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Coleby; 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.

56. Resolution to close the meeting to the public

The Council has been discussing the provision of Christmas lights, or an alternative, in 2021. There is a budget provision of £20,000 in the current civic year, and provisionally £20,000 for the 2021 – 2022 civic year also. This may be decreased depending on what the Council chooses to do for the 2021 – 2022 civic year.

52.1 The adequacy of the Repairs and Maintenance budget (confidential) – The cost of repair work to the Town Hall was discussed, and it is understood the repairs and maintenance budget provision for 2021 – 2022 should be sufficient.

Cllr Pearce temporarily left the meeting 14:56

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53.9 The adequacy of the budget provision for The Ness (confidential) – It was thought initially that the budget provision for The Ness would be more than adequate, but there are concerns now that it will not be sufficient.

Cllr Pearce returned 14:57

The budget provision for The Ness was discussed. Cllr Coleby made a confidential proposal; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour.

53.10 Information on which aspects of the budget are contractual and non-negotiable, and how this will inform the precept (confidential)

Cllr Parker left the meeting 15:19

There were confidential discussions regarding each of the budget headings.

53.11 The staffing budget, contingency and reserves (confidential) – There were no updates for consideration at this meeting.

53.13 Future funding of the Norse contract (confidential) – There were no updates for consideration at this meeting.

A comfort break was taken 16:03 and the meeting resumed 16:09

53.12 Future funding of the Marina Theatre (confidential) Marina theatre – There was a confidential discussion regarding the schedule of works for the Theatre.

Signed:

23 November 2020