

Lowestoft Town Council
Extraordinary Meeting of the Personnel Committee
First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
13:00 on 21 June 2023

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Sonia Barker, Wendy Brooks, Alan Green (Chair), Jen Jones, Andy Pearce and Elise Youngman

In attendance: Shona Bendix (Clerk) and Lauren Elliott (Project and Committee Clerk)

Public: There were no members of the public in attendance (either in person or via Zoom webinar)

1. Welcome

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

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr Sonia Barker, with reasons provided. Cllr E Youngman had advised she would be late. Cllr Brooks proposed to approve the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

3. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

3.1. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable interests from councillors on items on the agenda – There were none.

3.2. Written requests for dispensations for interests and note dispensations granted – There were none.

4. The draft minutes and confidential note of the meeting on 6 April 2023

Some members had experienced difficulty accessing the confidential notes. It was agreed to defer the draft minutes and confidential note and the Project and Committee Clerk will circulate a new password to access the confidential note.

5. Public forum

No advance comments had been received and there were no members of the public in attendance.

6. Review and adoption of Committee arrangements

6.1. Membership of the Personnel Committee – Membership was noted as Cllrs Barker, Brooks, Green, Jones, Newsome, Parker, Pearce and E Youngman.

6.2. Appointing the Deputy Chair of the Personnel Committee – Cllr Brooks nominated herself but the proposal was not seconded. An inappropriate word was said and an apology given for this. Cllrs Brooks and Pearce expressed concerns regarding provocation. Cllr Green called the meeting to order. No Deputy Chair was appointed and this would be deferred to the next meeting.

7. The Redundancy Policy, including whether to include redundancy arrangements in terms and conditions of employment

Cllr E Youngman arrived 13:08

Cllr Pearce observed there appeared to be no recorded decision to support the terms in the policy to pay redundancy payments at two times the statutory entitlement. Cllr Pearce did not wish to see the rights of any existing staff removed, but equally did not consider it appropriate to apply this as a blanket entitlement for all future staff, and it had therefore been suggested to enshrine this in individual staff's terms and conditions. The Clerk had been liaising with the Council's Human Resources provider and could not recall there being any issues. An amendment to the policy would be considered by the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee, or the Finance and Governance Committee if the Sub-Committee is unable to

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meet. An update on the liaison with the Human Resources provider will be provided to the relevant Committees and Full Council.

8. The implementation of the Town Council's Wellbeing Policies

Cllr Brooks requested clarification of the process Councillors should follow when requiring assistance due to stress caused by the Council, and need to be made aware to contact the Clerk. Cllr Pearce had raised a request for support under the Wellbeing Policy and noted Council may be limited in the action it can take depending on the nature of the request. In certain cases a Code of Conduct complaint would need to be made. Cllr Pearce suggested that the request should be directed to the Mayor, Chair of the Personnel Committee and the Clerk in the first instance, who should provide an acknowledgement within three working days and further updates every ten working days until it is resolved.

The Clerk advised that some officers have received mental health first aid training. It had been discussed that informal monthly gatherings for Councillors could be arranged, with guest speakers. Officers hold mental health sessions to discuss any issues affecting staff and other people that officers deal with. Safeguarding is also considered where officers may be dealing with members of the public who may have mental health issues.

Cllr Brooks disagreed with involving the Mayor and Chair of the Personnel Committee as this could remove confidentiality and the Councillors fulfilling those roles may not have received appropriate training. Cllr Brooks wished to see a system to encourage Councillors to treat one another with respect and to respect differing opinions.

Cllr Jones advised she is also mental health first aid trained and considered resilience to be different for everyone.

Cllr Pearce clarified that his suggestion was for requests to be directed to the Mayor, Chair of the Personnel Committee and the Clerk in the first instance, to identify it as a request under the Wellbeing Policy, respect confidentiality and decide who the request should be referred to.

Cllr Pearce proposed that the individual submitting the request should submit it to whomever they consider most appropriate to handle it, which could be the Clerk, Mayor or Chair of the Personnel Committee. It should then be identified as a request under the Wellbeing Policy, with the individual's confidentiality being respected. The request should be formally acknowledged within three working days of receipt, with updates to be provided every ten working days until resolved. Cllr Brooks disagreed and suggested that requests should be submitted to the Clerk in the first instance.

Cllr Jones temporarily left the meeting 13:24

The Clerk advised that Councillors may feel comfortable speaking with someone individually, but should they wish to access a service paid for by the Council, those requests would need to be made to the Clerk or the Deputy Clerk.

Cllr Jones returned 13:26

Councillors would not be required to discuss details of their request when seeking to access a service via the Clerk or Deputy Clerk. The Clerk offered to put something together to amend the policies and this may affect the Staff Wellbeing Policy as well. This will include timescales and an appropriate route whereby the Clerk has to sign off the process, and a second tier arrangement. Cllr Pearce proposed this, so long as it includes provision for a prompt initial acknowledgement then periodic updates until the matter is resolved, which Cllr Pearce suggested should be intervals of no longer than ten working days; seconded by Cllr Jones; all in favour.

9. The Appraisals Guidance

Cllr Brooks advised that it had been agreed that the Mayor, Chair of the Personnel Committee and their respective Deputies would receive appropriate appraisals training within six months of the Annual Meeting and prior to conducting the Clerk's appraisal. Cllr Green advised he had received training previously. Officers will source appropriate training.

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10. A request from the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee to consider the provision of Park Wardens

Cllr Pearce did not consider this to be something which the Council could undertake at present. This was intended by the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee as a visible deterrent to anti-social behaviour. Cllr Pearce suggested this should be considered as part of a wider strategy as an alternative to CCTV, rather than in isolation. Cllr Pearce suggested opening discussions again with East Suffolk Council to seek the new administration's views on CCTV.

11. Signing up to be Disability Confident

It was agreed for officers to put a proposal together on how to implement at least the first tier. Cllr Pearce suggested this should include hidden and mental health disabilities.

12. IT training for all Councillors

The Clerk advised that training sessions were being arranged, including a potential third date or bespoke session for those unable to attend either of the scheduled sessions.

13. An update from the Clerk on any staffing issues (some aspects may be confidential)

To be discussed during the confidential session.

14. Planned timeframe and oversight arrangements for approved recruitment and transition in organisational structure (confidential)

To be discussed during the confidential session.

15. An update on current and future staffing, including for grounds maintenance (confidential)

To be discussed during the confidential session.

16. A policy decision on reimbursement when using RingGo car park charge (confidential)

Cllr Green noted that RingGo has a facility to provide a reminder when a car parking session is due to expire, at a cost of £0.20. This should not be required when officers are parking all day, but may be useful for a shorter session or when officers are visiting sites. Cllr Pearce clarified that the Town Council would not be responsible for paying any parking fines incurred by officers. Cllr Pearce proposed to leave to officers' discretion to decide whether a reminder about their car parking session is required, and if so that it should be added to their expenses claim and reimbursed. The Clerk advised that she has a delegation to reimburse car parking expenses and the Committee confirmed it was happy for the Clerk to exercise her delegation to use her discretion to determine whether a reminder is required and should therefore be reimbursed. Officers will be reminded to ensure this is not automatically applied when they are parking all day, but it may be acceptable in circumstances where they are parking at a site for a shorter period. Cllr Green seconded Cllr Pearce's proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

17. Date of the next meeting

3 August 2023 14:00 – Cllr Pearce proposed 13:00 as the meeting time and for meetings to be held monthly for this civic year, between August and March, to be reviewed again for the next civic year. Cllr Green seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

Cllr Barker arrived 13:51

18. Items for the next agenda and close

Councillors were advised to email requests to the office. Cllr Pearce proposed moving the meeting into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Jones; all in favour.

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19. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:

19.1. Any employment matters relating to items on this agenda, including those above as required:

13. An update from the Clerk on any staffing issues (some aspects may be confidential)

14. Planned timeframe and oversight arrangements for approved recruitment and transition in organisational structure (confidential)

15. An update on current and future staffing, including for grounds maintenance (confidential)

Items 13, 14 and 15 were considered together. The Clerk reported on some issues, which were being dealt with as this Committee would expect.

The Clerk provided an update on arrangements from July.

There was a discussion regarding the recruitment of an apprentice.

The Clerk provided an update on the Asset Management Officer position and offered to put together further information for the Council to consider.

Cllr Pearce requested consideration of transitional arrangements for the Town Hall at an appropriate time.

Cllr Brooks was concerned that the Town Council may be working with contractors and organisations whose ethos and views may be counter to the Town Council's and may require the consideration of Full Council.

Cllr E Youngman temporarily left the meeting 14:31 and returned 14:33

The Clerk advised that officers had been able to do more around tenant management and changing legislation would further enable this.

Cllr Jones left the meeting 14:35

The meeting was closed at 14:36.

Signed:

3 August 2023