

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee
Via Video Meeting
14:00 on 12 April 2021

MINUTES

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

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

151. Welcome

A minute's silence to mark the passing of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, was observed.

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.

152. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Neil Coleby. Cllr Pearce proposed acceptance of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Parker; all in favour.

153. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

There were none.

154. Receipt of any comments and noting that the draft minutes of the meeting on 1 February 2021 will be considered at the next appropriate meeting

The draft minutes were noted.

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

There were none.

156. The 2020 – 2021 end of year Lowestoft Town Council Budget and reserves position

Where earmarked reserves exist it has been agreed that any underspends in the 2020 – 2021 budget will be carried forward against the same earmarked reserve rather than being allocated to general reserves. This position has been endorsed by the Finance and Governance Committee. The Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee is considering five-year plans and has identified bench and bin provision as priorities. This could mean quite significant capital expenditure over the next couple of years.

The Clerk temporarily left the meeting 14:06

Cllr Pearce proposed that if there is an underspend against the parks development budget in 2020 – 2021 that it is carried forward to the 2021 – 2022 budget as an accrual, rather than being allocated to an earmarked reserve; seconded by Cllr Parker; all in favour.

The Clerk returned 14:07

157. The 2021 – 2022 Lowestoft Town Council Budget and embedding a five-year budgeting plan (some aspects may be confidential)

Cllr Pearce has been looking at how to reduce the number of tabs on the budget spreadsheet, and will circulate his suggestions later this week. Any agreed changes will not take effect until the next budget-setting round begins later this year, but a template can be agreed beforehand. It was suggested that detailed work plans could be drawn up with the Council's grounds maintenance contractor over five years to inform the budget. The work the Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee has been doing with the five-year plans should also be incorporated. The Council has previously made a commitment to completely refurbish at least one play area per year, so it was suggested that the Council could strategically identify its priorities in this respect for the next five years. Similarly, the Toilet Strategy Working Group could consider priorities for the refurbishment of public

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conveniences. A budget has been agreed for this purpose and Fen Park and Sparrows Nest have been identified as the priorities for the 2021 – 2022 year. The Council has committed to maintain general reserves equivalent to six months' worth of precept. A strategy needs to be embedded to achieve this. Cllr Coleby has made major contributions to the five-year plans and it was agreed that any works requiring financial input should be built into the five year financing plans. Some data about the financial needs already exists and has been built in. Cllr Green offered to discuss this in more detail with Cllr Coleby. The Council frequently receives questions from members of the public asking when certain works will be taking place and it would like to be able to provide more specific answers. Some of this data is available from condition surveys, which advise when certain works should take place.

158. The format of the 2022 – 2023 Lowestoft Town Council Budget (some aspects may be confidential)

This was covered with the discussion of the previous item and Cllr Pearce will circulate his suggestions. Arrangements for condition surveys were discussed and officers keep a schedule of when they are due at each site. The surveys are already instructable by the Clerk and any emergency works arising as a result can be instructed under delegated authority. It would be beneficial for this Sub-Committee to annually review the schedule of surveys to inform the budgeting process. Cllr Pearce proposed scheduling an annual review of the condition survey schedule, with the input of the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee also, in July, prior to the start of the next budget-setting process, and for detail from the condition survey work to form part of the annual budget-setting process; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour. It was queried whether the Council has details of the labour cost and the equipment cost of replacing all apparatus within its play areas. For most sites it does not, as the grounds maintenance contractor would take direction from the Council. The equipment at The Ness has a relatively short life span due to the environment it is in. The capital cost of the equipment is known and the Council is setting aside funds each year to accumulate the budget to replace it. As parks are refurbished the Council could consider when they would need to be refurbished again and set aside funds for this purpose. The effect of vandalism should also be factored in. There is also the question of insurance when items are damaged and this will be discussed further. Play equipment is inspected annually so the Council can look at the previous report and any subsequent work to see if it would be minded to set aside a greater sum for replacement. The Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee will consider this initially as part of the five-year plans. The Council could scrutinise the robustness of play equipment more carefully, but always uses reputable companies and warranties do apply. Manufacturers should know the lifespan of the equipment but the Council may not always be given this information as standard.

The Council is having to deal with recent incidents of eco-vandalism and the legal budget has not been set with this type of offence in mind. The Council may wish to pursue private prosecutions and funding may need to be set aside for this purpose. The Police have been very supportive and it is not yet known whether a case can be pursued and so it is very difficult for budget provision to be made in advance. The Council needs to consider its policy position on measures to counter environmental vandalism, replacing items which have been destroyed and measures to safeguard the environment. There is a policy on the replacement of trees which should be adhered to. It has been discussed that trees recently removed should be replaced with more established trees if possible. The Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee will consider this initially. It was suggested that the Council may wish to build up a budget for environmental repairs and maintenance in the same way it

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does for its buildings. The Community Wardens will be a positive presence in the town and should act as a deterrent to vandalism.

159. Date of the next meeting

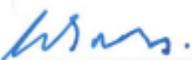
Monday 12 July 2021 14:00 – The Sub-Committee agreed it would like to meet in the first month following the Annual Meeting. The date of the next meeting was agreed as 7 June at 14:00.

160. Items for the next Agenda and Close

It was requested that item 158 be carried forward to the next agenda. Item 156 may also require further discussion after the Annual Meeting and this Sub-Committee needs to ensure the reserve targeting is still accurate, particularly the staffing reserve when the staff base will almost be doubled. The Clerk will produce information on what an appropriate staff reserve would be.

The Chair thanked those who had been viewing the livestream of the meeting. There were no confidential matters for consideration and the Chair closed the meeting 15:04.

161. Resolution to close the meeting to the public

Signed: 

7 June 2021