

# Lowestoft Town Council

## Meeting of the Finance and Governance Committee

Via Video Meeting  
16:45 on 14 January 2021

### MINUTES

**Video meeting participants:** Cllrs Sue Barnard, Neil Coleby, Alan Green, Paul Page, Graham Parker, Andy Pearce (Chair) and David Youngman

**Also participating:** Shona Bendix (Clerk) and Lauren Elliott (Committee Clerk)

#### 115. 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.

#### 116. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Alice Taylor. Cllr John Pitts had not provided apologies and was absent. Cllr Barnard proposed acceptance of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Coleby; all in favour.

#### 117. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

Regarding item 124.10, Cllr Barnard declared that she is a member of the Committee of the Local Archaeology and History Society but is not associated with the Lowestoft Museum.

#### 118. Receipt of any comments and noting that the minutes of the meeting of 10 December 2020 will be considered at the next appropriate meeting

The draft minutes were noted.

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

A comment had been received from a member of the public regarding item 124.3a, imploring the Council to consider what the Lowestoft Town Tennis Club is offering to the community before it considers passing over any facilities to the club. This comment will be taken under consideration at the relevant agenda item.

#### 120. Budget:

120.1. Monitoring the budget for 2020 – 2021 – The budget monitoring documentation had been circulated and there were no comments.

120.2. Bank reconciliations – Cllr Page confirmed he had checked and verified November's bank reconciliation.

120.3. A maximum budget for wildflower areas at Clarkes Lane and Daffodil Walk – An indicative quote of £24,000 had been received. It was suggested that additional, detailed quotes be sought. It is understood the scope of the indicative quote covers preparation of the area and purchase of the seeds, and possibly grass suppressant. Weed killer would be a cheaper alternative, but the Council has adopted a policy on the use of weed killer. Additional comparative quotes will be sought for this Committee to consider and make a recommendation to Full Council.

120.4. Receiving the draft minutes from the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee meetings on 14 and 21 December 2020 and 4 January 2021 – The draft minutes were noted.

120.5. Recommendations on the 2021 – 2022 budget and precept, taking account of the following recommendations from the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee:

120.5a. An additional budget of £25,000 for Christmas lights – It was clarified that the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee is not recommending that this is the amount spent on Christmas lights, nor has it recommended a specific option on the type of lights. The Sub-Committee had hoped to have a steer from Full Council on its preferred option. Projectors are cheaper but the projector itself needs to be indoors. Some braided lights can be left up all year round, which would be a cost saving, but would require permission from Suffolk County Council. The proposed budget is a

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contingency for the most expensive option. Any underspend could be allocated to reserves or be redirected. The contract with the current provider has ended, but they have offered to extend the contract for a further year, for which the cost could be negotiated and the product changed, based on the Council's preference. It was suggested that wildflower areas are more in keeping with the Council's environmental policies. This is a contingency and has been included in the draft budget which will be considered by Full Council. Its intended purpose is as a maximum budget for the provision of Christmas lights, but if it is decided that this is not appropriate, funds could be diverted through the proper process. Should the Council opt for braided lights, the biggest cost would be the purchase of the lights for London Road South and provision of the necessary infrastructure. The Council previously made a decision to install Christmas lights along London Road South in 2020, but there was insufficient time to install the necessary infrastructure. Now that the existing contract has ended, the Council needs to consider the provision of Christmas lights as a whole for 2021. Cllr Barnard proposed a recommendation to Full Council to approve the recommendation from the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee of an additional budget of £25,000 for Christmas lights, but ensuring it is phrased within the budget as Christmas lights/contingency; seconded by Cllr Page; all in favour.

120.5b. Allocating the Local Council Tax Support Grant from East Suffolk Council – It was reported at the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee meeting that the Town Council may be receiving this grant, and since the meeting this has been confirmed formally. The Council Tax base position is better than first thought, and this has already been reflected in the draft budget. The grant of £52,405 will be paid at the time of the first precept payment, on 30 April 2021. A Government grant channelled through East Suffolk Council, the grant is intended to help the Town Council deal with the funding shortfall which has occurred due to the pandemic. Since formal notification of the grant has only recently been received, it has not been reflected in the draft budget and precept. If confirmed, the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee recommended that the grant should be allocated to general reserves and not be deducted from the existing precept recommendation, as it had not been allowed for in the budget. It was queried whether this could now be added into general reserves in the draft budget, and East Suffolk Council instructed to deduct it from the precept, subject to Full Council's approval of the draft budget, thus maintaining the same position. It was confirmed that the figure can be added as anticipated income and can be allocated however the Council decides. It can be allocated to reserves, which have decreased due to the current situation. This would support projects the Council wishes to undertake. The recommendation from the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee was to allocate the grant funding directly to general reserves. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council to support that recommendation from the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee; seconded by Cllr Parker; six Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor abstained from the vote.

120.5c. Applying a -1.54% decrease for the 2021 - 2022 precept demand – The 1.54% decrease would be on the Council Tax bills, rather than on the precept demand. This has been recommended by the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee, in light of the latest information about the Council Tax base position. It has been agreed that three options would be presented to Full Council – a 1.54% decrease, a 0% increase and a 2% increase. The draft budget document has been prepared and circulated, and was shared at the meeting. Should the Council agree to the 1.54% decrease, the precept would reduce from £1,837,731 in the current financial year to £1,765,245 in the 2021 – 2022 year. Should the Council instead opt for a 0% increase the precept would be £1,792,774. A 2% increase would result in a precept of £1,828,629. An underspend on the staffing budget in the current year will be used towards funding the new staff due to be appointed in July. It is however anticipated that there will

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not be this level of underspend in the 2021 – 2022 year. Some areas of capital expenditure are expected. It has been identified where within the budget the funds can come from, but this would need to be replenished, which will be considered when the 2022 – 2023 budget considerations begin. The Budget and Loan Sub-Committee would like to look at a five year plan to even out to make considerations more consistent and spread any increases over a longer term. The loan for the Marina Theatre box office building could be repaid more quickly, rather than reducing the precept, but the interest rate is low and this may not equate to much of a saving, particularly if early repayment charges apply. Also, the Council has income to cover the repayments most years. If the Theatre remains closed the situation may need to be reviewed. It was queried whether the grant will reduce the precept. The grant is from Central Government and is intended to assist Parish Councils with their budget costs so they do not have to precept from the public. At the time of the last Budget and Loan Sub-Committee meeting the grant had not been confirmed and so was not factored into the budget, and that Sub-Committee agreed the money should be allocated to general reserves, but not deducted from the draft precept. Now that the grant is confirmed this can be added into the draft budget under the general reserves heading, so if East Suffolk Council deducts the sum from the precept it would not change the situation. It is likely there will be unanticipated expenditure during the year so it was suggested that, should the 1.54% reduction option be selected by Full Council, the precept demand should still be submitted as £1,765,245, with the grant as additional income, to be allocated to general reserves. Cllr Coleby proposed a recommendation to Full Council to accept the budget as prepared, setting the precept at £1,765,245, in line with the option of a 1.54% decrease in Council Tax bills compared to the 2020 – 2021 year. Cllr Coleby further proposed that the grant payment be allocated to general reserves as an additional amount of income; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour. There was a vote of thanks to officers and the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee for their work on the budget.

**121. Payments:**

121.1. The income and expenditure reports for December 2020 and January 2021 to date, including payments made under delegated authority (see schedules) – The reports were received and noted as follows:

*Table 1 December Income*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Received from</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Amount</b>
1 December 2020	Lamarti	Use of Links Road Car Park	£360 + £72 VAT = £432
7 December 2020	Market income	Weekly market income 7 December 2020	£42.50
14 December 2020	Market income	Weekly market income 14 December 2020	£42.50
21 December 2020	Market income	Weekly market income 21 December 2020	£42.50
24 December 2020	Tenant	Rental income from tenant	£213.16
24 December 2020	Tenant	Rental income from tenant	£1,000
29 December 2020	Market income	Weekly market income 29 December 2020	£18.50
29 December 2020	Tenant	Rental income from tenant	£10,000

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Table 2 December Expenditure

<b>Date</b>	<b>Payment to</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Amount</b>
1 December 2020	East Suffolk Council	Pakefield Street PC business rates	£122
1 December 2020	East Suffolk Council	Kensington Gardens PC business rates	£210
1 December 2020	East Suffolk Council	Sparrows Nest bowls pavilion business rates	£110
1 December 2020	East Suffolk Council	Links Road car park business rates	£187
1 December 2020	East Suffolk Council	Triangle Market PC business rates	£117
1 December 2020	Zurich Municipal	Insurance for the Ness	£527.96
4 December 2020	SCC Pension Fund	Pensions November 2020	£4,438.65
7 December 2020	Blachere Illuminations	Christmas Light uninstillation	£2,349 + £469.84 VAT = £2,819.04
7 December 2020	Liquid DJ	VJ Day event Sound	£400
7 December 2020	Michlmayr	Annual service to Town Hall clock	£314 + £62.80 VAT = £376.80
7 December 2020	Henry Baker	Lest we Forget Video	£175
7 December 2020	BSA Security	Gunton Hall Alarm	£80.40
8 December 2020	NPower	Electricity Charges	£214.11
8 December 2020	NPower	Electricity Charges	£124.79
8 December 2020	NPower	Electricity Charges	£74.70
8 December 2020	NPower	Electricity Charges	£71.42
8 December 2020	NPower	Electricity Charges	£93.37
8 December 2020	NPower	Electricity Charges	£63.18
10 December 2020	NALC	Leaders Talk Planning for the Future Webinar	£43.09 + £8.62 VAT = £51.71
16 December 2020	Gazprom Energy	Town Hall gas	£44.22
16 December 2020	Lloyds Bank Account	Credit card charges	£72.89
18 December 2020	Need2Store Ltd	Civic artefact storage	£200 + £40 VAT = £240
18 December 2020	East Point Business Services	Service charge	£7,397.50 + £1,479.50 VAT = £8,877
18 December 2020	British Hamper Company	Hamper overpayment refund	-£37.50 + -£7.50 VAT = -£45
21 December 2020	East Suffolk Norse	Clearing of rubbish Denes Oval	£400 + £80 VAT = £480
21 December 2020	Fibre Management	Marina Theatre asbestos survey	£3,100 + £620 VAT = £3,720
21 December 2020	Marina Theatre Trust	Marina Theatre management fee	£37,500 + £7,500 VAT = £45,000
21 December 2020	East Point Business Services	Hamilton House rent	£3,675 + £735 VAT = £4,410
21 December 2020	East Point Business Services	Hamilton House capital repay	£3,357.40 + £671.48 VAT = £4,028.88
21 December 2020	HMRC	HMRC November 2020	£4,211.62
23 December 2020	Salaries	Salaries December 2020	£10,248.01

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Date	Payment to	Description	Amount
31 December 2020	NPower	Electricity charges	£100.59 + £5.03 VAT = £105.62
31 December 2020	Unity Trust Bank	Bank charges	£40.65

*Table 3 January Income*

Date	Received from	Description	Amount
4 January 2021	Market Income	Weekly Market Income	£54.50
8 January 2021	East Suffolk Council	Refund for Planning Application	£231
11 January 2021	Market Income	Weekly market Income	£18.50

*Table 4 January Expenditure*

Date	Payment to	Description	Amount
4 January 2021	East Suffolk Council	Pakefield Street PC business rates	£122
4 January 2021	East Suffolk Council	Kensington Gardens PC business rates	£210
4 January 2021	East Suffolk Council	Sparrows Nest bowls pavilion business rates	£110
4 January 2021	East Suffolk Council	Links Road car park business rates	£187
4 January 2021	East Suffolk Council	Triangle Market PC business rates	£117
6 January 2021	Suffolk Pension Fund	Pensions December 2020	£4,438.65
8 January 2021	NPower	Electricity Charges	£352.93

- 121.2. Any payments for approval (see schedule) – There was no schedule of payments for approval, only those itemised later on the agenda.
- 121.3. Applications made under the COVID-19 Grant Awarding Policy – Since the last meeting, an application for £1,500 from Disability Advice North East Suffolk had been received and approved.

**122. Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee**

- 122.1. Receiving the draft minutes from the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee meeting on 16 December 2020 – The draft minutes were noted.
- 122.2. Recommendations from the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee:
- 122.2a. Adopting the Mulch Policy – Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council to adopt those policies and procedures as specified in items 122.2a – 122.2d; seconded by Cllr Parker; all in favour.
- 122.2b. Adopting the Co-option Policy, as amended
- 122.2c. Adopting the Disciplinary Procedure and Disciplinary Rules, as amended
- 122.2d. Adopting the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme, subject to officer review and amendments where necessary
- 122.3. Reviewing the Financial Risk Assessment, the checklist for Internal Controllers and any other associated documents – The Risk Assessment and Management Policy was displayed with tracked changes to show suggested amendments. This remains fairly similar year on year. Amendments have been made to reflect risk assessments which are made due to the pandemic and other emergency situations. The Clerk has tried to remove specific dates against items which happen annually. Regarding VAT, the Council is compliant with Making Tax Digital rules. With insurance, cover is extended to any additional items which come into the Town Council's possession. The Clerks' fidelity insurance was increased due to the size of

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the Council's budget. The Financial Risk Assessment was also reviewed. The Internal Auditor will be reviewing the 2020 – 2021 financial year and will be checking that appropriate financial risk management measures were in place. This is again reviewed annually. An amendment has been made to add in arrangements for emergency situations. A date has not yet been set for the review of internal controls, but this will be ahead of the external audit. The Internal Controls statement was reviewed. There had previously been discussions about managing the risk of staff numbers. An additional three members of staff are due to be appointed in July, but it was queried whether the risk is still being satisfactorily managed in the meantime. Job descriptions may need to be amended to reflect the different work conditions due to the pandemic. At the moment staff are doing what they can and risks are being managed. Staff are covering site inspections, which have been productive and helpful until the Community Wardens have been appointed. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council to adopt the Risk Assessment and Management Policy, the Financial Risk Assessment and Internal Controls statement; seconded by Cllr Coleby; all in favour.

- 122.4. Reviewing the Friends Groups Policy – The Assets, Inclusion and Development (AID) Committee also reviewed this policy at its meeting earlier this month and suggested some minor amendments. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council that this Committee supports the review by the AID Committee and would recommend the adoption of the policy, with the amendments as suggested by the AID Committee; seconded by Cllr Barnard; six Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor abstained from the vote.

### **123. Events and Communications Sub-Committee**

- 123.1. Receiving the draft minutes from the Events and Communications Sub-Committee meeting on 17 December 2020 – The draft minutes were noted.

### **124. Other financial matters, including:**

- 124.1. Funding of an additional piece of equipment at the Stoven Close play area – This has also been considered by the AID Committee. There was an issue with the initial application for funding but there is planning mitigation money available which could be used. The Town Council will not have to use its own funds to purchase the equipment but will be responsible for the cost of installation and ongoing maintenance and the equipment will be covered under the Town Council's insurance. The Norse contract covers general maintenance and arranging annual play inspection reports. Staff also carry out checks and pick up deterioration of sites and aesthetic improvements as well as health and safety. The addition of one piece of equipment should not increase the cost of the inspection regime with Norse, as it should not take much longer to incorporate. Adding whole parks like The Ness is different, as it is a whole new land mass with lots of additional equipment. Cllr Coleby proposed a recommendation to Full Council to proceed with the purchase of an additional piece of equipment at the Stoven Close play area, using the available planning mitigation money; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour.
- 124.2. The financial implications of the refurbishment of the Sparrows Nest and Fen Park public conveniences – Cllr Butler has provided a report and believes additional work may be required to the building housing the Sparrows Nest public conveniences, further to that identified in a previous survey and by a Norse specialist. An additional condition survey for Sparrows Nest would be required. It is understood that sufficient funding has been aside to refurbish both the Sparrows Nest and Fen Park public conveniences, but additional funds are available in the capital works budget if needed. A budget of £58,643 has been set aside for public conveniences in the 2021 – 2022 budget, including the reserves. The original estimate the Council received for the works to Sparrows Nest and Fen Park was £12,150, excluding a hot water supply. Cllr Coleby proposed proceeding with a condition survey as soon as possible, with delegated authority to the Clerk to progress; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.
- 124.3. The Denes Oval:

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- 124.3a. Proposals from the Lowestoft Town Tennis Club and the Lowestoft Cricket Club regarding improvements to the Denes Oval, including to consider alcohol licensing, sponsorship banners and club signs – A joint meeting with both clubs had been held recently, to discuss their proposals for improving the existing facilities. No detailed specifications or quotations have been received yet, and the Council has made no formal decision yet on how to proceed. The Tennis Club has tried to structure its requirements into priority order and has indicated it would be willing to contribute funding towards some of the works. Alongside this, the Tennis Club would like to progress a lease with the Town Council. The Cricket Club mainly would like to see improvements to the pavilion itself. As part of general asset management responsibilities, an indicative quote has been received for improvement work to the public tennis courts, which could progress at an earlier stage. It was queried whether work should be undertaken in advance of the lease or whether this should be in place first to clarify the respective rights and responsibilities of the tenant and the landlord. If there is no urgent need to progress work to the tennis courts now it could be incorporated into the lease discussions and the project as a whole. If health and safety concerns arise however it would need to be addressed more quickly. The interests of the clubs and public access would need to be balanced. If there were a proposed move to exclusive use this would need to tie in with those discussions. The Council would however want to maintain some public use and would want to scope out all options before committing to a lease. Other facilities, such as a running space, had been discussed previously. The Tennis Club would like to see floodlights installed, and have already raised some funds towards this, as well as seeking external funding, although this may be limited without a lease in place. The Cricket Club is looking to seek advice from East Suffolk Council's Conservation Officer about the pavilion. Cllr Coleby proposed that the Councillors who have already been involved with this should have an internal meeting with the Clerk and report back to the next Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee meeting; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour. The quotation received for improvements to the public tennis courts can be considered at that meeting. Cllr Page would like to be involved in the meeting and it was agreed an invitation should be extended to Cllr Taylor, as she has been involved previously.
- 124.3b. The cost of improvement work to the tennis courts – This was covered by the discussion of item 124.3a.
- 124.4. The cost of resurfacing the Links Road car park – The Clerk has concerns on a health and safety basis regarding the extent of the potholes. Unmade surface car parks are not uncommon but do present risks. Work is currently underway to move pipework further away from the sea. Quotes indicate that the car park can be resurfaced for less than £5,000. Cllr Coleby proposed that once the work to move the pipework is complete the resurfacing work is completed within a maximum budget of £5,000, with delegated authority to the Clerk to progress; seconded by Cllr Barnard; all in favour. It was reported that bicycle racks in the North East corner of the car park are often flooded, so the Clerk will seek advice about drainage as well.
- 124.5. Purchasing laptops for all Councillors – Cllr Green has made this suggestion as it is difficult to read attachments and documents on the tablets. Several Councillors have encountered problems using the tablets. Cllr Green would like laptops to be purchased to replace the tablets. Quotes have not yet been sought. It was suggested that laptops could be purchased only for those who need them at this stage, although more may be needed for new Councillors in the future. Cllr Green proposed that officers seek advice through the Council's IT contract on the cost of twenty laptops, the cost of ten and the unit cost, to be considered by this Committee at its meeting in February; seconded by Cllr Coleby; all in favour. Should the Council approve the purchase of laptops, enquiries will be made into how the tablets can be repurposed.
- 124.6. Instructing a carbon footprint survey – This has been discussed by the Climate Emergency

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Committee and external expertise is needed. If the Council is going to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030 it will need to know its starting point. The cost of the survey should not exceed £6,000. Subject to Council's approval, there should be a climate emergency budget in place from next year, however, funds should be available in reserves to progress this in the current financial year. Cllr Coleby proposed progressing a carbon footprint survey within a maximum budget of £6,000, with the funds to be taken from an appropriate reserve, to be decided by officers; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour.

- 124.7. A recommendation from the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee to carry out appropriate surveys on the Kensington Gardens Ammunition Bunker

*A five minute comfort break was taken 19:02 and the meeting resumed 19:07*

*Cllr Youngman left the meeting 19:07*

Given the history of the site, this Committee would like to ensure there is nothing potentially hazardous present before it considers public use of the site. Officers have contacted East Suffolk Council to see if they have this information before seeking quotes for appropriate surveys. Any information received will be brought back to this Committee for consideration.

- 124.8. Budgeting for bicycle racks and lock-ups – The Climate Emergency Committee has started to look at the possibility of installing electric bicycle lock-ups in the Town Council's parks, as the bicycles are expensive and their use cannot be encouraged without suitable provision to store them securely. Cllr Green has been exploring options and prices start from £600. The Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee is considering five year plans - which include the provision of bicycle racks - and can start to look at appropriate locations.

- 124.9. Taking out Ill Health Liability Insurance – The Clerk is seeking further information as to the cost. The pension provider has raised concerns about whether smaller authorities have the appropriate insurance cover needed within the context of the overall pension obligation and staffing. It may be that the Town Council is adequately covered with the insurance it already has but this item will be carried forward to the next meeting for further consideration once the Clerk has more information.

- 124.10. The loan agreement for the Lowestoft Collection (confidential) – To be discussed during the confidential session.

**125. Date of the next meeting**

11 February 2021 16:45

**126. Items for the next agenda and close**

There were no requests for items to be added to the next agenda, in addition to those already being carried forward.

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

**127. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:**

- 127.1. Any legal matters, including those above as required:

124.10. The loan agreement for the Lowestoft Collection (confidential) – There was a confidential discussion regarding the loan agreement for the Lowestoft Collection. Cllr Green made a confidential proposal; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

The Chair closed the meeting 20:15.

Signed:  .....

20 May 2021