

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Finance and Governance Committee
First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
15:00 on 13 January 2025

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Connor Blowers, Wendy Brooks, Neil Coleby, Graham Parker, Andy Pearce (Chair) and Bernadette Rappensberger

In attendance: Sarah Foote (Acting Town Clerk), James Cox (Finance Manager) and Lauren Elliott (Senior Committee and Project Clerk)

Public: There were two members of the public in attendance (in person)

101. Welcome

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

102. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Paul Page, with reasons provided. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

103. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

103.1. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests from councillors on items on the agenda – Cllrs Blowers, Brooks and Pearce declared they were acquainted with the representatives of Suffolk Sober Spaces, who were in attendance as members of the public, but were not connected with the application at agenda item 108.2 and did not consider themselves to be pre-determined. In response to a query from the Acting Town Clerk, Cllr Blowers clarified he is on the Management Committee for the Kirkley People’s Forum, not the Kirkley Centre.

103.2. Written requests for dispensations for Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and note dispensations granted – There were none.

104. The draft minutes and confidential note of the meeting on 9 December 2024

Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the minutes and confidential note of the meeting on 9 December 2024; seconded by Cllr Parker; all in favour.

105. Public forum

Two representatives of Suffolk Sober Spaces were in attendance with regard to agenda item 108.2, and had provided a presentation to Committee members ahead of this meeting.

Two additional members of the public arrived 15:07, with regard to grant application which had been submitted, but was not on this agenda. It was advised that the application would be considered at February’s meeting. The two additional members of the public left the meeting 15:09

It was agreed to bring forward item 108.2.

108.2. An approach from Suffolk Sober Spaces for a sponsorship arrangement – Representatives from Suffolk Sober Spaces had delivered a presentation to Committee members ahead of this meeting. The type of support offered by their organisation was discussed, and they would investigate the need for expanding the type of support they offer, such as for gambling addiction. The name of the organisation was chosen via a voting process, but could be changed. Suffolk Sober Spaces had requested a sponsorship arrangement of approximately £4,900 per year. The funds would be required from April 2025. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of an initial two-year sponsorship arrangement, from April 2025 – April 2027, renewable at the end of that period. By then, the Town Hall should be open, which may provide an opportunity for use of the community space for Suffolk Sober Spaces’ activities. During the course of the sponsorship period, it was requested that officers put Suffolk Sober Spaces in

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touch with the Town Hall Heritage Manager, who was also responsible for overseeing community events. Discussions should be initiated in a year's time to consider the suitability of the Town Hall for their needs, or to consider renewal of the sponsorship on the same terms. The first payment would be made in April 2025, on presentation of an invoice. Cllr Brooks seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour. The representatives of Suffolk Sober Spaces offered their thanks to the Committee.

The two members of the public left the meeting 15:20

Cllr Brooks temporarily left the meeting 15:20

106. Budget and Loan

106.1. Monitoring the budget for 2024-2025, including delegated Committee and Sub-Committee budgets – The budget was actively monitored during the month, by this Committee, Full Council and those Committees and Sub-Committees with delegated budgets, with a particular focus on year-end budget positions.

106.2. Bank reconciliations – There had been no update since the last meeting.

106.3. The 2025/2026 budget and associated timescales and communications (some aspects may be confidential) – The 2025 – 2026 budget and precept would be considered at the Full Council meeting on 28 January, and an Extraordinary Meeting called in early February, if required, to deal with any non-urgent business from that meeting.

Cllr Brooks returned 15:22

Strategic work was required to assess the impact on reserves in the 2026 – 2027 and 2027 – 2028 financial years. Contingency allowances had been made, as not all sums could be crystallised at this stage, however this was under active consideration by the relevant Committees.

The Budget and Loan Working Group had made a recommendation for a precept increase of 13%, based on a significant top-up to general reserves, to ameliorate the forecast impact on general reserves over the next couple of years. This would equate to an increase to the Town Council's element of the Council Tax bill of £21 per year for a Band D household and £16 per year for a Band B household.

The proposal from the Working Group was to make this recommendation to Full Council, with a briefing paper to be prepared, explaining the context of the increase and the risks of not doing it. The Budget and Loan Working Group had spent several months reviewing the budget and reserves and working up the proposal. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council to endorse the Budget and Loan Working Group's proposal, on the basis that the explanation and justification is prepared both for Full Council and externally for the leaflet to accompany the Council Tax bill, and on the basis that the financial burden per household, which is relatively low for the Town Council's element of the Council Tax bill anyway, would be just under £2 per month for a Band D household and £1.33 per month for a Band B household. The proposal would go forward to Full Council with a +/- 1% alternative, but the variation would be how much then goes into reserves.

Immediately after the 2025 – 2026 budget and precept are agreed, officers and the Finance and Governance Committee would need to begin strategic planning around the reserves to agree updates to the Reserves Policy by the end of the financial year and understand the areas of particular impact on the capital budgets and precept over the next five years. Strategic finance and reserve planning with Full Council would follow. Cllr Brooks seconded the proposal and noted the Council would still be delivering the projects it had committed to, and maintaining its resolution that servicing the Public Works Loan Board loan would not in and of itself trigger and increase to the precept. Cllr Brooks offered her thanks to Cllr Pearce for his work on the budget.

Cllr Parker did not support the proposed 13% increase to the precept, and requested that condition reports for every item which were due to be replaced be made available to every Councillor, ahead of the Full Council meeting. This would be arranged, but it

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had not been requested at the Budget and Loan Working Group meetings previously, and previous Council decisions on replacement of items would not be revisited. With only one opportunity to set the budget and precept each year, contingency and forward planning was imperative. The cumulative precept increase over the past few years had been less than the cumulative inflationary increase, whilst the Town Council had still continued to make improvements to its assets. The cumulative effect meant that even a 13% increase would still be below inflation. The vote on Cllr Pearce's earlier proposal was taken; five Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor voted against. It was anticipated that an Extraordinary Budget and Loan Working Group or Finance and Governance Committee meeting would not be required ahead of the Full Council meeting.

107. Payments and Receipts:

107.1. The income and expenditure reports for December 2024 and January 2025 to date, including payments made under delegated authority (see schedules) – These would be reviewed at the Full Council meeting.

107.2. Any payments for approval (see schedule) – There were none.

108. Grants and Sponsorships

108.1. Receipt of the following grant applications and whether they require urgent consideration:

108.1a. Greener Growth CIC - £1,000 – Cllr Brooks proposed approval; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger. It was confirmed funds were available in the grant budget to cover this. Cllr Coleby advised he would abstain from the vote, as he had been in a contract with Greener Growth for a community garden, as part of another role. Five Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor abstained from the vote.

108.1b. Music Prescription - £4,800 – It was confirmed this was separate from agenda item 108.2, though the two organisations did collaborate on individual projects.

The Acting Town Clerk temporarily left the meeting 16:10 and returned 16:11

Cllr Pearce proposed to approve this application, on the basis it was to be paid in April, from the 2025-2026 budget; seconded by Cllr Blowers; all in favour. It was clarified the application was for professional fees not payment of salaries.

108.2. An approach from Suffolk Sober Spaces for a sponsorship arrangement – This item had been considered earlier in the meeting.

109. Other financial and governance matters, including:

109.1. Funding for BoxUp options at Denes Oval – Full Council had given a delegation to officers at its December meeting. The trial of an existing installation was in place at Normanston Park until April. Cllr Pearce advised this item was related to the Community Partnership, which was East Suffolk Council led, which may have implications for Cllr Parker as an East Suffolk Councillor. The Community Partnership were applying for funding to purchase the Normanston Park locker at the end of the initial twelve month rental period, with a decision expected in March. The Town Council would not have any funding liabilities, but may be asked to keep the locker clean. A new four box locker was going to be installed at the Denes Oval, with Community Partnership funding confirmed to cover the hire for the first year. If the Town Council accepted the offer of funding, it was unclear whether the Town Council could exercise the right to buy option, as a separate authority. The delegation was therefore given to officers to decide whether to accept the funding or fund directly, and the Sports Development Officer was making enquiries. Funding was available in the budget. The Sports Development Officer had recommended a four box locker for Denes Oval for the first year, with the option to extend it in the future. Consideration of budget allocation would only be required if there was a decision from officers under delegation to directly fund, in which case

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budget allocation could then be considered at February's Full Council meeting.

109.2.A recommendation from the Lowestoft Youth Forum Working Group on its Terms of Reference – Cllr Barker had advised that the Working Group had not been able to meet ahead of this meeting, but hoped to meet the following week, in which case an update could be provided to February's meeting of this Committee.

109.3.An interim recommendation to Full Council regarding ring-fenced sponsorship funds (confidential) – To be considered during the confidential session.

110. Recommendations from the Standing Orders and Policies Working Group on the following policies:

The Working Group had reviewed these policies the previous month. Cllr Pearce proposed to endorse the recommendations of the Working Group and recommend adoption of the policies listed under this agenda item to Full Council, subject to any amendments or appending comments agreed at that meeting; seconded by Cllr Brooks; five Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor abstained from the vote.

110.1.Environment and Climate:

110.1a. Cycling Pledge

110.1b. Environmental

110.1c. Mulch

110.1d. Wildflower Meadows

111. Reviewing the following policies:

Cllr Brooks advised that she and another Councillor had reviewed the policies listed, and the Committee Clerk and Planning Assistant had taken notes. Most of the policies required only minor amendments or no amendment at all. The Social Media Protocol was considered repetitive and would be edited by officers. Cllr Brooks proposed a recommendation to Full Council to adopt the policies listed under this agenda item, with the exception of the Social Media Protocol, which would be brought back to this Committee when reviewed by officers. Cllr Coleby seconded the proposal and suggested the Council should consider its interaction with social media, particularly with certain platforms having recently having removed certain guidelines. All Councillors voted in favour.

111.1.Civic:

111.1a. Arts

111.1b. Conferring the Title of Honorary Freemen and Freewomen

111.1c. Conferring the Title of Honorary Freemen and Freewomen – Post Award

111.1d. Heritage Plaques

111.2.Public Engagement

111.2a. Community Engagement

111.2b. Media

111.2c. Noticeboard Protocol

111.2d. Social Media

112. Date of the next meeting

10 February 2025 - 15:00

113. Items for the next agenda and close

Councillors were asked to send any requests to the office.

Cllr Coleby proposed to move the meeting into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

114. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:

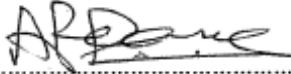
114.1.Any legal matters, including those above as required:

109.3. An interim recommendation to Full Council regarding ring-fenced sponsorship

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funds (confidential) – Cllr Pearce explained the agenda item and made a proposal; seconded by Cllr Coleby; all in favour.

The meeting was closed at 16:35.



Signed:

10 February 2025