

**Lowestoft Town Council**  
**Extraordinary Meeting of the Personnel Committee**  
**First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE**  
**14:00 on 8 September 2022**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Cllrs Sonia Barker (Chair), Wendy Brooks, Graham Parker and Keith Patience

**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)

**31. Welcome**

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

**32. Approval of apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Alan Green and Andy Pearce, who had provided reasons. Cllr Brooks proposed approval of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

**33. Declarations of Interests and dispensations**

Cllr Patience advised he is a member of East Suffolk Council.

**34. The draft minutes of the meeting on 4 August 2022**

Cllr Brooks proposed approval of the minutes; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

**35. Public forum**

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

**36. Reviewing the Terms of Reference of the Personnel Committee, including reviewing and considering implementation of the following responsibilities:**

36.1. Helping ensure that a staffing framework and culture exists within the Council which nurtures wellbeing, productivity, treats staff equally and with respect, values diversity and supports staff to give their best, including through suitable training, development and management – Cllr Brooks considers this is well covered in current policies and procedures. Cllr Brooks proposed acceptance of this item; seconded by Cllr Patience; all in favour.

36.2. Reviewing and making recommendations on the staffing structure in consultation with the Finance and Governance Committee, when needed – Cllr Brooks proposed approval of this item; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

36.3. Drafting, implementing, reviewing, monitoring and revising employment policies and making related recommendations to the Council – Cllr Brooks suggested this should also include ‘in consultation with the Finance and Governance Committee’. The Clerk advised that all policies are reviewed by the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee, which reports to the Finance and Governance Committee. Regarding item 36.2, Cllr Brooks considered that this Committee makes recommendations to the Finance and Governance Committee, rather than working in consultation with it. The Clerk suggested the following wording: ‘reviewing and making any recommendations on the staff structure to the Finance and Governance Committee and Full Council as appropriate’. Regarding item 36.3, the Clerk suggested the addition of the following wording ‘these policies are also considered by the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee and the Finance and Governance Committee’. Cllr Barker proposed approval of this amendment; seconded by Cllr Parker; all in favour.

36.4. Establishing and reviewing the salary payscale reference points – The Personnel Committee does not establish salary payscale reference points. Currently all staff are under the national salary scheme, but this may not be the case for all future staff. The

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Clerk suggested addition of the wording 'where relevant'. Cllr Barker proposed approval of the amendment; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

**37. Mileage and vehicle cost reimbursement, including the following:**

- 37.1. The criteria for identifying essential and non-essential vehicle users – Cllr Brooks advised that several staff use their own vehicles for site visits and would consider any such work to meet this criteria. The Clerk advised that the criteria is defined in the Green Book. Cllr Patience would consider the Community Wardens as essential users. The Clerk advised the reimbursement for a casual user would be higher than for an essential user. The current reimbursement rate for mileage is £0.45 per mile. Cllr Parker would consider any users who would require use of their vehicle to visit sites as essential. The Clerk advised one member of staff was recruited on the basis they would not be required to drive. The Climate Emergency and Ecological Committee will be reviewing vehicle use as part of assessing the Town Council's carbon footprint. The Council does not currently apply the NJC terms of providing an allowance to vehicle users. Reimbursement for mileage would be paid on top of this, but at a lower rate. Cllr Brooks would like officers to advise which they would prefer. Officers had raised with the Clerk that providing their own vehicles for work purposes was becoming expensive. The preference would be for the allowance as the mileage rate of £0.45 is not sufficient. Cllr Patience proposed asking the Finance and Governance Committee to consider this, accompanied by a report with further details on the amount of mileage reimbursed to officers currently, and also with details on the mileage which can be reimbursed to officers who use bicycles. At the request of Cllr Brooks, Cllr Patience added that all officers with vehicle usage as a condition of their employment should be classed as essential; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.
- 37.2. Any equality and diversity implications of requiring vehicle use – Cllr Brooks considered some roles require travel by way of car or bicycle, and the Council should look at how it advertises vacancies. The Clerk advised that the Council would only require this if it were essential to the role. Cllr Patience was concerned this could be depriving young people of a career in Local Government, and suggested the Council could instead give candidates the opportunity of employment within the Council if they can obtain a driving licence within a certain timeframe. The Clerk was concerned this may result in an officer not being able to effectively fulfil their role until then. Cllr Barker advised a shared electric vehicle is already being considered. The Council would take account of reasonable adjustments, such as for disabilities. Having an office vehicle would enable more flexibility. Cllr Barker proposed that a list of discussion points is included in the report being considered by the Finance and Governance Committee (as per the previous item); seconded by Cllr Parker; all in favour.

**38. Flexible Working Policy, including the following:**

- 38.1. Implementation of the policy, if adopted – Cllr Patience considered the Council does not have enough employees currently to implement this, and would expect at least one senior officer to be available whilst the office is open. Cllr Patience was also concerned of the cost of heating the entire floor space when fewer staff may be present at any one time. Cllr Parker had previously requested the proposals encompass Saturday office opening as well, to increase the service to the public. Regarding energy use, the Clerk advised heating can be controlled in the offices, and the Council Chamber is only heated for meetings. Out of hours working takes place currently. The Clerk has put a proposal together for a six month trial period, reviewable at three months. Some officers would like to keep to their current arrangements. Under the new proposals two officers would not be working on a Friday, and two who would not be working on a Monday. This can happen now with officers taking time off in lieu. Officers understand they can only work their new proposed hours if it works well with Council business and there is adequate

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cover by staff with complementary roles. The Clerk advised extending to covering a wider number of days could be considered once the staff base has increased. Individual staff arrangements can be discussed further in confidential session. Cllr Brooks would not wish to lose cohesion within the team and could not see a need for the office to be open seven days per week. The Clerk has looked into what other authorities do. East Suffolk Council has variable hours of opening even with a relatively large resource, and do not currently open weekends. The Marina Centre is open two days per week for face-to-face appointments. In response to a concern raised by Cllr Parker regarding lone working, the Clerk reiterated that working arrangements are appropriately risk managed and safeguards put into place.

38.2. The protocol for requesting, considering and recording decisions – To be discussed during the confidential session.

38.3. Implications should the policy not be adopted – To be discussed during the confidential session.

### 39. Progress with the recruitment of the Committee Clerk

The Clerk has circulated dates. Cllrs Barker and Green have confirmed their availability for the interview dates. Widespread advertising is being undertaken and the Council and there has been some interest. The Clerk's concern is moving towards appointing someone to deal with asset management, including expansion and change and a new way of working, including more staff under direct management. Additional officers doing ground and facilities work is important, and the Clerk will put together a proposal with a job description, which will be considered at the next meeting and by the Finance and Governance Committee. The Clerk has put plans together as to how the Committee Clerk's involvement will affect meetings, including officer cover.

### 40. An additional day's leave for staff in lieu of the Saturday Christmas Eve

Cllr Brooks proposed approval of this. In response to a query from Cllr Patience, the Clerk advised that Council had historically given staff an additional day's leave on Christmas Eve, but this is optional and there has been no expectation it will happen every year. The office is closed between Christmas and New Year, when officers are required to take annual leave. Arrangements may be different in future years when the staff base has increased. Cllr Brooks proposed a recommendation to Full Council to approve the additional day's leave for staff in lieu of the Saturday Christmas Eve, but review this again next year; seconded by Cllr Patience; all in favour.

### 41. Date of the next meeting

13 October 2022 14:00

### 42. Items for the next agenda and close

The remainder of the items carried forward from the previous meeting will be added to the next agenda. Cllr Brooks gave her apologies for the next meeting.

*Cllr Patience temporarily left the meeting 15:21 and returned 15:22*

Cllr Barker proposed moving the meeting into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Parker; all in favour.

### 43. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:

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

38.1. Implementation of the Flexible Working Policy, if adopted – Lone working arrangements were discussed, but the lone worker issue would be very similar under the new arrangements as to what it is now. The proposed new arrangements for each member of staff were displayed and discussed. As with

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existing arrangements, officers with complementary roles would need to cover one another's annual leave. In response to a query from Cllr Parker, the Clerk advised that the biggest risk to the Council would be deciding not to go ahead with the flexible working arrangements if it agrees to the trial period and officers consider it to work well. Cllr Parker was concerned that the meeting schedule and arrangements could change following the elections in May. Cllr Brooks proposed a recommendation to Full Council to proceed with a six month trial of the proposed new flexible working arrangements. If approved, the Clerk suggested commencing the trial from the Full Council meeting on 27 September, to be reviewed at the Full Council meeting in December, and if approved to finish at the Full Council meeting in March, where a decision can then be made how to proceed from there. Cllr Barker requested anonymised views from officers to be considered at December's Full Council meeting. Cllr Barker seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

38.2. The protocol for requesting, considering and recording decisions – The Clerk advised this is part of the Policy, which embeds the formal process.

38.3. Implications should the policy not be adopted – This had been included as part of the discussions.

The Chair closed the meeting at 15:54.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Barker', written over a horizontal dotted line.

Signed:

13 October 2022