Lowestoft Town Council

Full Council Meeting

First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
18:30 on 24 September 2024

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Sonia Barker, Nasima Begum (Mayor), Connor Blowers, Wendy Brooks, Jen Jones, Christine Moore, Christian Newsome, Graham Parker, Keith Patience, Andy Pearce, Bernadette Rappensberger, Deborah Ray and Elise Youngman

In attendance: Sarah Foote (Acting Town Clerk) and Lauren Elliott (Project and Committee Clerk)

Also in attendance: Sheila Moss King (Town Hall Project Manager) (Remotely) (For part)

Public: There were no members of the public in attendance

99. Welcome

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

100. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Robert Breakspear, Neil Coleby, Janet Craig, John Murray, Paul Page, John Pitts and Nick Webb, with reasons provided. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Parker; eleven Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor abstained from the vote.

101. Declarations and dispensations

101.1. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable interests from councillors on items on the agenda – Cllrs Parker and Patience declared they are members of East Suffolk Council. Cllr Moore declared she is an employee of East Suffolk Council. Cllr Blowers declared he is an employee of the Marina Theatre.

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

102. The draft minutes and confidential note of the Full Council meeting on 27 August 2024

Cllr Pearce proposed to approve both; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

103. Public forum

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

104. Finance and Governance

104.1. Receipt and consideration of the following:

104.1a. 2024 – 2025 budget and reserves – Cllr Pearce proposed to accept the document received as an accurate statement of the current position; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

104.1b. Any bank reconciliations – June's bank reconciliation was outstanding with one of the bank reconciliation signatories. July's bank reconciliation had been completed. August's bank reconciliation would be provided to one of the bank reconciliation signatories.

Cllr Youngman arrived 18:35

104.1c. Payments and income for the month ending 31 August 2024 and September 2024 to date (see schedules) – Cllr Pearce proposed to accept the schedules as an accurate record of the current position; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

104.1d. Payments for approval – There were none.

104.1e. Quotation for internal alterations at Hamilton House – Cllr Pearce proposed to approve this, with a delegation to officers to implement the alterations within the

stated maximum budget; seconded by Cllr Jones; twelve Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor abstained from the vote.

104.2. The draft minutes of the Finance and Governance Committee meeting on 10 September 2024 – The draft minutes were received and noted.

104.3. Recommendations and matters from the Finance and Governance Committee:

104.3a. Rationalisation of items 6.18 and 6.19 in Financial Regulations, including current authorised users and scenarios, protocol for reviewing and adding new authorised users and review of authorisation limits – The new model Financial Regulations were adopted by the Town Council earlier in the year, noting they would require tailoring to align with the Council's processes. These provisions relate to which officers can hold a debit/credit card for business purposes, and the authorised protocol for use of personal debit/credit cards and reimbursement. This had been considered by the Finance and Governance Committee, and Cllr Pearce proposed to endorse the recommendation of the Finance and Governance Committee; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

104.3b. The increase in legal fees and budget implications (some aspects may be confidential) – To be considered during the confidential session.

104.3c. A maximum budget of £20,000 to purchase a facilities management software programme, with a delegation to the Acting Town Clerk to undertake the procurement within that budget –

The Acting Town Clerk temporarily left the meeting 18:38

The Town Council had appointed a Facilities and Contracts Manager due to the significant amount of assets-related work. Information was saved in different places and a software system would pull this together and enable progress monitoring.

The Acting Town Clerk returned 18:39

Another quote was pending. Cllr Pearce proposed to endorse the recommendation of the Finance and Governance Committee, and delegate authority to officers to make procurement within that agreed maximum budget; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

105. Town Hall Project

105.1. The draft minutes of the Town Hall Project Committee meeting on 12 September 2024 – The draft minutes were not available for this meeting.

105.2. The delivery stage of the redevelopment of the Town Hall:

105.2a. A progress report from the Project Manager, including an update on the procurement of a main build contractor (some aspects may be confidential) –

The Town Hall Project Manager joined the meeting remotely 18:43

A report had been provided in advance by the Project Manager. Several compliant bids had been received as a result of the main construction tender process, but all exceeded the budget. The project team had looked at what could be done differently, and had asked the bidders to price the proposals and come back. This would reduce the shortfall but the project team were continuing to seek ways to reduce the costs and the funding gap. Further deterioration of the building over the winter would be inevitable. Reasons for the budgeting being exceeded had been given in the report, this included the provision of a soakaway for rainwater mitigation, at the insistence of Anglian Water. It had been established that the roof tiles were not slate and no resale value, but would require full replacement. There had been significant increased costs for mechanical and electrical services, such as heating, plumbing and AV. This would be discussed with the appointed contractor, and additional sources of funding were being explored. The National Lottery Heritage Fund would be willing to consider a further application, but would need to see evidence of other funders.

There was no additional Towns Fund funding. East Suffolk Council was considering a further contribution. The Public Works Loan was currently set at a ceiling of £4million and could be increased, so the Town Council itself was contributing more. It had previously been resolved that the servicing of the loan would not in and of itself trigger an increase to the precept, and that promise would need to stand.

105.2b. Approving submission of an application to the Public Works Loan Board for an uplift and extension on the already approved borrowing terms, noting the cost of servicing the loan should not trigger an increase in the precept – Cllr Brooks proposed approving the application, subject to the servicing of the loan not increasing the precept. Cllr Pearce seconded the proposal on the basis it is a request to apply at this stage. This would be accompanied by affordability calculations, which would demonstrate that the cost of servicing the loan at current rates could be met from a cumulative combination of rent and service charges for Hamilton House, income from commercial tenants and the year on year savings, following the transitional period, of bringing grounds maintenance services 'in house'. It would be a condition that an application would only be submitted on the basis that existing income or revenue would be used and redirected, and would not require a precept increase to service the loan. It may not be necessary to drawn down the full amount, and any request to draw down would have to come back to Full Council. The vote was taken and all Councillors voted in favour. There were no confidential matters to consider under this item.

The Town Hall Project Manager left the meeting 18:51

106. Marina Theatre

106.1. The draft minutes of the Marina Theatre Project Committee meeting on 12 September 2024 –

Cllr Blowers temporarily left the meeting 18:51 for the consideration of items under this heading

The draft minutes were not available for this meeting.

106.2. The Marina Theatre Redevelopment Project:

106.2a. A progress report from the Project Manager, including an update on the procurement of a main build contractor (some aspects may be confidential) – The Project Manager had given her apologies for this meeting. Marina Theatre Project Committee members were aware of the schedule of meetings on 30 September, with a view to a recommendation being made to an Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 3 October.

106.2b. Legal position on pending Licence for Alterations – To be considered during the confidential session.

106.2c. Consideration to funding support (confidential) – To be considered during the confidential session.

Cllr Blowers returned 18:53

107. Assets, Inclusion and Development

107.1. The draft minutes of the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee meeting on 2 September 2024 – The draft minutes were received and noted.

107.2. Recommendations from the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee:

107.2a. A recommendation on variations to the lease for the car park on Whapload Road (confidential) – To be considered during the confidential session.

108. Planning

108.1. The draft minutes of the Planning Committee meeting on 12 September 2024 – The draft minutes were not available for this meeting.

109. Personnel

109.1. The draft minutes of the Personnel Committee meeting on 5 September 2024 – The draft minutes were received and noted.

109.2. A progress report on job profiling evaluations and further implementation of the three-tier staffing structure (confidential) – To be considered during the confidential session.

109.3. Approval of a recommendation on staff terms and conditions – To be considered during the confidential session.

109.4. Matters relating to staff absence (confidential) – To be considered during the confidential session.

110. Climate and Ecological Emergency

110.1. The draft minutes of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Committee meeting on 23 September 2024 – The draft minutes were not available for this meeting.

110.2. Any recommendation from the Climate and Ecological Emergency Committee on the following:

110.2a. Use of the climate emergency budget for installation of PV panels on the Town Hall – The Committee had recommended approval of this item. Cllr Brooks proposed to endorse the recommendation of the Committee; seconded by Cllr Pearce. Officers were asked to check with the Project Manager whether the panels would be the final items to be installed prior to the building opening, therefore allowing the cost to be spread over three years. The Budget and Loan Sub-Committee would work through the advice received from the Project Manager. It was not anticipated that it would be necessary to use reserves. The vote was taken and all Councillors voted in favour.

111. Outside bodies

111.1. Any items for inclusion on the East Suffolk Council Quarterly Liaison Meeting agenda and appoint attendees – The Acting Town Clerk asked the members of East Suffolk Council to leave the room for the consideration of this item.

Cllrs Moore, Parker and Patience temporarily left the meeting 18:58

The draft agenda had been uploaded to the members' area. The meeting would be held at Hamilton House the following week. An East Suffolk Council officer would be in attendance to talk about Houses of Multiple Occupancy, and it was suggested the Chair or another representative of the Planning Committee should be in attendance. Cllr Brooks requested the addition of an item to discuss the new legislation regarding bins and how East Suffolk Council intends to roll it out. It was suggested a representative of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Committee should also attend. Cllrs Begum, Jones, Pearce, Rappensberger and Ray volunteered to attend. Cllr Newsome proposed to appoint those Councillors at the attendees; seconded by Cllr Blowers; all in favour. For the next agenda, Cllr Pearce requested the addition of an item to discuss a long-term working relationship with East Suffolk Council's Communities Team.

Cllrs Moore, Parker and Patience returned 19:01

111.2. Cllrs Barker and Rays' report from the First Light Festival Steering Group meeting on 20 August 2024 – The report referred to the minutes of the meeting, which had been uploaded to the members' area. Any questions could be directed to Cllrs Barker and Ray.

112. Legal matters (confidential):

112.1. An update report on legal matters – To be considered during the confidential session.

112.2. Completion of land transfer matters for the following:

112.2a. Whitton Green Play Area – To be considered during the confidential session.

113. Date of next meeting

22 October 2024 at 18:30

An Extraordinary Meeting would be taking place on 3 October.

114. Items for the next agenda and close

Councillors were asked to email any requests to the office.
Cllr Blowers proposed to move the meeting into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

115. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:

115.1. Any matters, including those above as required:

Cllr Patience left the meeting 19:03

104.3b. The increase in legal fees and budget implications (some aspects may be confidential) – Cllr Pearce proposed to ask the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee to make provision to absorb any budget overrun, but recoup the overspend in the 2025 – 2026 budget and reimburse the appropriate budgets; seconded by Cllr Rappensberger; all in favour.

106.2b. Legal position on pending Licence for Alterations for the Marina Theatre –

Cllr Blowers temporarily left the meeting 19:05 for the consideration of items relating to the Marina Theatre

A final draft of the licence had been returned to the Theatre's lawyer.

106.2c. Consideration to funding support for the Marina Theatre (confidential) – There was a confidential discussion regarding potential funding support. Cllr Brooks made a confidential proposal; seconded by Cllr Pearce; nine Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor voted against; one Councillor abstained from the vote.

Cllr Blowers returned 19:54

As Chair of the Budget and Loan Working Group, Cllr Youngman consented to the postponement of the following Monday's meeting to enable the scheduling of the Extraordinary Marina Theatre Project Committee meeting.

107.2a. A recommendation on variations to the lease for the car park on Whapload Road (confidential) – The Acting Town Clerk was due to meet with the lawyer the following week, including to discuss the recommendation from the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee. Cllr Brooks proposed to endorse the recommendation of the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee, ensuring the process is undertaken in line with the legal advice received; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

109.2. A progress report on job profiling evaluations and further implementation of the three-tier staffing structure (confidential)

Cllr Brooks temporarily left the meeting 19:57

Further work was needed on the organogram and this would be taken back to the Personnel Committee at its meeting on 3 October.

109.3. Approval of a recommendation on staff terms and conditions - Work had been undertaken by the consultant working with the Town Council to ensure job descriptions reflected current roles and remuneration. A set of individual reviews had provided in a separate meeting paper.

Cllr Brooks returned 19:58

The Project and Committee Clerk temporarily left the meeting 19:59 for the remainder of the consideration of this item

The Project and Committee Clerk returned 20:09

Following the approval of the previous item, Cllr Pearce requested that the use of new job titles begin, including on documentation and emails.

112.1. An update report on legal matters – A written report had been provided and the Acting Town Clerk gave a verbal update on some of the outstanding matters.

112.2a. Whitton Green Play Area – It was noted the documents would be signed following this meeting.

The meeting was closed 20:14.

Signed: .....

3 October 2024