

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee
Via Video Meeting
10:00 on 24 August 2020

MINUTES

Video meeting participants: Cllrs Neil Coleby, Alan Green (Chair) and Andy Pearce

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

1. Appointment of the Chair of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee

Cllr Green Chaired the meeting for this item. Cllr Pearce proposed Cllr Green for the position of Chair of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee, and this was seconded by Cllr Coleby. There were no other nominations. The vote was taken and all Councillors voted in favour.

2. Welcome

The right to report and the application of the video meeting protocol were explained and noted, and the meeting was welcomed.

3. Apologies for absence

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

4. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

There were none.

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

There were none.

6. Sub-Committee arrangements

6.1 Membership of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee – Membership was confirmed as Cllrs Coleby, Green, Parker and Pearce.

6.2 Appointment of the Deputy Chair of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee – Cllr Pearce proposed Cllr Parker (in his absence) for the position of Deputy Chair. This was seconded by Cllr Coleby. There were no further nominations. The vote was taken and all Councillors voted in favour.

6.3 Terms of Reference of the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee – The Terms of Reference contain provision for the appointment of substitutes, and it was queried whether there is a requirement for them to be members of the Finance and Governance Committee. It was agreed that this Sub-Committee would like any substitutes to have an understanding of the budget, so ideally they should be members of the Finance and Governance Committee, which is also the Committee who determines the composition of this Sub-Committee. This will be added to the next Finance and Governance Committee agenda for consideration. With regard to the climate emergency section of the Terms of Reference, it is understood that Suffolk County Council is looking to adopt a 'net zero' policy. If the Town Council is also looking to move in this direction this should be strongly stated in the Terms of Reference. This can be added to the Climate Emergency agenda for consideration. Cllr Pearce proposed adoption of the Terms of Reference; seconded by Cllr Coleby; all in favour.

7. Consideration of the 2020 – 2021 Lowestoft Town Council Budget

The budget was displayed at the meeting. The figure for Christmas lights is £20,000, which includes the purchase of Christmas lights for London Road South, as agreed earlier in the year. The year one cost is higher as it includes purchase of the lights. This is the final year of an existing three year agreement with Blachere to provide Christmas lights for Bevan Street

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East and the High Street. Following this, quotes will need to be sought to install, switch on, take down and store the lights. It was requested that a quotation be sought from Blachere to continue this service with them. A cost from Suffolk County Council is pending for structural testing of the street lights.

It was queried whether the figure for insurance is the overall figure, or whether it is split across the individual sub-headings. It was confirmed that this is the overall figure. This needs to be considered for setting the precept, particularly the effect of the pandemic on insurance.

It has been confirmed that there will be no elections until May so there were no concerns with the current budget provision.

Regarding the staffing budget, recruitment has been delayed due to the pandemic, but it was confirmed that the budget does include provision for recruitment.

There is an IT charge under the admin, which it was confirmed is for replacement tablets, equipment for new staff, etc. The separate IT Service Charge heading is just for that purpose. It was agreed that the budget allocation seems appropriate for the purposes required, but a sum may need to be apportioned to the reserves for ongoing equipment replacement.

It was clarified that the Town Council pays a BID levy on the Town hall, but not on Hamilton House, as Hamilton House is not within the BID area.

Regarding events, the Events and Communications Sub-Committee now has a delegated budget, which will include Remembrance and Holocaust Memorial Day.

Asbestos is being removed from the allotments, which will come out of the allotment maintenance budget, but the invoice for the work has not yet been received.

The invoices from East Suffolk Norse for the partnership charges are now being received on a regular monthly basis. The Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee raised the question of whether the pandemic has affected the permanent grounds maintenance staff in. A meeting of the Norse Contract Working Group is being arranged and the Clerk is liaising with Norse about the effect of the pandemic on the contract. A new draft of the contract is being worked on.

It was queried why the budget for The Ness seems so large considering it has been mostly grant-funded. The ongoing maintenance cost had to be estimated previously, which was calculated based on other Town Council owned parks of a similar size. The exact costs will not be known until the park is completed. A compostable toilet is being considered. There are ongoing discussions as to what items are in and out of scope, so that the Town Council can understand exactly what it will be liable for.

Condition surveys and compliance work are covered by asset compliance costs. The Sub-Committee was concerned the current figure may be inadequate. Officers will consider this for next year's budget.

The Clerk will request an update on the position of paying business rates for public conveniences. The budget figure for the Fen Park public conveniences is towards their refurbishment.

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Under the play area refurbishment budget, it was agreed earlier this year to proceed with improvement plans for Whitton Green. Funding is being contributed from other sources and the cost to the Town Council should not exceed £30,000.

It was requested that when next year's budget is prepared, the income section under the Links Road car park be amended, as it refers to room hire.

Currently, there is a £15,000 budget provision for apprentices. Full Council will be considering the promotion of apprenticeships, but could also look at appointing apprentices. This Sub-Committee would wish to support the professional development of all staff, and requested confirmation of costs for next year of any identified training requirements and ongoing courses. If new staff will be encouraged to start professional studies it would also be beneficial to know costs associated with this. This will be included as a separate agenda item for the next meeting.

8. A request from the Finance and Governance Committee to explore the cost of installing and maintaining defibrillators, to enable budget provision to be made to provide at least two Town Council defibrillators per year, and match fund at least five defibrillators per year for a minimum of the next five years

This will come into effect next year, but budget provision is available for those being installed this year, including the one for the Gunton Drive telephone kiosk. The defibrillator itself has been funded externally, but the Town Council will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and running costs. It is understood the running costs will be approximately £100 over ten years, but it is unclear whether this includes electricity costs. Cllr Coleby proposed that a budget £1,000 be set aside from the repairs and maintenance budget to cover defibrillator running costs and any ancillary costs for the remainder of this financial year; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour. The capital cost of a defibrillator is approximately £2,000. Cllr Coleby proposed that provision of £10,000 for defibrillators is included in the budget each year, to cover the cost of the two to be purchased annually by the Town Council, match funding, training and maintenance costs; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour. The defibrillator which was going to be installed on the Gunton Estate Residents Meeting Hall is now due to be installed at Aldi, and will therefore not be the responsibility of the Town Council.

9. The cost of plans for implementation of the Tree Council funding application

East Suffolk Norse have indicated a budget of approximately £5,000 but this is for certain areas only so it is hoped that the Town Council can also engage with volunteer groups for the other sites. It is not confirmed at this stage what the overall cost will be.

10. The financial implications associated with the declaration of a health emergency

Full Council will be considering the health emergency declaration at tomorrow's meeting, and it was noted that there may be cost implications if it is adopted, including the provision to plant additional orchard trees. Some of these costs can be subsumed in other budget headings. There may also be some overlap with item 8, as the provision of defibrillators is an important factor of public health.

11. Date of the next meeting

A date has not yet been set for the next meeting. A recommendation on the budget needs to be presented to Full Council at their meeting in December. The effect of the pandemic on people's ability to pay Council Tax is being considered. Previously, the Council did not want to impose an increase greater than the rate of inflation and it was suggested this should be considered for next year's budget also. The Clerk will make enquiries with East Suffolk

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Council about the Council Tax base. The date of the next meeting was agreed as 14:00 on Thursday 1 October.

12. Items for the next Agenda and Close

There were no requests in addition to the items already identified during the meeting.

13. Resolution to close the meeting to the public

The Chair thanked those who had been viewing the meeting via live stream. There were no confidential matters for consideration and the Chair closed the meeting at 11:04.

Signed:

1 October 2020