

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Personnel Committee
First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
16:30 on 4 November 2021

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Sonia Barker (Chair), Wendy Brooks, Alan Green, Graham Parker, Keith Patience and Andy Pearce

In attendance: Shona Bendix (Clerk) and Lauren Elliott (Committee Clerk)

Public: There were no members of the public in attendance, either in person or via Zoom webinar

28. Welcome

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

29. Apologies for absence

It was noted that Cllr Amanda Frost had resigned from this Committee. Cllr Alice Taylor had not provided apologies and was absent.

30. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

Cllr Barker declared a local non-pecuniary interest in item 33.

31. The draft minutes of the meeting on 13 October 2021

Cllr Brooks proposed acceptance of the minutes; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

32. Public forum

No advance comments had been received. There were no members of the public in attendance, either in person or via Zoom webinar.

33. Staff recruitment (confidential):

To be discussed during the confidential session.

33.1. Re-advertising the Climate and Planning Officer position

33.2. Re-advertising the Events and Communications Officer position

33.3. Re-advertising the Community Warden position

33.4. Budgetary provision and equipment for new staff

34. Support and consultancy arrangements

The Council has committed to support staff with any consultancy needs. Details of what consultancy support may be required over the next year will be fed into the Budget and Loan Sub-Committee meetings.

35. Whether Lowestoft Town Council should join the Suffolk Association of Local Councils

District Councillor James Mallinder has suggested that the Town Council may find this beneficial, particularly when putting together its Climate Action Plan and measuring its carbon footprint. The Town Council is already a member of the Society of Local Council Clerks. Cllr Patience has attended training courses run by the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) and found them to be beneficial. Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council require any Councillors on their Planning Committees to have appropriate planning training. Although this is not required of Town Councillors, it was agreed that such training would be beneficial. SALC should also provide a forum for the Town Council to increase its communication with other parishes in the area. Cllr Patience proposed that Lowestoft Town Council joins SALC for a trial period of one year; seconded by Cllr Pearce. The Clerk declared that she joined Lowestoft Town Council under a contract from SALC and was previously the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SALC. The Clerk has contacted the current CEO, who has provided more detail about the

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services it has to offer, which the Clerk explained. Training is partially included, so may be subject to additional charges. Their legal provision covers important issues relevant to Town and Parish Councils, but the Town Council would still require additional legal support. The membership does include the services of Paul Hoey and Steve Parkinson, both of whom Council has agreed to contract separately with. The cost would be £2,989.50 for the year. It may be possible the fee for the remainder of this year could be agreed on a pro-rata basis. Cllr Green declared that he is a Councillor for Kessingland Parish Council, which is an existing member of SALC. The Clerk has a delegation for subscriptions, which will be reviewed alongside all other delegations at the Annual Meeting in May. The vote was taken and all Councillors voted in favour of joining SALC from now, for a trial period of a year.

36. The conclusion of the inclusivity review and to consider any actions required as a result

Councillors who were in attendance found the group and one-to-one sessions to be beneficial and agreed that a follow-up session next year would help to develop what has been started in these sessions. The Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee has started to look at incorporating actions into the Town Council's policies following this. It was suggested that those Councillors who were not able to attend the sessions this time around should be given another opportunity to do so before the follow-up sessions. Cllr Brooks proposed asking the Clerk to seek a quotation for a follow-up meeting and additional sessions ahead of this for Councillors who could not attend the first one; seconded by Cllr Barker. It was suggested that the Council should consider what it can do to encourage younger people to join the Council, such as the timing of its meetings. The input of Councillors and officers would be beneficial. The Committee would be happy for the follow-up meeting to take place either in person or via Zoom, whichever is the preference of the consultants, and may need to be held in the evening to enable more Councillors to attend. SALC could also be asked for their views on this, and may be able to review the Council's policies and recruitment process. The consultants did make recommendations following review and suggested that further sessions may be helpful. They also suggested that training may be beneficial, such as mediation training, and to ensure that the Council is conducting its affairs equally and inclusively, through a review of its processes and policies. The vote was taken on Cllr Brooks' proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

37. Any staff and Councillor training and development needs (confidential)

The Council has new Councillors and officers with training requirements, but detailed discussions about training requirements for new staff are not needed at this stage, and the Clerk has delegated authority to progress any training required. The Council has appointed a health and safety consultant. Certain elements of the service offered, including training, are an additional cost to contract cost. It was requested that the cost of any training is identified so that budget provision can be made within the training budget. These costs are currently being separated out and the Clerk is assessing the value of the training against similar training opportunities available.

38. Date of the next meeting

This will be agreed following the confidential discussion of item 33.

39. Items for the next agenda and close

There were no requests for items to be added to the next agenda.

Cllr Green proposed moving the meeting into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

40. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:

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

Cllr Brooks temporarily left the meeting 17:22

33.1. Re-advertising the Climate and Planning Officer position – It was confirmed that all vacancies were advertised via the Jobcentre previously.

Cllr Brooks returned 17:23

Amendments to the existing job description were discussed. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council to re-advertise the Climate and Planning Officer position as a Committee Clerk full-time position (but applicants who desire a part-time position will still be considered), which will involve providing Clerk support to the Planning and Climate Emergency and Ecological Committees. Experience in Climate and/or Planning matters would be desired but not essential. The proposal also included a recommendation on the salary scale, depending on experience. Cllr Brooks seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

33.2. Re-advertising the Events and Communications Officer position –

Cllrs Parker and Patience left the meeting 17:44

Amendments to the existing job description were discussed. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council to re-advertise this vacancy as a full-time Communications Officer position (but applicants who desire a part-time position will still be considered); seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour. It was agreed that the advertising budget should be increased, and SALC could also assist with extending advertising to other parishes. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council on the salary scale, depending on experience; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

33.3. Re-advertising the Community Warden position – The Committee did not wish to make any fundamental changes to the job description, so would not need the approval of Full Council to re-advertise. It was however agreed that advertising of all positions should be done at the same time. Cllr Pearce proposed re-advertising this vacancy unaltered in terms of hours, salary and specification, and to begin advertising at the same time as the other vacancies; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour. Councillors were reminded not to approach the Community Wardens directly to request work.

33.4. Budgetary provision and equipment for new staff – The budget provision is £316,000 per year for salaries and pensions, plus contingency and consultancy support on top of that as required. The Finance and Governance Committee can consider any changes to the budget provision if the recommendations arising from this meeting are approved by Full Council. The Council has £85,814 in its office earmarked reserve and a £5,000 budget for furniture this year. Air conditioning and desks are required for the separate room which will become the Community Wardens' office. Once the expenditure is known it will be apportioned against the appropriate budget streams. The Clerk will liaise with staff regarding individual equipment requirements.

Cllr Pearce made a proposal regarding changes to existing staff's salaries; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour. It was confirmed that this does not need the consideration of Full Council as it is noting a previous decision.

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37. Any staff and Councillor training and development needs (confidential) – This item will be carried forward to the next meeting. The Committee has already discussed Councillor training through SALC and arising from the inclusivity review. Training requirements for new staff will be reviewed once the vacancies have been filled. The date of the next meeting was agreed as 16:30 on 15 February to review the recruitment process and consider the need for project managers or additional resources. If approved, the advertisements will go live as soon as practical after November's Full Council. The closing date will be before Christmas but interviews will be held in January. There will be a separate Personnel Committee meeting to appoint the new staff. Full Council will need to give delegated authority to this Committee and the Clerk to make the appointments.

The Chair closed the meeting 18:37.