

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Personnel Committee
First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
16:00 on 13 December 2021

MINUTES

Present (in person): Cllrs Sonia Barker (Chair), Wendy Brooks, Alan Green and Andy Pearce

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

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

41. Welcome

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

42. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Graham Parker and Keith Patience. Cllr Alice Taylor had not provided apologies and was absent. Cllr Pearce proposed acceptance of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour.

43. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

There were none.

44. The draft minutes of the meeting on 4 November 2021

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

45. Public forum

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

46. The timeline and process for staff recruitment

It was suggested that advertising should take place over three weeks at least. Nine working days should be set aside for shortlisting and liaison with candidates. Interviews will take place over three days at least. Successful candidates will start from nought to three months of being notified, depending on notice periods. The Personnel Committee has a delegation to agree the appointments. A meeting can be arranged on the third day of interviews. The advertisements are ready to be published, pending a decision from this Committee on interview dates. Cllr Pearce proposed that a Zoom meeting of this Committee is arranged for early January, with delegated authority to officers, in conjunction with this Committee, to agree the process for recruitment, including setting a closing date for Councillors to express their interest in the shortlisting and interview panels, and determining when a decision will be made on appointing Councillors to the panels. It was agreed this should be an inclusive process and all Councillors should be given an opportunity to express their interest. Cllr Brooks seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour. Full Council has agreed that advertising can proceed and has increased the budget for doing so. The Clerk will email all Councillors before Christmas inviting expressions of interest for the panels, and will circulate the advertisements and job descriptions to the Personnel Committee. Cllr Barker advised she had a confidential matter to discuss regarding this item.

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

There was previously a large underspend from the staffing budget, as the pandemic delayed planned recruitment of four positions, for which the Council had budgeted twelve months' salary, National Insurance and pension contributions. It is understood there will be another underspend, as not all of the vacancies were filled and the Council no longer has its Events and Communications Officer. For that reason, it was suggested that the salaries, National

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Insurance and pension contributions for new staff should be at least partially funded from the staffing reserve, as that was the intended purpose when included in the precept. It was queried whether the training budget should be based on last year's figure plus RPI, or whether a further increase is needed. The Council would not wish to progress a cumulative and excessive budget for staffing but some of the vacancies have since been amended, such as moving to full time. The Budget and Loan Sub-Committee is reviewing this. Training is usually an upfront cost not affected by length of service. It was requested that the Clerk identifies suitable training courses for Councillors. The Clerk has already made some enquiries following points raised at the last meeting, and is awaiting details and confirmation of costs. The Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) offers more opportunities. The Clerk will review their courses, and courses from other providers, and will bring details back to this Committee. The Terms of Reference for the Personnel Committee contain responsibilities which the Committee has not yet considered. Cllr Pearce proposed that from the new year, meetings are scheduled to take place every two months, which can be cancelled if not needed. Cllr Green seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour. Officers will liaise with the Chair regarding dates. Cllr Barker advised she would no longer be able to attend a previously agreed meeting date of 15 February. Dates for the recruitment process were discussed. It was agreed that advertising should commence Friday 17 December 2021 through to Friday 21 January 2022. Shortlisting should then begin from the week commencing 24 January, then interviews should follow from 31 January through the first week in February. Cllr Green advised he would not be available on Friday mornings. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of these dates; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour. As well as the local press, it was agreed that advertising would take place via the JobCentre and SALC.

48. Date of the next meeting

As discussed earlier, the next meeting will take place via Zoom, which officers will arrange. From there, meetings every two months will be arranged between the Clerk and the Chair.

49. Items for the next agenda and close

The Committee would like to receive an update on the recruitment process. An item was also requested to consider resourcing around assets, particularly whether having two Community Wardens reporting to the Clerk is sufficient or whether an intermediate position would be beneficial, given the increasing workload relating to assets. Officer input would be welcome. Similarly, regarding events and communications, the Council has agreed to advertise for a Communications Officer, but questioned the need for a full time Events Officer, understanding that the majority of this work can be covered between the Communications Officer and existing staff. For more high profile events, the Council may wish to make use of freelance or contractor options. There are lots of external factors which will feed into staffing, and may require some confidential discussion. The Committee would also like to understand what concerns existing staff have. It was agreed to carry forward item 47 to the next meeting.

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

50. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:

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

46. The timeline and process for staff recruitment – Cllr Barker advised she had a confidential matter to discuss at the Zoom meeting in January, which will be an internal meeting. There was a discussion about the recruitment process.

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47. Any staff and Councillor training and development needs (confidential) – The Clerk previously sent a request to all Councillors about any training they would like. It was requested that the Clerk does this again in the new year. Earlier in the meeting it was requested that the Clerk looks into beneficial training courses for Councillors, and it was suggested that two or three specific courses could be identified and added to the request to be sent to Councillors. Cllr Pearce proposed that an item be added to January’s Full Council agenda to consider running the equality and inclusivity course again for all Councillors and officers, with a specified maximum budget. Budget contingency of approximately £6,500 will be made. Cllr Brooks seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

At 17:15 Councillors went into a separate meeting room to discuss staff pay

The Councillors returned 17:35

It was agreed to add a confidential recommendation from this Committee regarding staff pay to the Full Council agenda. There was a discussion regarding probationary reviews for the Office Assistant and the Community Warden.

The meeting was closed 17:39.

Signed: