

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Personnel Committee
First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
18:00 on 14 April 2022

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Sonia Barker (Chair), Wendy Brooks, 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)

62. Welcome

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

63. Apologies for absence

No apologies had been received. Cllr Alice Taylor had not provided apologies and was absent. Cllr Alan Green had also advised members he would not be attending this meeting in his Mayoral capacity.

64. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

There were none.

65. The draft minutes and appended confidential notes of the meeting on 3 February 2022

Cllrs Brooks and Patience had queries regarding the confidential notes, which it was agreed would be discussed during the confidential session. Cllr Brooks proposed approval of the minutes; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

66. Public forum

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

67. The appointment of two new members of staff in March 2022

It was noted that three members of staff had been appointed in March but one had since resigned.

68. Reviewing the recruitment process

The Clerk advised that advertising of the previous vacancies did include the Suffolk Association of Local Councils, and was satisfied the Council did all it could in terms of advertising. Cllr Parker was happy with the scoring process and interview process in terms of the preparation of questions, but had concerns regarding how the candidates were then appointed. Cllr Brooks would prefer to do the shortlisting in person. Additionally, Cllr Brooks had concerns regarding the number of questions during the interview and the written test required of some of the vacancies at the end of the verbal interview. Cllr Brooks was disappointed that officers left the room at the end of the interviews. Cllr Pearce considered officer input to be an important part of the process, which should be witnessed and have a formal written record. The Clerk advised the decisions arising from all the interviews were based on the panel members in the room. The correct processes were followed and there is no question regarding the validity of the appointments. The Committee agreed to discuss the matter further in confidential session. The Clerk advised that she has fundamental problem with the balance on the interview panels. The Clerk is held accountable for the management of staff, but staff are outnumbered on the interview panels. Cllr Pearce agreed that staff input is essential, but whilst officers need to work well as part of a team they also need to work with Councillors and the Town Council as a corporate body is accountable as the employer. The Clerk considered that the process did not always lead to the correct outcome, but was not referencing individual cases.

Lowestoft Town Council

Meeting of the Personnel Committee

First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE

18:00 on 14 April 2022

69. Re-advertising the Committee Clerk vacancy

The Clerk advised that the Finance and Governance Committee had considered a proposed staffing structure she had put forward, and Full Council would need to consider this appointment in the context of other staff the Council may or may not be recruiting. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council to re-advertise the Committee Clerk vacancy as a previously agreed position; seconded by Cllr Brooks; four Councillors voted in favour; one Councillor voted against.

70. The application to staff salaries of the national cost of living increase of 1.75% for 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, and noting that the Finance and Governance Committee considers the amount is too low

Cllr Parker queried the process for agreeing this and was advised by Cllr Pearce that it is agreed nationally. Cllr Patience explained the process. The Finance and Governance Committee had asked if the Council would have discretion to deviate from this in any year, but had received feedback that the Council has committed to the outcome of the national negotiations and should therefore abide by them. The Clerk will circulate information on how the process is agreed nationally and applied to Town and Parish Councils.

71. Reviewing the following Town Council policies:

71.1. Redundancy Policy – Cllr Pearce had previously submitted his comments to the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee and would like these taken into account. Cllr Patience would like to see a severance pay agreement inserted under a separate heading within the policy.

71.2. Training and Development Policy – Cllr Patience would like provision in the policy which would require officers to reimburse a proportion of funding for any long term professional study they undertake, should they then leave the Council after a certain time. Cllr Pearce suggested this should apply to long term studies only and not individual training courses. Cllr Pearce proposed asking the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee to consider inserting this into the policy, with advice from the Clerk regarding appropriate wording; seconded by Cllr Parker. Cllr Pearce noted that one officer's long term professional study is already underway, so any decision should only apply to new courses and not those which are already in progress. The policy refers to 'relevant training' and Cllr Pearce asked the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee to review this wording and determine who decides what relevant training is. Cllr Brooks noted that the Town Council's Standing Orders state that Councillors should attend relevant training courses prior to joining Committees. Cllr Pearce would like the policy to cross reference this section of Standing Orders, or the wording of the Standing Orders may need to be revised if Councillors cannot be compelled to attend training courses, or training for certain Committees, such as Planning, is not essential, as the Town Council is not a planning authority. Cllr Pearce proposed referring the Redundancy Policy and Training and Development Policy back to the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee to review the comments made by this Committee; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

72. The process and associated timeframes for looking at staff recognition and reward each year

Cllr Pearce had requested this item to consider a mechanism to justify any pay increases over and above the cost of living. This would be different to any pay increase for a change of role or increase in responsibilities. Any proposal from the Clerk for an increase in pay or individual reward to an officer for exceeding their objectives should be considered by the Finance and Governance Committee, Personnel Committee and Full Council, but should respect the confidentiality of the individual member of staff. Cllr Pearce clarified that he was not suggesting a move to performance related pay, or directly linking pay to officer appraisals. Due to the potential impact on the budgeting round The Clerk suggested she could put

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together information for August's Personnel Committee meeting. In the event that the Clerk felt an officer would potentially qualify for a pay increase or single award for exceeding their objectives, she would submit a report to the Finance and Governance Committee and Personnel Committee to consider. Cllr Barker proposed asking the Clerk to bring forward suggestions; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

73. Staff resourcing, particularly for assets and events (some aspects may be confidential)

The Clerk had put forward an outline staffing plan at the Finance and Governance Committee. Cllr Pearce suggested that, following on from this, individual positions for events and assets should not be agreed at this stage, as they are included in the plan. Cllr Pearce proposed asking the Clerk to progress the line of thinking as discussed in the Finance and Governance Committee meeting and reporting back to the Personnel Committee meeting in two months for an update; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour. In the meantime, the Clerk can circulate the plan she had presented.

74. Staff appraisals (confidential)

The Clerk advised that all staff appraisals have taken place. New members of staff are going through their induction and probationary period with appropriate reviews. Cllr Pearce proposed that all staff appraisals are completed by the end of month seven, to enable any recommendations regarding pay to be fed into the budget round; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

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

Details of courses offered by the Suffolk Association of Local Councils had been circulated to Councillors. Cllr Brooks advised she had already completed some of the courses. Officers had previously asked Councillors for any training requests. Cllr Patience proposed circulating the details to Councillors to seek interest and feed back to Full Council; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

76. Staff terms and conditions (confidential)

To be discussed during the confidential session.

77. Date of the next meeting

9 June 2022 18:00 – There was a discussion as to whether to have meetings of this Committee earlier in the day. Cllr Parker advised that the meeting schedule would be reviewed at the Annual Meeting anyway and membership may also change.

78. Items for the next agenda and close

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

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

79. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:

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

65. The draft minutes and appended confidential notes of the meeting on 3 February 2022 – Cllrs Brooks and Patience made comments regarding discussions at the previous meeting on starting salaries.

68. Reviewing the recruitment process – The Clerk offered to put a written proposal together based on comments made earlier in the meeting. Cllr Barker proposed that the Clerk puts together a written proposal for consideration at the next meeting; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

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- 74. Staff appraisals (confidential) – Cllr Barker advised that the Clerk’s appraisal had taken place today with herself as Chair of this Committee and Cllr Green as the Mayor. The date for the Clerk’s next appraisal had been agreed as November, which would still be within time for the budget setting.
- 76. Staff terms and conditions (confidential) – Cllr Pearce proposed supporting the recommendation of the Finance and Governance Committee to Full Council regarding a member of staff’s pay; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

Signed:

9 June 2022