

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

MINUTES

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

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

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

56. Welcome

The fire evacuation procedure and public right to report. Chair offered thanks to Committee members and officers for attending and supporting the meetings and the achievements of the Committee this year.

57. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Graham Parker, who had provided a reason. Cllr Keith Patience had resigned from the Committee. Cllr Green proposed approval of the apologies received; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

58. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

58.1. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable interests from councillors on items on the Agenda – There were none.

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

59. The draft minutes and confidential note of the Extraordinary Meeting on 20 October 2022

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

60. Public forum

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

61. Reviewing the Terms of Reference of the Personnel Committee, including implementation of the following responsibilities:

61.1. Overseeing the recruitment process of the Clerk and making recommendations on appointment, terms and contractual matters to the Council for all staffing – The Project and Committee Clerk reminded the Committee that Full Council had approved a delegation to this Committee to progress the recruitment of approved positions. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of this Term of Reference; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

61.2. Ensuring that suitable HR arrangements and insurances have been reviewed and established – The Chair advised an item linked to this Term of Reference would require confidential consideration. In response to a query from Cllr Brooks, the Clerk advised that HR arrangements and insurances are both related to risk management, and there are certain issues which overlap with the Council's overall insurance cover. Cllr Pearce advised the Council would need to ensure it had adequate cover given the increase in the number of staff. The Clerk advised that the fidelity insurance is also reviewed as part of the audit process. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of this Term of Reference; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

61.3. Establishing and reviewing the performance management system (including annual appraisals) and the training and development policy for councillors and staff – Cllr Pearce advised there is an established system for the performance management reviews, whereby the Clerk carries them out for the staff team, and the Mayor and Chair of the Personnel Committee carry them out for the Clerk. This Committee is not

Lowestoft Town Council

Extraordinary Meeting of the Personnel Committee

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

14:00 on 14 December 2022

notified of the detail of individual performance management reviews, but would be informed of any recommendations for an individual financial reward for outstanding performance or permanent change to a member of staff's salary. Cllr Pearce proposed approval of this Term of Reference; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour. The framework for the Clerk's performance management review is set out in the Appraisals Guidance. Cllr Brooks queried whether the Guidance should enable the Clerk some element of choice as to who carries out the appraisal. Cllr Pearce advised that the Councillors appointed as the Mayor and the Chair of the Personnel Committee are responsible for carrying out the employer duties of the Council. The Clerk suggested the responsibilities attached to certain roles could be made clearer at the Annual Meetings. Cllr Barker requested a review of the Appraisals Guidance by the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee. Cllr Pearce proposed to make it a mandatory requirement that any Councillor who fulfils the role of Mayor or Chair of the Personnel Committee should receive appraisal training, if they have not already done so; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

- 61.4. Oversee any process leading to dismissal of staff (including redundancy) (the final decision regarding dismissal is a responsibility of Full Council) – Cllr Barker noted the clarification on the point that the final decision regarding dismissal remains with Full Council was added earlier in the year following a review. Cllr Brooks proposed approval of this Term of Reference; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour.

62. Progressing the recruitment of the following positions:

62.1. Asset Manager Officer – The Clerk noted the correct job title should be Asset Management Officer. Recruitment of this position should be progressed in the new year. Cllr Brooks would like to see staff and Councillors equally represented on the panel and suggested three of each for this position. Cllr Brooks would also like all Councillors to be offered equal opportunity to sit on the panel. The Clerk did not think it would be appropriate for members of staff who would be reporting to this Officer to interview them, but agreed there should be an opportunity for staff to meet each candidate. Cllr Pearce proposed that the panel should consist of three Councillors and three members of staff and that every Councillor should be given the opportunity to express an interest in sitting on the panel, no later than 16:00 on Tuesday 20 December. Cllr Pearce further proposed delegating authority to the Clerk to determine staff representation on the panel; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour. It was understood that the advertising budget for this position had previously been approved at £5,000, and may require national advertising.

62.2. An apprentice – It had been agreed that the appointment of one horticultural apprentice would be progressed, and it is hoped the appointment will be made in January. Cllr Pearce proposed proceeding with the appointment of one horticultural apprentice, with delegated authority to the Clerk to implement this; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour. Cllr Pearce proposed delegating authority to the Clerk to make expenditure related to the recruitment of the horticultural apprentice from the approved recruitment budget for this position; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

63. Progressing Councillor Mental Health First Aid training

East Suffolk Council has arranged free training specifically for Town and Parish Councils, available online or in person. The Communications Officer has circulated the details to all Councillors. Cllr Pearce requested the addition of an item on the next agenda to review how many Councillors have booked onto the training. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation that all members of the Personnel Committee and Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee undertake the mental health first aid training offered by East Suffolk Council; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

Lowestoft Town Council

Extraordinary Meeting of the Personnel Committee

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

14:00 on 14 December 2022

64. The draft Councillor Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

Cllr Brooks suggested removal of the introduction and queried use of the word 'moral'. Cllr Brooks would like the aim of the policy to be to promote a culture which is positive about Councillors' wellbeing, and to create an atmosphere in meetings and on social media where Councillors feel supported. Regarding point 2.5, Cllr Brooks queried how the Clerk was expected to produce reports on Councillor wellbeing. Cllr Pearce would like the policy to support enabling equality of access for any person with a mental health condition who would like to potentially stand for election as a Councillor. Cllr Pearce suggested exploring the possibility of having an independent, free to access, referral service which Councillors could access confidentially for support, with a periodic statistical report on the take up of the service. Cllr Pearce proposed building this into the policy, subject to a recommendation to Full Council, and to bring the policy back to this Committee at its next meeting, with Committee members to send in their comments to the office in the meantime; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

65. Reviewing the Flexible Working Policy and flexible working trial

Cllr Pearce considered the trial to have achieved its aims, but asked the Clerk to ensure that with the increased number of staff, and some staff having taken on additional responsibilities, there is always sufficient cover to ensure someone is available and able to pick up those responsibilities. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to Full Council to declare the flexible working trial as having achieved its aims, and to make the arrangements permanent, under the management of the Clerk, to ensure there is sufficient cover to pick up the responsibilities of members of staff who may be unavailable on particular days; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour. The Clerk also considered the trial a success and had received feedback from a survey of staff, to be discussed during the confidential session, which would not affect the recommendation to Full Council. The Clerk confirmed officers had been able to choose their own hours, subject to feasibility, and all staff had received a letter detailing the conditions.

66. Whether to introduce a vehicle allowance with effect from 2023 – 2024, for all staff who use their own vehicles for work purposes

Cllr Brooks proposed a recommendation to Full Council to support this. Cllr Pearce seconded the proposal and considered a vehicle allowance to be more transparent, fairer to staff, and a clearer way of monitoring the Council's net zero targets. The vote was taken and all Councillors voted in favour. Cllr Pearce asked officers to review the staff travel budget to ensure it would be adequate for the next year.

67. Future staffing (some aspects may be confidential)

The Clerk advised that some discussion had taken place in another Committee's meeting. It is anticipated the staff base will increase to nineteen eventually. The Clerk had prepared a confidential meeting paper which showed the changes to the staffing structure. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to support the recommendations from the Finance and Governance Committee to Full Council; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

68. The information to be provided with salary publication

Cllr Pearce would not support the publication of salaries at Town and Parish Council level, where individuals could be identifiable. Cllr Pearce proposed that the Town Council does not proceed with salary publication, but requested that the first Personnel Committee meeting of the new Council gives consideration to releasing a statement to demonstrate that there is no gender bias in the Town Council's remuneration structure; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour. The Town Council's overall salaries budget is published.

69. The process for staff reward and recognition

The Clerk temporarily left the meeting 15:23

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

Where a member of staff has been considered to have earned a single financial reward or a permanent increase to their salary, Cllr Pearce suggested there should be a mechanism for this to be formally recommended to the Council and included in the budget. Cllr Pearce would not however support a move to performance related pay and would not expect Councillors to be provided with the confidential details of individual staff members' appraisals.

The Clerk returned 15:24

The Clerk advised she would provide something robust and timely to the Council in the event of any recommendation being submitted for staff reward and recognition. It had been agreed previously to link appraisal timescales with the budget setting round. Cllr Pearce proposed that, on the basis the Clerk is satisfied that the process is working and co-ordinated with the budget, the Personnel Committee also supports this, and has an annual standing item on its agenda, ahead of the budget setting round, to implement any changes before the budget is agreed; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

70. Succession planning

With the Council's current staffing structure there is generally only one officer covering each role. Cllr Pearce requested that appropriate cross-skilling is incorporated into staff training to ensure adequate cover of each role, and that appropriate training is arranged prior to a member of staff taking on further or different responsibilities where possible. The Clerk advised that the training budget had helped with this. The move over to a new IT provider should assist with the Council's communications. Staff training has ensured adequate depth of cover for important health and safety matters. One member of staff is currently undertaking NEBOSH training with a view to helping them potentially move into a more significant role in the organisation, and providing more depth of cover. Consultants also provide support in this respect. The Committee was pleased to see how staff had developed professionally and how well the new members of staff had integrated into the team and improved the delivery of the Council's business. Cllr Brooks praised the working atmosphere which had been created, and considered it important that staff felt motivated and empowered to development themselves. The Committee offered its thanks to staff. The Clerk will provide an annual update to this Committee, ahead of the budget setting round, providing an overview of the staffing, including roles and responsibilities. Cllr Pearce spoke of the importance of ensuring solidarity between Councillors and staff is clear in public communications, and recognising the work of staff in delivering the Council's decisions. Cllr Pearce proposed that the Committee sees the progress made in this area with employee training with cross skilling and collaborative working. With the recruitment approved and envisaged over the next twelve months the Committee would ask for the professional development of staff to continue, and offered its thanks to the Clerk and her team for their work over the last twelve months; seconded by Cllr Brooks; all in favour.

71. Noting that appraisals have taken place (some aspects may be confidential)

The Clerk advised some appraisals had taken place between August and November, and the rest were scheduled to take place between now and May 2023. The six month probationary review for the most recent employee is scheduled for April. Cllr Pearce proposed the addition of an item to the Personnel Committee and Full Council agendas ahead of this to enable a potential change to this employee's terms and conditions, subject to a satisfactory review; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

72. Staff terms and conditions (confidential)

The Clerk advised there had been a discussion in the Finance and Governance Committee meeting about a member of staff and their professional study. This had been agreed by the Finance and Governance Committee and could be approved by the Clerk under an existing delegation. Cllr Pearce proposed to endorse the decision of the Finance and Governance Committee to commit to sponsor completion of this study over two years; seconded by Cllr

Lowestoft Town Council

Extraordinary Meeting of the Personnel Committee

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

14:00 on 14 December 2022

Barker; all in favour. The Clerk advised no other significant professional study was envisaged. One member of staff was undertaking NEBOSH training and two other members of staff were undertaking IOSH training. Wider training and development needs will be explored through appraisals. Cllr Pearce proposed requesting an update from the Clerk ahead of the 2024 – 2025 budget setting round on any anticipated significant expenditure relating to staff training, and a recommendation on whether the expenditure should come from the training budget. The training budget will remain delegated to the Clerk. Cllr Barker seconded the proposal and all Councillors voted in favour.

73. Date of the next meeting

2 February 2023 18:00 – It was clarified that 18:00 was the start time agreed by Full Council upon approval of the 2022 – 2023 meeting schedule. The Clerk advised the Committee can continue to hold Extraordinary Meetings if it would prefer to meet at 14:00. It was agreed that meetings should continue to be held at 18:00 and this can be considered again when the meeting schedule is reviewed at the Annual Meeting. At 16:00, Cllr Pearce proposed suspending Standing Order 3y by thirty minutes to enable the meeting to continue; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour.

74. Items for the next agenda and close

Committee members were asked to email any agenda item requests to staff by 24 January. Cllr Pearce proposed moving the meeting into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour.

A comfort break was taken 16:04

75. Resolution to close the meeting to the public:

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

The meeting resumed 16:09

61.2. Ensuring that suitable HR arrangements and insurances have been reviewed and established – The Clerk displayed a paper she had prepared which compared different providers. It was noted that the Personnel Committee had a delegation to make a decision on this outside of a meeting. Cllr Pearce proposed to accept the Clerk's recommendation as per the meeting paper; seconded by Cllr Barker; all in favour. Cllr Pearce requested the Finance and Information Officer to update the relevant figure in the budget template.

65. Reviewing the Flexible Working Policy and flexible working trial – One member of staff had decided to remain as they are as their current arrangements suited them, but appreciated the opportunity to consider flexible working in the future. The staff survey was displayed. There had been no negative feedback from staff and the amount of 'time off in lieu' being taken had reduced. If approved, staff would be able to amend their individual flexible working patterns if they can be readily accommodated. Any substantive changes would be brought to this Committee for consideration via the Policy, but staff are aware the needs of the organisation would prevail. The Committee agreed the trial had been a success and appreciated the assurance earlier in the meeting that the responsibilities of individual members of staff would be sufficiently covered. Any requests for weekend working could be considered.

72. Staff terms and conditions (confidential) – The new staffing structure had been discussed by the Finance and Governance Committee. This Committee had voted earlier in the meeting to support the recommendations of the Finance and Governance Committee to Full Council.

The Clerk and Project and Committee Clerk temporarily left the meeting 16:24 for a confidential discussion under item 72

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

Cllr Pearce made a proposal about the Clerk's terms and conditions from 1 April 2023 which related to her performance and changes in the organisational structure. Seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour.

The Clerk returned 16:31

The Project and Committee Clerk returned 16:32

The meeting was closed 16:34.

Signed:
2 February 2023