

Lowestoft Town Council
Budget and Loan Council Meeting
First Floor, Hamilton House, Battery Green Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 1DE
12:30 on 18 September 2023

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs Sonia Barker, Wendy Brooks, Alan Green (Chair) and Elise Youngman (Deputy Chair)

In Attendance: James Cox (Finance and Information Officer) and Taylor Williams (Committee Clerk)

21. Welcome

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

22. To receive and consider approval of apologies for absence from any Councillors not in attendance

Apologies were received from Cllr Begum with reasons provided. Cllr Parker proposed approval of apologies received; seconded by Cllr E Youngman; four in favour and one abstention. Cllr Pearce was absent with no apologies received.

23. Declarations and dispensations

23.1. To receive declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary, Other Registerable and Non-Registerable interests from councillors on items on the agenda – Cllr E Youngman declared she worked the company who cleaned the toilets owned by Lowestoft Town Council.

23.2. To consider written requests for dispensations for interests and note dispensations granted – No written requests for dispensations had been received.

24. Public forum

An opportunity for the public to make comments on any matters on this agenda, and to consider any advance comments from the public – No members of the public were in attendance and no advance comments had been received.

25. To consider the draft minutes of the meeting on 4 September 2023 and 11 September 2023

As the minutes were in progress their approval was deferred to the next meeting.

26. To review the 2023 – 2024 Lowestoft Town Council Budget and reserves (some aspects may be confidential).

No comments.

27. To review the 2024 – 2025 Lowestoft Town Council Budget and reserves (some aspects may be confidential).

As rent figures for tenants and salary budgets would be discussed and displayed, the Finance and Information Officer (FIO) requested the session be taken into confidential session.

Cllr Brooks queried why the meeting should be taken into confidential and requested any tabs relating to confidential items be left to the end of the meeting and the rest remain in public session, noting that members of the public had questioned why the discussions concerning the budget were not in public session as they wish to hear the discussions and understand how the Sub-Committee reaches its decisions.

The rest of the Sub-Committee noted that anything discussed would be made public before the budget is voted on by Full Council.

28. Date of next meeting

As the Finance and Governance meeting had been rescheduled to 25 September 2023 at 12:30, the next meeting of this Sub-Committee was rescheduled to 2 October 2023. Cllrs Parker and Green gave their apologies in advance.

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29. Items for the next agenda and close

It was requested that Councillors email items to the office.

30. To resolve that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, namely any legal and employment issues relating to the matters on this agenda.

Cllr E Youngman proposed the meeting be moved into confidential session; seconded by Cllr Parker; four in favour and one abstention.

The Chair closed the meeting to the public and moved into confidential session at 12:36

Sparrows Nest - The FIO notified the Sub-Committee that a utilities bill backdated three to four years had been received from the electricity suppliers at a total cost of £7,400, for which a breakdown of the cost had been requested. The budget did not require an increase for next year, but there would be an overspend on utilities in this year's budget.

There was a query on the £16,225 figure and why it had been set against the War Museum under Spend to Date rather than Capital Expenditure. The FIO confirmed it was funded from the Sparrows Nest Capital Earmarked Reserve (EMR) and was listed under Spend to Date to display the breakdown of capital works. The FIO confirmed the expenditure line name was 'War Museum Retaining Wall' and explained the tab size needed to be enlarged to view it. It was agreed for the FIO to review the format of the budget document and for the wording of expenditure to be returned to at a later meeting.

The FIO noted that the figure for capital expenditure would be informed by the condition survey reports.

The Ness – The anticipated year-end figure was £7,411, which could be transferred and ring-fenced in the general Play Areas Refurbishment EMR. Cllr Brooks proposed the funds in this budget be moved into the general Parks and Open Spaces EMR. The proposal was not seconded and clarification was requested on whether this movement of funds had been previously agreed.

Sea Wall - The £2,000 covered bin and bench replacements. The Clerk was due to meet East Suffolk Council to discuss the sea defences at north beach, therefore this budget would be revisited once any liabilities are clarified.

Kensington Gardens - The FIO clarified parks such as Kensington Gardens that have their own tabs either have an income stream that is reinvested or are large destination parks. The Sub-Committee queried whether the grounds maintenance works and costs could be split per site. It was clarified that grounds maintenance equipment was allocated to the Offices budget and the grounds maintenance work was allocated to the Salaries budget. If the Sub-Committee wanted to explore breaking down the costs per site, then the Assets, Inclusion and Development Committee or Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee would need to monitor the activity of all sites. The FIO would review the utilities, and capital expenditure on receipt of the condition surveys reports, and feedback the information to the Sub-Committee.

Fen Park - Cllr Brooks suggested the term 'destination park' be discussed by Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee due to disagreements on the terminology. If the current £37,000 budget

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is spent, then the remaining EMR could be moved to the Parks and Open Spaces EMR and this budget removed. It was suggested to create a costing schedule for all activities carried out by Grounds Maintenance staff. Currently the equipment for grounds maintenance was allocated under Offices and the remainder under Staff. The FIO advised that the process of monitoring and timing all tasks would result in lost staff hours. It was agreed to concentrate on the outsourcing requirements, with a review every six-months suggested to scrutinise the work of the Grounds Maintenance staff.

Community Halls - The Sceptic Tank EMR covered any major repairs or replacements. Gunton toilets, highlighted capital expenditure tab as money needed for this.

Cllr E Youngman temporarily left the chamber at 13:28 for consideration of the Community Halls budget and cleaning related matters

Cleaning for Gunton and Whitton Hall toilets cost £49.90 per clean. £4,324 was the estimated total for this year and £5,717 was estimated for the following year. Further amenities such as toilets rolls being allocated to the Public Convenience budget. £6,500 was provisionally entered in the budget and the FIO would discuss prices with the contractor. The FIO was asked to review the cleaning contractor's equipment from a climate emergency perspective, noting that the Town Council could also consider eco-friendly toilet paper.

Marina Theatre - Cllr Green suggested this budget be revisited at a later date.

Town Hall - Cllr Green suggested this budget be revisited at a later date.

Cllr E Youngman returned to the chamber at 13:36

Staff - The FIO confirmed the gross salaries figures needed to be checked and there was some uncertainty on any cost-of-living increases. The salary budgets for 2024-2025 was set to £697,254 with a contingency of £71,468 (to cover cost of living and emergencies) totalling £768,722. Cllr Brooks suggested the contingency be set to £100,000 and reviewed at a later time. £15,280 was agreed for the Out of Hours budget line. It was agreed for the contingency budget to also cover any job advertisements for 2024-2025. Pensions were currently included in the gross salary figure and would be split out in due course.

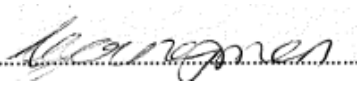
Training - It was agreed to reduce the Councillor Training budget line to £7,500. The overspend on play inspection training was due to training new staff, in the future £1,000 would be budgeted for training new staff and refresher training. Per the staff recommendation to increase the Staff Training (General) budget line to accommodate the increase in staff numbers, it was agreed to increase the budget line to £25,000.

Offices - It was agreed to review this budget at the next meeting.

Professional services – The FIO would bring specific costs for elections to a future meeting once invoices have been received. Only the uncontested elections had been billed at the time of this meeting. The FIO would review the Elections budget line and consider whether to lower the budgeted £13,744, though a reserve would be needed for the next election. The FIO would review the estimated elections cost in four years, based on four years RPI, to obtain a target figure and then, with the current amount in reserves, split the difference out across the next four years.

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The Chair closed the meeting at 13:58

Signed: 
2 October 2023