

Lowestoft Town Council
Meeting of the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee
Via Video Meeting
14:00 on 16 December 2020

MINUTES

Video meeting participants: Cllrs Sue Barnard (Chair), Alan Green, Jacqueline Hardie, Peter Lang, Paul Page, Andy Pearce and Alice Taylor

Also participating: Shona Bendix (Clerk) and Lauren Elliott (Committee Clerk)

32. Appointing the Chair of the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee

Cllr Green Chaired the meeting for this item. Cllr Pearce nominated Cllr Barnard for the position of Chair of the Standing Orders and Policies Sub-Committee. Although Cllr Barnard was not present for this part of the meeting, she had indicated she would be interested in this position. Cllr Pearce's proposal was seconded by Cllr Lang. There were no other nominations. The vote was taken and all Councillors voted in favour.

33. Welcome

Cllr Green Chaired the meeting for this item. Councillors and members of the public were reminded of the right to report and the application of the video meeting protocol, and the meeting was welcomed.

Cllr Barnard joined the meeting 14:02

34. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Neil Coleby. It was understood that Cllr Paul Page had also provided apologies, although these had not been received by officers. The Finance and Governance Committee had approved requests from Cllrs Peter Lang and David Youngman to join this Sub-Committee, and Cllr Youngman will be joining as of January's meeting. It was noted that Cllrs Amanda Frost and Keith Patience had resigned from this Sub-Committee. Cllr Taylor had not provided apologies and was absent. Cllr Pearce proposed acceptance of the apologies, including Cllr Page's if they are received; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour.

35. Declarations of Interests and dispensations

There were none.

36. Receipt of any comments and noting that the draft minutes of the meetings on 18 November 2020 will be considered at the next appropriate meeting

Cllr Hardie joined the meeting 14:05

The draft minutes were noted.

37. Any advance comments from the public on any matters on this agenda

Cllr Butler had provided a report on the draft Cycling Strategy, which had been circulated to the Sub-Committee.

38. Review of the following Town Council policies:

38.1 Tree Policy, including to consider any recommendations from the Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee – The Tree Policy was discussed at yesterday's Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee meeting. Cllr Pearce has emailed some comments to officers directly. Some of the individual statements within the Policy are still prohibitive. This Sub-Committee would like the policy to have more flexibility and allow more discretion in the operation of the policy, without creating a precedence. There are still amendments to be made and officers will be consulting with East Suffolk Norse, as its Arborist does offer guidance to the Council about specific issues, in line with the policy. The policy will also include the Council's commitment to planting more orchard trees. In the review so far, officers have tried to accommodate the requests to allow some

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flexibility, without weakening or undermining the policy. There is an allowance in the policy for maintenance of trees which pose a danger to people or property. The Sub-Committee agreed it did not need to see the policy again once the review is complete, and it will be instead be taken to the Parks and Open Spaces Sub-Committee and the Assets, Inclusion and Development (AID) Committee before Full Council.

- 38.2 Open Spaces Strategy – The Open Spaces Strategy includes a policy for memorial benches. East Suffolk Council is reviewing its own memorial bench policy. It was requested that the Town Council’s memorial bench policy is reviewed against the final draft of East Suffolk Council’s policy. The East Suffolk Council policy incorporates the cost of maintenance within the price of the bench. There is currently no framework for reviewing the benches and it was suggested this should take place every six months. Both the Town Council’s and East Suffolk Council’s policies state that additional adornments should not be placed on benches and may be removed. The bench itself is intended to provide the memorial and other members of the public should be welcome to use them. The Town Council would like to offer some flexibility regarding bench designs and would consider themed benches so long as they are robust and not inappropriate. The Open Spaces Strategy gives provision for the Town Council to consider the names of its sites. It was previously agreed that no name changes would be progressed at the moment, as work on the Neighbourhood Development Plan had already begun, however it was suggested this item should be revisited next year. The section on ponds may be subject to review once the environmental assessment results have been received. There is a space in the Strategy for the Tree Policy to be inserted, which will be done once it has been adopted by Full Council. It was agreed to carry this item forward to February’s meeting of this Sub-Committee.
- 38.3 Toilet Strategy – The Toilet Strategy Working Group is meeting tomorrow and this item will be revisited following that.
- 38.4 Mulch Policy, including to note a recommendation from the Assets, Inclusion and Development for its adoption – Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to the Finance and Governance Committee to adopt the Mulch Policy; seconded by Cllr Hardie; all in favour.
- 38.5 Co-option Policy – At the section which refers to a polling station being set up, it was requested that an amendment is made to clarify that postal votes are permitted too. The policy states that candidates will be provided with documents, including the Town Council’s Code of Conduct and Standing Orders. It was requested that an amendment is made to add this policy to the list, so that candidates are aware of the procedure. There was a discussion as to whether it would be appropriate for candidates to discuss their applications in front of one another at the co-option meeting. The difficulty is whether there is a right to exclude other people from the meeting for this purpose. Officers will consider if there is any way of making the process fairer, such as only accepting representations in writing in advance of the meeting. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to the Finance and Governance Committee to adopt the Co-Option Policy, with amendments to clarify that postal voting is acceptable, and to include the policy with the documents provided to candidates ahead of the co-option meeting; seconded by Cllr Barnard; all in favour.
- 38.6 Cycling Strategy – Cllr Butler has sent in comments, which include safety concerns, which support similar comments previously made by Cllr Hardie. It was requested that the Climate Emergency and Community Safety Committees review this strategy, with specific regards to the concerns raised regarding road safety, at which point the strategy can be referred to Full Council rather than back to this Sub-Committee. It was commented that Lowestoft does have a good cycle network compared to some other areas, and some measures which slow cyclists down do improve safety. It would be difficult to improve the cycle network due to the infrastructure of the roads. The Town Council has got cycle maps on its website and officers will review how cycling is being

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promoted by the Town Council. East Suffolk Council is reviewing its own strategy, and ran a map-based consultation. East Suffolk Council's ideas for the Town Council's Cycle Strategy would be welcomed. There is currently no cycle route from Gunton to Hopton to reach Great Yarmouth. Councillors would prefer to see off-road cycle routes. This Sub-Committee would like the strategy to take account of Cllr Butler's comments and the comments raised during this meeting, and would like to see if the other Committees mentioned have any specific comments regarding road safety.

- 38.7 Disciplinary Procedure – It was agreed to discuss this item and item 38.8 together. Both have been reviewed by this Sub-Committee before, and some minor amendments have been made. Most of the Town Council's policies and procedures are written in the third person. This procedure is in the first person, and it was commented this could be seen as adversarial. This is however a general standard format of many disciplinary procedures. Officers have all been consulted regarding the Disciplinary Procedure and Rules and no concerns were raised. All comments raised by this Sub-Committee previously have been incorporated. Cllr Pearce proposed a recommendation to the Finance and Governance Committee to adopt the Disciplinary Procedure and Rules, as amended; seconded by Cllr Hardie; all in favour.
- 38.8 Disciplinary Rules – This was covered with the discussion of item 38.7.
- 38.9 Environmental Policy – This policy amalgamates other policies linked to environmental matters - such as the Climate Emergency Declaration and the Council's commitment to biodiversity - as per the Council's desire. Separately, there has been a suggestion to merge the Climate Emergency Committee with the Planning and Environment Committee, and that will be considered at this Sub-Committee's review at its next meeting. It was suggested that by naming this the Environmental Policy, it could strengthen the case to merge the two Committees, and it was suggested that the adoption of this policy could be suspended until after the review has taken place. The Clerk has reviewed and amended the policy as per the request of the Council. The Environmental Policy is a pre-existing policy. The Open Spaces Strategy also requires review in light of the new environmental policies, such as the Sustainability Strategy and the Net Zero Policy. The Sub-Committee had no issues with the content of this policy. It was suggested that the name of the policy should not be changed, as it does cover matters relating to the environment. The Planning and Environment Committee does not just consider matters relating to the built environment, but it was suggested that it should be renamed to the Planning Committee, and the remit of the Climate Emergency Committee could be extended to consider all matters relating to the environment. The environment is however still an important consideration of the Planning and Environment Committee. It was suggested that the consideration of making a recommendation to adopt the Environmental Policy could be carried forward to next meeting, following the review of the Committee and Sub-Committee structures. It was suggested that this Sub-Committee could put forward a suggestion to change the name of the Planning and Environment Committee, however, as this Sub-Committee is completing the review that could be seen as pre-judicial. Cllr Pearce proposed acceptance of the Environmental Policy, but to only formally recommend its adoption following the review of Committee and Sub-Committee structures at January's meeting; seconded by Cllr Barnard; all in favour.
- 38.10 Financial Risk Assessment – It was suggested that the Council's aspiration to maintain general reserves equivalent to six months' precept should be included. There had been a concern about staffing levels, and a recruitment process was instigated following that. An Events and Communications Officer has been appointed, and further appointments should be made in July. Staffing levels are not covered in the Financial Risk Assessment, but the concern may have been raised in the Internal Audit Report. Staffing levels, the impact of the pandemic and the reserves position could all be included in the Financial Risk Assessment. The checklist for the internal controllers

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also needs reviewing. Cllr Pearce proposed referring the Financial Risk Assessment and checklist for the internal controllers, plus any other associated documents, to the Finance and Governance Committee for review; seconded by Cllr Lang; all in favour.

38.11 Freedom of Information Publication Scheme – One section of the document references members’ allowances and expenses, but it is understood that members do not have allowance and expenses. The Register of Gifts is now included with the Register of Interest and can be accessed via a link from the Town Council’s website. It was therefore suggested that the document should be updated to reflect this. Officers will review both of these suggestions and make the necessary amendments to the document. The Council maintains a detailed log of all Freedom of Information requests received. Cllr Lang proposed a recommendation to the Finance and Governance Committee to adopt the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme, subject to officer review and amendments where necessary; seconded by Cllr Pearce; all in favour. Occasionally the Council has reimbursed a member’s taxi fare where appropriate, but there have only been a couple of claims in the Town Council’s whole existence. Reimbursement of mileage for Council business is different. Officers will review the wording of the policy.

38.12 Friends Groups Policy – The policy and appendices have been reviewed recently, and amendments made at the request of the Council to try to encourage the creation of more Friends Groups by removing some of the bureaucracy. The appendices are mostly general advice leaflets. Any duplication or overlap of this policy in the Open Spaces Strategy may not have been checked and amended there. This, the Tree Policy and the Biodiversity Policy within the Open Spaces Strategy will all need to be reviewed. Cllr Pearce proposed that, following officer review, the Friends Groups Policy be reviewed by the AID and Finance and Governance Committees at their January meetings; seconded by Cllr Green; all in favour. The Policy includes provision for stakeholder forums. The Council has not yet held such a forum and it was requested that something be organised for early in the new year. There are certain sites for which the Council has already been discussing meetings with stakeholders and tenants. It was suggested a separate meeting for all the Friends Groups could also be arranged, to share ideas and concerns. There was a Friends of The Ness Group, but it is unclear whether it has been formally constituted. The Arnold’s Bequest Charity Board is looking to establish a Friends of Arnold’s Bequest Group. It was suggested that Friends Groups forum could be held once or twice a year.

39. Date of the next meeting

20 January 2021 14:00 – It was queried whether the date or time of the meeting should be changed. The Budget and Loan Sub-Committee will stop meeting as regularly soon, and it was suggested this Sub-Committee’s meetings could occupy that slot.

Cllr Green left the meeting 15:30

It was agreed that the Sub-Committee should continue to meet on a Wednesday, but as of January’s meeting it will meet at 16:00.

40. Items for the next agenda and close

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

The Chair thanked those who had been viewing the livestream of the meeting. There were no confidential matters for consideration and the Chair closed the meeting.

41. Resolution to close the meeting to the public

Signed:  16 June 2021