



# Leigh-on-Sea Town Council

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**Chair:** Cllr Bernard Arscott | **Vice Chair:** Cllr Carole Mulroney

**Town Clerk:** Clare Milligan



## Minutes of the Finance and Governance Committee Meeting

The Committee met at 7.30pm on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024 in Room 4, Leigh Community Centre, 71-73 Elm Road, Leigh-On- Sea, Essex, SS9 1SP.

Chair: Councillor B Arscott

Present: Councillors Dr D Bowry, C Mulroney, J Suttling and C Willoughby.

In attendance: The Town Clerk – Clare Milligan, Cllrs P Barber and P Wexham and 16 members of the public.

### **FG24-035 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies received. It was noted that Cllr J Lloyd and C Watt were absent.

### **FG24-036 Declarations of Members' Interests**

Cllr C Mulroney declared she was a Southend City Councillor and Cllr P Wexham advised he was part of the Leigh-on-Sea Endeavour Trust who apply for grants from the Town Council (item 10 on the agenda). There were no other declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Other Pecuniary Interests or Registrable Non-Pecuniary Interests.

### **FG24-037 Election of Vice Chair**

Cllr C Mulroney nominated Cllr C Willoughby as Vice Chair of Finance and Governance Committee. Seconded by Cllr B Arscott with all in agreement, Cllr C Willoughby was elected Vice Chair.

### **FG24-038 Public Participation**

Three members of the public spoke. The following questions were asked:

- 1) How can the fixed asset register be agreed before year end. The Clerk advised that this was not available for this meeting and that it would have to be deferred until January 2025. She also advised that when agreeing the asset register it was for the financial year and nothing to do with year-end.
- 2) Is there any income coming from the café to the Council. The Clerk advised this is being looked into.
- 3) Is the hanging basket contract for 3 year and was it for £11,000 as opposed to £6,000. The Clerk confirmed it was a three year contract at £11,000 per annum as shown on the draft budget for 2025/26.
- 4) Is the cost of the new IT contract value for money. The Clerk advised that the IT was far securer than it has ever been. That the cost was support as well as emails and that she did feel it was value for money.
- 5) What procurement took place in regard to the Worknest contract. The Clerk could not comment as she was not in place at the time.
- 6) Is the bio-diversity statement replacing the one on the website and will it have examples of what the Council has undertaken so far. The Clerk advised this would be discussed in item 18 on the agenda.
- 7) Will the money in the Earmarked Reserves (EMR) for the Special Constables stay

and will the Council continue to promote the recruitment of a Special. The Clerk advised it would stay in the EMR and budgeted for. She explained that the Council had one Constable so far and continues to promote them.

- 8) Applying for grants for room hire has worked well and would like to see this continue.
- 9) How is the Worknest contract good value.

#### **FG24-039 Minutes**

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 be approved and signed. Proposed by Cllr B Arscott, seconded by Cllr C Mulroney and agreed unanimously.

#### **FG24-040 Clerk's Report**

- 1) Café – A working group was appointed at the Full Council meeting in November 2024. They have met twice and a report will be given to Full Council in January 2025.
- 2) AGAR – The Clerk has heard back from the external auditor and they have advised that the Council can resubmit their part one of the AGAR. This will be taken to Full Council in January 2025.
- 3) Café Oven – an oven was purchased but unfortunately when the old one was taken out it was found the new one was not compatible with the building's electrics. The oven was returned to Nisbet and a new more suitable version was reordered. This was due to be fitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024 however it was found that additional amps were needed before the oven could be installed. The Clerk organised for the electricians to come in on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024 to put in the electrics and finish installing the oven. The Clerk will continue to chase Nisbet for the refund on the first oven ordered.

#### **FG24-041 Financial Transactions**

The Clerk went through the income and expenditure for the month of November 2024. All payments for November 2024 were approved. Proposed by Cllr C Willoughby, seconded by Cllr J Suttling and agreed unanimously. Cllr C Mulroney enquired about the invoices from the solicitors Backhouse. The Clerk advised all invoices are in line with the hourly rate and that funding was in the reserves.

#### **FG24-042 Financial Review**

The Clerk had circulated the budget comparison report showing what had been spent and the income in that month along with a running balance for the year and what percentage was still left in the budget. The report was agreed. It was noted that there were a lot of lines in the budget not spent which was disappointing. However going forward this should not happen.

The Clerk had circulated the bank reconciliations for October 2024 which were agreed. The bank reconciliations for November 2024 will go to Full Council in January 2025.

#### **FG24-043 CIL and Earmarked Reserves**

The Clerk had circulated the list of CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funding and the Earmarked Reserves (EMR) funding. A discussion took place. Cllr C Willoughby advised that a minute in a previous meeting had stated to increase the budget for elections to £10,000 for 2023/24 and so the £8,000 as shown on the EMR spreadsheet should reflect this. This should also mean that the amount in the budget for 2024/25 should be £10,000. The Clerk asked for Cllr C Willoughby to advise her of the date of the meeting to which the minutes relate so she can confirm this. Cllr C Willoughby also asked if there was a policy for

the Emergency Community Fund. The Clerk advised that Cllr C Mulroney had circulated this to Cllr C Willoughby as well as the Clerk. It was agreed this needed to be looked at and will be brought to the next Finance and Governance Committee meeting. The EMR and the CIL were agreed. Proposed by Cllr B Arscott, seconded by Cllr C Mulroney and agreed unanimously.

#### **FG24-044 Grant Process**

The Clerk had suggested that all grants that are applied for are paid out and not kept in the Council's budget to be used against hall hire for the organisations who applied for the grant. An in-depth discussion took place but a consensus could not be made. It was proposed that this needed to be looked at further along with the policy and brought back to the committee at a later date. Proposed by Cllr C Mulroney, seconded by Cllr B Arscott and agreed unanimously.

#### **FG24-045 Bank Mandate and Bank Accounts**

The Clerk asked for at least 4 more Councillors to be signatories on the bank. It was proposed for recommendation to Full Council that Cllrs P Barber, Dr D Bowry, C Mulroney and C Willoughby be added. Proposed by Cllr B Arscott, seconded by Cllr C Willoughby and agreed unanimously.

The Clerk asked for the closure of the payroll bank account and the impress bank account for financial year 2025/26. It was agreed to recommend to Full Council the closure of these accounts. Proposed by Cllr B Arscott, seconded by Cllr C Willoughby and agreed unanimously.

#### **FG24-046 Financial Regulations**

The Clerk had circulated the new Financial Regulations for recommendation to Full Council in January 2025. Cllr C Willoughby suggested that the limit for committees be £5,000 and the limit for seeking three quotes be £3,000. With these changes the financial regulations were agreed for recommendation. Proposed by Cllr C Mulroney, seconded by Cllr Dr D Bowry and agreed unanimously.

#### **FG24-047 Asset Register**

This was not available and deferred to January 2025.

#### **FG24-048 Contracts**

The Clerk had circulated the list of contracts for the Council. An in-depth discussion took place and questions were raised in regard to the Worknest Contract. The Clerk advised that this should have gone out to tender due to its cost but that the quote had been brought to a Council meeting and agreed. There was discussion regarding the Mashford contract and whether there was anything in there which meant the company were able to advertise on the side of the planters in the front of the community building. The Clerk advised that the contract was only agreed verbally and that there was nothing to say the Council had to advertise the company. The Clerk will have the notices removed. Cllr C Willoughby thanked the Finance Officer for her work in pulling the report together as this must have taken many hours. The contracts were noted.

#### **FG24-049 Petty Cash**

The Clerk asked for the committee to agree that petty cash was no longer required. It was agreed that as at the financial year 2025/26 petty cash would no longer be required. Proposed by Cllr C Willoughby, seconded by Cllr Dr D Bowry and agreed unanimously.

#### **FG24-050 Tender for Christmas Lights from 2025**

The Clerk asked for a small group consisting of two Councillors and herself be agreed to look at the tender for the lights for 2025 onwards. It was agreed that Cllr C Mulroney and

Cllr P Gilson would be the two Councillors. Proposed by Cllr J Suttling, seconded by Cllr C Willoughby and agreed unanimously.

#### **FG24-051 IT Hardware Investigation and Upgrade**

The Clerk had circulated the quote from ICE (Lodge Information Services) for investigating the wiring for the IT within the building. A discussion took place and it was agreed to accept the quote. Proposed by Cllr C Mulroney, seconded by Cllr J Suttling and agreed unanimously.

#### **FG24-052 Policies/Processes and Statements**

The following policies, procedures and statements were circulated and discussed. With a couple of minor amendments the policies, procedures and statements were agreed.

Proposed by Cllr C Mulroney, seconded by Cllr Dr D Bowry and agreed unanimously.

The amendments were as follows:

1. Statement of Internal control

3(a) to continue, 'finalised and agreed at Full Council.'

3(b) to continue, 'authorised at full council or finance committee.'

3(c) change to 'checked and or finance committee'.

3(d) change to '2 Councillors signing'.

2. Bio-diversity Statement

To add the examples of work already undertaken by the Council.

#### **FG24-053 Gas and Electricity quotes**

The Clerk circulated the quotes and a discussion took place. It was agreed that the Council should use a company that uses green energy. Therefore the Clerk will go back out to providers to gain further quotes. An extra ordinary meeting will now be organised for the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024 to re look at the quotes for decision.

Cllr B Arscott proposed to suspend Standing Orders in order for the meeting to carry on until 10pm to allow discussion on the draft budget. Proposed by Cllr B Arscott, seconded by Cllr C Willoughby and agreed unanimously.

9.21pm Cllr P Wexham left the meeting

#### **FG24-054 Draft Budget for 2025/26**

The Clerk had circulated the draft budget for 2025/26 and an in-depth discussion took place. A few changes were made to the budget including decreasing the income from the café to £2,000, increase the School Crossing to £7,500 and allocating the Good For Leigh line a budget of £500. Library line, Civic line and Volunteer Programme line to be removed. Community and Engagement to include the website. The Clerk advised that she will produce a forward plan for the Council to show exactly what is being saved for. There was a concern re the legal fees budget and that the amount may not be enough. However it was noted that there was an amount of £30,000 in the reserves. The Clerk confirmed that any point increase and potential pay increase was added to the staffing spreadsheet and that the pension was to remain static at present. It was agreed that any work to heating and lighting take into factor the bio-diversity statement. The draft budget was agreed for recommendation to Full Council. Proposed by Cllr C Mulroney, seconded by Cllr C Willoughby and agreed unanimously.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.57pm.

Next meeting Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2025.