



Leigh-on-Sea Town Council

71-73 Elm Road, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex SS9 1SP | Tel: 01702 716288

council@leighonseatowncouncil.gov.uk | www.leighonseatowncouncil.gov.uk

Chairman: Cllr Bernard Arscott | Vice Chairman: Cllr Sandra McCurdy

Town Clerk: Helen Symmons PSLCC



**Members are Summoned to attend a Meeting of
LEIGH-ON-SEA TOWN COUNCIL
To be held Tuesday, 16 January 2024 at 7.30pm
At Leigh Community Centre, 71-73 Elm Road, Leigh-On-Sea SS9 1SP**

Gina Lopes PSLCC
Locum Clerk
20 December 2023

Any member unable to attend the meeting should send their apologies to the Locum Clerk

AGENDA

1) Chairman's Welcome & Housekeeping

2) Apologies For Absence

3) Declarations Of Interest

Members should declare personal or prejudicial interests in any items on the agenda. It is a requirement of the Parish Council (Code of Conduct) that declarations from a Member include the nature of the interest and whether it is pecuniary or an interest other than pecuniary. In the case of a pecuniary interest being declared, the member must disclose the interest and withdraw from the meeting when the item is discussed.

4) Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2023 – for resolution

5) Public Participation (Maximum Time 15 Minutes)

Resolution to suspend the meeting to invite members of the public to speak

6) Questions from Councillors – for information only

To receive brief questions from Councillors (only items not on the Agenda)

7) Southend City Councillors' Reports – for information only

To receive brief reports from Southend City Councillors representing Leigh Town Council areas

8) Financial Matters

a) Payments list (25/11/23 2023- 19/12/2023) – for acceptance & approval

b) Bank Balances at 19 December 2023 – for information

c) Report of Audit of Accounts dated 2 November 2023 – for acceptance & approval

d) Public statement from Cllr Arscott & Cllr Agdeve re Report of Audit of Accounts dated 2 November 2023 – for information only

e) Renewal of Cloud Voice contract - for approval

9) Budget & Precept 2024/25

- a) Budget for financial year 2024/25 – for resolution
- b) Precept request for financial year 2024/25 – for resolution

10) Bus Route

Update on progress – Cllr Hart to report

11) Disposable Vapes Ban

Update on progress – Cllr Hart to report

12) Correspondence

a) Consultation on admission arrangements for Academic Year 2025/26 from Chase High School – for response

b) Any other urgent correspondence – if any

13) Motions from non-party Councillors – Cllr Mulroney to report

a) Hire charges

b) Future of the Community Centre

c) Standards of behaviour

14) Date of next Scheduled Meeting

28 March 2024– for information only

15) Exclusion of the press & public

Resolution to exclude the press and public

in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted (The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960)

a) Confidential Staffing matters – for consideration

b) HR Service Proposal – for consideration

c) Appointment of independent consultants – for consideration

MAXIMUM MEETING TIME TWO HOURS



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Payments List 25/11/23 2023- 19/12/2023 Report 2811/ Expenditure incurred under the General Power of Competence

Cheque	Expenditure	Payee	Purpose
		Expenditure - Cheques	
BK TRS	£38.00	Manchester Drive Allotment Society	Donation from plot holder
BK TRS	£35.21	Viking	Stationery
BK TRS	£150.00	PFS Group Ltd	Fire alarm service contract
BK TRS	£193.36	Amazon	Microphones, batteries, power cord, light bulbs
BK TRS	£110.00	Verde	Coffee supplies for cafe
BK TRS	£162.49	Essex Supplies (UK) Ltd	Cleaning materials
BK TRS	£313.11	The Montine Food Company Ltd	Café supplies
BK TRS	£358.80	British Telecom	Btnet charges
BK TRS	£19.28	Mark One Hire	Acrow prop hire
BK TRS	£2115.00	Worknest	HR support 15 hours
BK TRS	£133.09	The Montine Food Company Ltd	Café supplies
BK TRS	£34.84	Amazon	Coffee etc for Council meetings
BK TRS	£480.00	Aubergine 262 Ltd	Annual subscription for software and support re Community Engagement App
BK TRS	£221.00	Sugar Lump Lane	Christmas Cupcake workshop
BK TRS	£119.70	Fulton Paper	Paper
BK TRS	£150.48	James Todd & Co Ltd	Payroll processing
BK TRS	£87.22	Couno Office Solutions Ltd	Photocopying
BK TRS	£1800.00	Letchwood	Locum Town Clerk fee August
BK TRS	£5699.67	LGRC Associates Ltd	Locum Town Clerk fee and expenses November
BK TRS	£960.00	Thames Landscaping	To dress and remove lighting from tree in Leigh Library Gardens
BK TRS	£109.00	J Milne	Café supplies
BK TRS	£528.08	The Montine Food Company Ltd	Café supplies

BK TRS	£6.98	Amazon	Tape
BK TRS	£355.00	Hadleigh Salvage Recycling	Skip at Manchester Drive allotments
BK TRS	£78.60	Brunel Engraving Company	Memorial plaque
BK TRS	£2820.00	Worknest	HR support 20 hours
BK TRS	£32000.00	Payroll	December payroll
BK TRS	£136.50	Hirer	Refund hall hire
BK TRS	£128.93	The Montine Food Company Ltd	Café supplies
BK TRS	£50.00	MDAS	Alleyway clearance
BK TRS	£105.55	Essex Supplies (UK) Ltd	Cleaning materials
BK TRS	£3987.12	Edge IT Systems Ltd	One year contract for Facilities Finance and Allotments IT package
BK TRS	£120.00	Aubergine 262 Ltd	Domain renewal
BK TRS	£79.10	Viking	Stationery
BK TRS	£19.60	Amazon	Stationery
		Expenditure – Imprest Items	
	£12.99	Canva	Subscription
	£12.99	Zoom Communications	Subscription

LEIGH ON SEA TOWN COUNCIL BANK BALANCES

The bank balances as at 19 December 23 are

Current Account	£12,966.44
Imprest Account	£803.79
Payroll Account	£688.75
Savings Account	£350,602.19
PSDF	£532,364.07

Bank statements are available for inspection by Councillors by appointment with the Assistant Responsible Finance Officer

John P Watson & Co

Leigh on Sea Town Council

Audit of Accounts

This report has been prepared for the sole use of Leigh on Sea Town Council. To the fullest extent permitted by law, no responsibility or liability is accepted by John P Watson & Co to any third party who purports to use or rely on, for any reason whatsoever, this report, its content or conclusions.

1. Introduction

Following a statement made by a Councillor at a Town Council meeting on 13th September 2023 regarding concerns at figures seen in the August accounts and fears that they indicate fraud, I have been appointed by the Locum Town Clerk “to undertake an analytical audit of the Council’s accounts for the year 2022 – 2023 and part year 2023 – date”. The financial year starts on 1st April each year.

The instruction continues “While you will have scope to pursue whatever leads you see fit, the Council would like you to consider trends rather than specifics, looking for abnormal spending patterns, unusual duplicate expenditure, unauthorised material purchases or other spending patterns. This work will cover office expenditure as well as bar and café income and expenditure.”

This analytical audit is not connected, in any way, to the current dispute between the Town Clerk and the Town Council.

2. Background

The period covered by the instruction has been subject to an interim and final internal audit in respect of 2022 – 2023 and an interim internal audit in respect of 2023 – 2024. This internal audit was carried out by Heelis and Lodge. Heelis and Lodge, as part of their audit, have checked bank payments and reconciliations in detail and have tested a sample of salary payments with no issues found. Accordingly I have undertaken no further investigation in these areas.

3. Systems

To consider the approach to the work undertaken it is necessary for Councillors to understand the internal processes for approving expenditure.

There are essentially five main processes being:

i. **Bank Payments.**

Bank payments are supported by a Bank Authorisation form to which is attached the invoice being paid and any other pertinent information.

All payments are authorised by two Councillors. During Covid these authorisations were carried out by email exchange between the Finance Officer and Town Councillors who were signatories to the bank account. This method of approval was verbally agreed by the Internal Auditor at the time. I have noted that the Councillors were not sent copies of the invoices they were being asked to approve on the basis that, as they were long serving Councillors, they were familiar with the payments being made. This procedure carried on until the elections in May following which Councillors commenced attending at the Office to sign the Bank Authorisations. The Bank Authorisation is approved and initialled by the Town Clerk and the bank transfer is then input into the bank by the Finance Officer in the presence a second member of staff. The Finance Officer and the second member of staff initial the Bank Authorisation.

Following the elections to the Town Council on 4th May 2023 at which only one signatory remained as a Town Councillor it was expedient, in the short term, for the bank authorisations to be approved by a second non-signatory Councillor.

It should be noted that, following the dispute between the Town Clerk and the Town Council it is not possible to ask the Town Clerk to sign these authorisations.

ii. Imprest Payment

Imprest payments are supported by an Imprest Authorisation form to which is attached the invoice being paid and any other pertinent information.

The Town Clerk holds a Debit Card with a facility of up to £1,000 which is used, on her authority, to purchase various items. This balance is topped up periodically. The Imprest Authorisation form is signed by the person making the purchase and countersigned by the Town Clerk. In some instances the Town Clerk has not signed the Imprest Authorisation form but this has been accepted on the basis that the Town Clerk has effectively authorised the payment by releasing the card to the person making the purchase. Following the dispute between the Town Clerk and the Town Council this card has not been used although previously arranged subscriptions and bank charges continue to be debited to the card.

iii. Direct Debits

Direct Debits are approved by the Town Council at the Annual Council Meeting which is held at the beginning of each Council year.

iv. Contracts

Contracts are approved by the Town Council at the Annual Council Meeting which is held at the beginning of each Council year.

v. Cash Payments

A petty cash float is held for expenditure relating to the Café. This will be dealt with in detail later in this report.

4. Audit Work (General)

- i. The Edge accounting system used by the Town Council produces a "Paid Expenses Transactions" report which I have used as a basis for my investigation. This report shows approximately 2,500 transactions for the 2022/2023 financial year and approximately 1,150 transactions for the six months to 30th September 2023.
- ii. I have also been provided with a schedule of suppliers and with ledger sheets detailing the activity in respect of those individual suppliers in each financial period.
- iii. I have excluded from my investigation payments to utility providers, salary and associated payments and payments to Leigh Community Centre which is basically an internal transfer.
- iv. I have not verified whether Standing Orders and/or Financial Regulations have been adhered to in respect of the Council going out to tender where required as I considered this to be outside my remit.
- v. It appears that the Town Council does not have an ordering system in place, official orders only being issued when required (usually by the supplier).
- vi. Prior to producing this Report, I have met with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Town Council and the Councillor who made the statement at the Town Council meeting on 13th September 2023

- vii. I have not made any recommendations following this report as I believe that this would be the remit of the Internal Auditor. I am willing to do this if requested.

5. Audit Work (2022/2023) Office

- i. I have used the Paid Expenses Transactions Report as a reference point to inspect the documents which support each transaction.
- ii. I have initially inspected all transactions but, as the year has progressed and I have recognised regular payment (monthly contracts etc), I have confined my inspection to payments I have not recognised particularly the larger payments. I have subsequently inspected a large proportion of transactions (including cash payments in respect of the Café which is dealt with in more detail below).
- iii. Each transaction I have inspected has been supported by the correct paperwork duly authorised by two Councillors, approved by the Town Clerk and dealt with appropriately by the Finance Office when inputting the information (where appropriate) into the bank.
- iv. I have not found any “abnormal spending patterns, unusual duplicate expenditure, unauthorised material purchases or other spending patterns” in the year under review. I have not found any expenditure which, as an Internal Local Authority Auditor for over eight years is unusual or unexpected.

6. Audit Work (2022/2023) Cafe

- i. Prior to the Café being taken over by the Town Council, it was operated under licence by an individual who also provided bars to the community centre when required. Following his retirement the running of the Café was taken over by the Town Council on 1st January 2023.
- ii. The staff previously employed by previous operator were TUPE'd over to the Town Council on zero hour contracts on 1st January 2023.
- iii. The till in the Café is balanced every night and the till rolls are retained in the Office. There are very occasional discrepancies in the till reconciliation. These are usually a small amount (no more than a few pounds) and are no more than I would expect.
- iv. The café have their own card machine and the money taken by card is paid directly into the Town Council's bank account. The cash takings are paid into the Town Council's bank account by the Finance Officer on a regular basis.
- v. The Café has a cash float which, in the initial stages of being run by the Town Council was used to purchase provisions for use in the café. This was considered inefficient by the Town Clerk and an account was opened with three wholesalers using either the debit card associated with the Imprest Account (see 3.ii above) or paying by bank transfer.
- vi. A summary sheet is kept of all cash spent and the float is reconciled on a regular basis.
- vii. The Café do regular stock checks. I am advised that these stock checks are not costed out.
- viii. The Town Clerk has maintained a spreadsheet summarising the Income and Expenditure in the Café for the period 1st April to 30th June 2023. Because the opening and closing stock has not been valued it is not possible to ascertain the true gross margin in the café or to identify any possible leakage.

- ix. I have checked all transactions related to the Café in detail for the three months to 31st March 2023, comparing the items purchased to the food supplied to customers in the café by reference to the Café menus and have found no issues of concern.

7. Audit Work (2023/2024) Office

- i. I have continued to use the Paid Expenses Transactions Report as a reference point to inspect the documents which support each transaction.
- ii. Following the procedure adopted in 2022/2023 (see 5 ii above), I have continued to confine my inspection to payments I have not recognised particularly the larger payments. I have inspected a large proportions of transactions (again including cash payments in respect of the Café which is dealt with in more detail below).
- iii. As in 2022/2023 each transaction I have inspected has been supported by the correct paperwork duly authorised by two Councillors, approved by the Town Clerk and dealt with appropriately by the Finance Office when inputting the information where appropriate) into the bank.
- iv. Again, I have not found any “abnormal spending patterns, unusual duplicate expenditure, unauthorised material purchases or other spending patterns”. I have not found any expenditure which, as an Internal Local Authority Auditor for over eight years is unusual or unexpected.

8. Audit Work (2023/2024) Café

- i. The till in the Café continues to be balanced every night and the till rolls are retained in the Office. There continue to be very occasional discrepancies in the till. These are usually a small amount (no more than a few pounds) and are no more than I would expect.
- ii. The café continue to have their own card machine and the money taken by card is paid directly into the Town Council’s bank account. The cash takings are paid into the Town Council’s bank account by the Finance Officer on a regular basis.
- iii. The Café continues to maintain a cash float which is still used to purchase provisions for use in the café. The use of cash to purchase supplies has been exacerbated by the dispute between the Town Clerk and the Town Council which means that, since 31st July 2023, the primary wholesaler can no longer be used as the Town Council no longer have access to the online account. The other two wholesalers continue to be used but I understand that they do not have the choice of product (fresh produce) provided by the original wholesaler.
- iv. A summary sheet is kept of all cash spent and the float is reconciled on a regular basis.
- v. The Café continue to do regular stock checks. I am again advised that these stock checks are not costed out.
- vi. Due to the dispute between the Town Clerk and the Town Council the spreadsheet previously maintained by the Town Clerk showing the income and expenditure in the Café has not been maintained.
- vii. I have checked all transactions related to the Café in detail for the six months to 30th September 2023, comparing the items purchased to the food supplied to customers in the café by reference to the Café menus and have found no issues of concern.

9. Conclusion

- i. In addition to discussing the original brief with the Locum Town Clerk, holding telephone discussions with members of Council and preparing this Report I have spent some nineteen hours actually reviewing, in depth, the paperwork covering the eighteen months to 30th September 2023 and, whilst there are some small discrepancies in procedures, I can find no indication of “abnormal spending patterns, unusual duplicate expenditure, unauthorised material purchases or other spending patterns”.
- ii. It is my considered opinion that the Town Council has not been subject to financial irregularities

2nd November 2023



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Press Release

Cllr Bernard Arscott, Chairman of Leigh on Sea Town Council, confirmed an Audit of Accounts had been produced by an independent professional. The report was in response to a request made at the Council meeting on 13 September 2023.

Cllr Murat Agdeve who had proposed the Audit is pleased to have received the Audit Report and looks forward to the document being formally accepted by all Councillors at the January meeting and available to the public. Cllr Agdeve was concerned at the time, as a relatively new Town Councillor, there had been a change in Councillors and the previous administration and wanted to ensure all was in order.

Cllr Agdeve stressed his comments were never directed at any specific member of staff and he did not question anyone's honesty. Cllr Agdeve wishes to apologise for any detrimental impact that may have been experienced by the Town Council staff as a result of his words and particularly recognises the diligent work of the Assistant Responsible Finance Officer.

Cllr Arscott acknowledged, with hindsight, things could have been phrased differently. Cllr Arscott wishes to apologise for any distress caused to the Assistant Responsible Finance Officer and thank her for hard work and long service to the Council.

Cllr Arscott confirmed, as Chairman, it is his intention to ensure the Town Council proceeds in a professional way. He recognises the value of the Council Staff Team and will ensure there is good working relationships to enable the effective delivery of services to all residents.



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Chairman: Cllr Keith Evans | **Vice Chairman:** Cllr Dr. David Bowry

Town Clerk: Helen Symmons *PSLCC*



Re: Leigh-on-Sea Town Council precept 2023/24

At a Council meeting 24th January 2023, Leigh Town Council resolved its precept for 2023/24.

The resolved precept for 2023/24 is **£462,056** and means a Council Tax rate of **£50.58** at Band D giving a reduction of £0.36 (-0.71%). This is subject to the SCC tax base remaining at 9135.15 as advised.

A brief breakdown of the proposed budget is as follows:

Information & Support Services	157,400
Finance & Governance	33,750
Community Facilities	241,000
Health & Wellbeing programme	46,900
Community programmes	11,200
Allotments	31,300
Environment facilities/services	42,000
Planning and Licensing	15,750
Capital & Strategic Projects	30,000
Increase to General Reserves	10,326
Finance & Governance	-1,250
Community Facilities	-131,250
Health & Wellbeing programme	-5,000
Allotments Income	-20,070
Total Precept 2023/24	462,056

If you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Symmons
Town Clerk

PRECEPT NOTES

Staffing costs are increased in 24/25 by

Café staff not previously included £47583.00

5% increased agreed on all staff £18266.65

Total increase: £65,849.65.

Last Year's precept figure £462,056

Add inc in budget £ 65,849.65.

2024/25 draft Precept figure £527,905.65

(Correspondence from Chase High School)

Formal Consultation on Admission Arrangements for Academic Year 2025/26

Dear Colleague,

In accordance with the requirements of the current legislation, namely the School Admissions Code (September 2021, DfE), The Discovery Educational Trust, Chase High School, is writing to you, as a statutory consultee, to provide you with the details of the Admission Arrangements (AAs) that will be applied to admissions to Chase High School for the academic year 2025/26.

The consultation period will commence as of the date of this communication and will end on 31 January 2024. This meets with the statutory requirement of a minimum six calendar (and not school) week consultation period.

Whilst the 'look and feel' of the documentation is different to our previous AAs, substantive changes are detailed below for your ease of reference:

- **Sibling:** the definition of sibling now requires the sibling to be on roll at Chase High School at the time of application and admission of the applicant child, and also requires the siblings to be living at the same address. Refer paragraphs 4.b. and 9. of the policy document.
- **Children of Staff at Chase High School:** A new criteria has been added to include children of staff members. Refer paragraph 4.d. of the policy document.

Minor changes have also been made to the tie breaker methodology (refer to paragraph 8. of the policy document) and the waiting list methodology (refer to paragraph 15. Of the policy document).

None of the changes referenced are considered to have a significant impact on the cohort applying for admission to Chase High School for 2025/26.

In accordance with clause 1.47 a) of the School Admissions Code, The Discovery Educational Trust, Chase High School, would be grateful if you could bring this consultation to the attention of the parents/carers of your school and nursery, where relevant, to assist us in reaching as many parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen.

The Discovery Educational Trust, Chase High School, invite you and your parent/carer community to make any comments or observations to me, in writing, by Wednesday 31 January 2024. You can provide your feedback by email on admissions@chasehigh.org, by post, marking your correspondence for the attention of Admissions, or by handing in your comments at the Chase High School main reception.

Kind regards

Admissions

