



Leigh-on-Sea Town Council  
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**Chairman:** Cllr Bernard Arscott | **Vice Chairman:** Cllr Sandra McCurdy

**Town Clerk:** Helen Symmons *PSLCC*



Minutes of the meeting of Leigh-on-Sea Town Council  
**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023** in Leigh Community Centre,

Minutes

**91. CHAIRMAN AND HOUSEKEEPING ANNOUNCEMENT**

**92. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received and agreed for Cllrs Robinson, Lloyd, R Arscott, Robinson, Gilson, Lambert and Carty

**93. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Mulronee declared she was a Southend City Councillor, Cllr Flewitt declared his husband was a Southend City Councillor and Cllr Garston declared his father was a Southend City Councillor. There were no other pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest declared.

**94. MINUTES**

Cllr Mulronee advised that she was unable to find the previous minutes for the meetings on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 2023 or 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and asked when they were going to be published on the website. Cllr Mulronee also requested that minutes show the full questions asked to the Council and that minutes be completed within 7 days. It was advised that the 25<sup>th</sup> July minutes were circulated with the paperwork for the meeting. The Chair noted the other comments/requests and advised that he would reply within 7 days.

- a. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING ON 25th JULY 2023. These minutes were approved with 7 for and 3 abstaining.
- b. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING ON 13<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2023. These minutes had not been circulated and so could not be approved.

**95. PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS (on agenda items)**

**96. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (for which written notice has been received)**

Question from Manchester Drive Allotment Society – previously circulated.  
The representative for the Manchester Drive Allotment Society made representation and Cllr Flewitt replied. The Parish Council is in full support of the allotment site. They will be trying to reduce waiting times and there will be no reduction in the service.

A question received as follows regarding the over sixties club.  
Could the chairman and administration give assurances that the over sixties club will continue at the community centre and continue to be run by the council staff. Could the

council record the thanks for the staff who organise the event and the volunteers who come to help.

Cllr Mulroney spoke about the Over sixties club and the concern that the Council would no longer be supporting this. The Chair to the Council confirmed that the club had the full support of the Council and that the Council hoped it would go from strength to strength. The Council thanked the staff for their support.

Resident 1 question: There have not been any formalised minutes available for residents to view on the Leigh Town Council website since the 23rd May 2023. Could the chair confirm when he expects minutes for the past 5 full council meetings to be finalised and uploaded? The Chair advised that he hoped the minutes would be on the website by the end of the month.

Resident 2 question: 1) please can councillors inform me of the cost per month of the suspension of the town clerk 2) please can all councillors reaffirm at the meeting that bullying is unacceptable and abhorrent and is intolerable in any way shape and form 3) on the basis of question 2, if any councillors are found to be implicated in the bullying of staff please can they confirm they will stand down from their position with immediate effect. The Chair advised that the costing would be sent to the individual within the next 7 days. The Council unanimously agreed that bullying is unacceptable and the Chair advised that if there was any Councillor found to be implicated in the bullying of staff that he hoped they would reflect on that very carefully. He was however unable to say what another Councillor may or may not do.

Resident 3 question: I am very unhappy with the atmosphere of the Town Council. What is the Chair doing to keep up morale and stability of the classes at the centre. The Chair advised he was unaware of the situation and would happily meet with anyone to talk about it.

Resident 4 question: At the last council meeting, reference was made to the appointment of an independent adjudicator to report on the issues surrounding the suspension of the town clerk. On what date was the adjudicator appointed, what were the terms of reference and what is the deadline for their report to be completed and presented to the council? The Chair advised that a written reply would be sent out and made public within 7 days of the meeting.

Residents have come to me with concerns that their classes are being moved from Leigh Community Centre to other locations due to the tense atmosphere at the council. What is the Chair doing to ensure classes and groups are encouraged to stay for the financial stability of the centre?

The Council advised that they were supporting the staff and outside/professional support is available if any staff member needed it.

There are many rumours flying around about plans to close the Community Centre. Can Councillors reassure residents this is not the case.

The Council confirmed that the centre would not be closing.

## **97. CORRESPONDENCE**

The remembrance service is in the Eastwood Hall 12<sup>th</sup> November starting at 2pm to enable those who wish to attend the Service at St Clements was noted.

Cllr Mulroney on behalf of the Town Clerk enquired as to why the Council had not replied to the Clerk's Subject Access Request on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 2023 for all correspondence relating to herself and her subsequent request on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2023. A complaint in regard to this

was sent to the Locum Clerk on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023. If the information is not forthcoming within the next 10 days, the Clerk will take this to the Information Commissioner. The Chair will follow this up with the Locum Clerk.

**98. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS (for which written notice has been received)**

No written questions had been submitted. However, Cllr Mulroneu asked the following:

a. The Town Clerk remains suspended after nearly 3 months with no end in sight and it is clear that somewhere a decision has been made to extend the period but, for how long I don't know, there has been no staffing committee and thus no official Committee decision to back this up. The decision to extend the suspension is therefore ultra vires and should not stand. Please can you advise me who made that decision and under what authority and why a staffing meeting was not called to do so. And when the Town Clerk can retake her position.

b. It is common knowledge that ALL staff have submitted a grievance against the Town Council as a body corporate, prior to her suspension a grievance had been submitted by the Town Clerk which has not been dealt with and yet a further grievance has been submitted by the finance officer against allegations of potential fraud made at the meeting on 13 September 2023 which affects not only her, but the staff's reputations. These grievances affect the 3 independent councillors because we too are part of the body corporate. Therefore, our reputations are being sullied by these grievances which have brought the reputation of the Council into disrepute. Will you now confirm unequivocally that all the grievances relate solely to the actions of the Conservative members.

c. You have heard that there is considerable fear and worry from those who use the Council's services in the Centre, the allotments etc many of whom have livelihoods to maintain of which the centre is a vital part. Will you now confirm unequivocally that LTC and LCC and all its various assets and activities will remain unaltered except for any genuinely consulted on, debated and agreed changes that are beneficial to the people of Leigh and the centre will remain under the auspices of LTC and no moves will be made to change that status.

d. The people of Leigh have a right to know how we are spending their council tax – I am sure you would agree. So, with that in mind will you please apprise them of the following costs – bearing in mind that some of these are published or have been advised to me by the Locum clerk.

The cost so far of the Locum's services.

The cost of the auditor on the allegation of potential fraud

The cost of the HR consultant is given in the accounts as £2820 I understand that was for 20 hours work. Can you please advise as to whether you have authorised them to take any additional work since their first engagement and if so, how much that is going to cost. Can I also ask why the brief to the HR consultants has not been made available to councillors and the Locum clerk despite several requests through him. Adjunct to that who wrote the brief and approved it for submission and why was no approval sought to its content from the Staffing Committee. When the decision was made to engage a new HR consultant (and Councillor Bowry will have a question on this) I asked whether the three independent members were to be allowed to take part in the investigation and you said yes. Why has 20 hours of investigation gone by, and we have not been included.

e. When you are going to reestablish the committee timetable which was approved under your chairmanship in May and ensure that all that has been left undone is done and most importantly proceed with the budget for 24/25. To this end will you produce a chart of all outstanding or overlooked matters so that we can all see what needs to be done within the next 10 days.

f. What if any actions beneficial to the residents of Leigh have been taken since the meeting on 13 September.

g. My final question is a very important one - for the benefit of those in the audience I have circulated a copy of the Nolan Principles and what they require of those in public life. Can

you please tell the residents what they are and stand for and most importantly comment on each individually as to how you are fulfilling them.

As the Council was unaware of these questions, they were unable to answer them but responded they would send a written reply.

#### **99. SOUTHEND CITY COUNCIL**

Cllr Richard Longstaff advised that the Tree Motion at Southend City Council had gone through and he was hopeful that a working party would be set up to oversee any trees that were destined to be felled,

Cllr Mulroney advised that the 20mph works for Glendale Gardens would shortly be completed. She also advised that the City Council were looking at consulting on proposals for possible changes to the electoral system.

Cllr Flewitt enquired as to the non-working lights in the Strand Wharf underlighting.

However, Cllr Mulroney advised this was the responsibility of Leigh Town Council and not the City Council.

#### **100. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT**

There was no update for this meeting. Cllr Mulroney felt that this was a worry and that things were getting missed. Cllr Mulroney asked that the Locum Clerk supply with his next fees a breakdown on how much of his time is used to undertake actual council activity and how much time is spent on phone calls and meeting with Conservative members

### **COMMITTEES / PDGS AND REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS**

#### **101. COMMITTEES**

To receive the Minutes of Committees for 2022/23, presented by the Committee Chairman.

a) Planning, Licensing and Highways Committee –

Cllr Garston proposed the minutes, seconded by Cllr Agdeve and agreed unanimously. It was noted that Cllr Robinson had stood down and he was thanked for his contribution to the committee. It was agreed Cllr Hart would sit on the committee. Proposed by Cllr Garston, seconded by Cllr Agdeve and agreed unanimously.

b) Community & Culture Committee

Next meeting 25<sup>th</sup> October

Cllr Mulroney advised that a list of items for the meeting had been send and enquired as to whether the items were on the next agenda. Cllr Flewitt advised that he had yet to see the agenda. It was agreed that if the agenda did not have all the items requested the meeting would be postponed for two days in order for the correct agenda to be produced. Proposed by Cllr B Arscott, seconded by Cllr Hart and agreed unanimously.

c) Finance and Governance Committee

Meeting 31<sup>st</sup> July – No Minutes available

d) Staffing Committee – No minutes available. Cllr Mulroney asked when this committee was going to meet. Cllr B Arscott hoped it would be the first week in November 2023.

#### **102. STRATEGIC PLAN PDG**

There was no report, but Cllr Mulroney asked if any work had been completed regarding the consultation that had previously been proposed. Cllr B Arscott advised he was in discussion with the Locum Clerk on this and that a magazine would go out before Christmas.

**103. YOUTH PROVISION PDG**

There was no report, but Cllr Mulroney asked if Cllr B Arscott had met with the youth groups. Cllr B Arscott advised that they were coming to the Community & Culture Committee meeting to give a presentation.

**104. REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS**

Cllr Flewitt advised that the airport was undertaking a virtual meeting with the Town Council on 11th January 2024. He was also hopefully that after a telephone call with the bus company and Cllr Hart on the 26th October 2023 that a meeting would be set up where public questions could be taken.

<b>OTHER DECISION ITEMS</b>
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**105. TO APPOINT A REPRESENTATIVE TO THE ESSEX ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS' EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.**

It was agreed to appoint Cllr B Arscott be the Town Council representative. Proposed by Cllr Flewitt, seconded by Cllr Garston; with 7 for and 3 abstaining the motion was passed.

**106. TO SET A DATE FOR COUNCILLOR TRAINING**

A short discussion took place and Cllr Mulroney advised that the Town Clerk had circulated an email on 24<sup>th</sup> May requesting any Councillors who were interested in training to let her know. The Clerk had said that she had not received any requests. Cllr Agdeve advised that he had requested planning training. No date was set for any further training.

**107. DISPOSABLE VAPES – to consider drafting a letter in support of a proposed ban on disposable vapes.**

As of 12th October, a government consultation has commenced which includes a proposal to ban the sale of disposable vapes and it is proposed that a letter should be drafted in support of said ban addressed to the M.P. A discussion took place and it was agreed a letter would be written to the MP in support of a complete ban. Proposed by Cllr Hart, seconded by Cllr A Arscott and agreed unanimously.

**108. BUS ROUTE**

A discussion took place and it was advised that the letter agreed regarding the no. 21 route still had not gone out to the bus company or the MP. This will be picked up.

**109. FINANCIAL MATTERS**

- a. To note the internal audit report and consider actions arising.  
The audit report was noted and the Council thanked the staff for an excellent report. Cllr Bowry enquired as to the cost of Worknest HR services. Cllr B Arscott advised that the Council had initially paid for a block of 5 hours and once these have been used a further block would be purchased. This worked out cheaper than the previous HR provider who were charging a monthly fee even if they were not undertaking any work for the Council.
- b. To note that an independent financial audit has been commissioned to investigate allegations of potential fraud.  
Cllr Mulroney was still concerned over the allegations of fraud made by another councillor. Cllr Agdeve advised that he did not accuse any particular member of staff of fraud or that fraud had been committed just that he felt an in-depth audit of the finances would be a good idea. He felt his comments had been miss represented.

Cllr Mulroney asked with the investigation hanging over the staff what support had the Council offered the staff. The Chair advised that he had been in contact with the Locum Clerk who was supporting staff and that professional help was available if the staff required it.

- c. To consider first draft of 2023-24 budget.

There didn't seem to be any draft budget for 2024/25 and Cllr Mulroney asked that work on this is started as soon as possible and a timetable for setting the budget be sent out. Cllr B Arscott advised that the Finance Committee would be meeting to discuss the budget on the 7<sup>th</sup> November and that he was happy for a timetable to set up.

- d. Council bank balance as at 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Current Account	£35,792.80
Imprest Account	£900.06
Payroll Account	£654.41
Savings Account	£404,452.21
Public Sector Deposit Fund	£532,364.07

These balances were agreed.

Cllr Suttling has completed the reconciliation checks for August and September

- e. To approve expenditure for September

Cheque	£ cost	Payee	Purpose
BK TRS	£150.00	Mashfords Gardening & general Maintenance	Grass cutting at Skate Park
BK TRS	£110.00	Verde	Coffee supplies café
BK TRS	£146.19	Amazon	Maintenance item and urn
BK TRS	£2512.80	Kieran Lucas Contractors Ltd	Works related to new steel beam LCC
BK TRS	£41.41	Couno Office Solutions Ltd	Photocopying
BK TRS	£19.93	Mark One Hire	Acrow prop hire
BK TRS	£158.40	James Todd & Co Ltd	Payroll processing
BK TRS	£311.93	Cater Kwik Ltd	Water boiler for café (replacement)
BK TRS	£25.00	Plot-holder	Plot deposit refund
BK TRS	£445.28	Montine Food Company Ltd	Café supplies
BK TRS	£558.91	Veolia Environmental Services	Garden waste sacks
BK TRS	£1127.03	PFS Group Ltd	Call out re fire alarm. Access control system works LCC
BK TRS	£125.00	Manchester Drive Allotment Society	Retained deposits and site clearance
BK TRS	£125.90	Essex Supplies (UK) Ltd	Cleaning materials
BK TRS	£314.10	Montine Food Company Ltd	Café supplies
BK TRS	£220.50	Basildon Borough Council	Panto tickets Community Transport
BK TRS	£16.78	Essex Supplies (UK) Ltd	Cleaning materials
BK TRS	£358.80	British Telecom	Bt net charges
BK TRS	£988.79	Kieran Lucas Contractors Ltd	Additional temporary propping related to new steel beam LCC
BK TRS	£708.00	Essex Maintenance Ltd	Supply & fit new tap in disabled toilet
BK TRS	£78.00	Hirer	Refund hall hire
BK TRS	£101.00	Havens Hospices	Herd in the City donations collected
BK TRS	£750.00	Manchester Drive Allotments	ASA agreement
BK TRS	£125.00	Marshall Close Allotments	ASA agreement

BK TRS	£150.00	Mashfords Gardening & general Maintenance	Grass cutting at Skate Park
BK TRS	£192.00	Verde	Coffee supplies café
BK TRS	£53.16	Viking	Stationery
BK TRS	£15.00	Plot-holder	Plot deposit refund
BK TRS	£50.15	Couno Office Solutions Ltd	Photocopying
BK TRS	£25.49	Amazon	HDMI cable
BK TRS	£19.28	Mark One Hire Ltd	Acrow prop hire
BK TRS	£115.40	The Montine Food Company	Café supplies
BK TRS	£158.40	James Todd & Co Ltd	Payroll processing
BK TRS	£110.00	Verde	Coffee supplies café
BK TRS	£272.46	The Montine Food Company	Café supplies
BK TRS	£118.90	Essex Supplies (UK) Ltd	Cleaning materials
BK TRS	£32.84	Hirer	Refund deposit
BK TRS	£480.00	Phuse Media	Website development
BK TRS	£360.00	BT Payphones	Red Telephone Box
BK TRS	£370.00	Heelis & Lodge	Internal audit interim visit fee
BK TRS	£316.06	The Montine Food Company	Café supplies
BK TRS	£123.00	J Milne	Baked goods for café
BK TRS	£1156.00	Greenworks	Washroom services annual contract
BK TRS	£32.34	Viking	Stationery
BK TRS	£35.00	Plot-holder	Plot and key deposit refund
BK TRS	£960.00	Kieran Lucas Contractors Ltd	Repairs to water leak at Manchester Drive allotments
BK TRS	£29.96	Essex Supplies (UK) Ltd	Cleaning materials
BK TRS	£320.00	Amazon	2 x Portable PA systems and light bulbs
BK TRS	£146.56	The Montine Food Company	Café supplies
BK TRS	£2820.00	The HR Services Partnership Ltd (Worknest)	HR support
		<b>Expenditure – Imprest Items</b>	
	£12.99	Zoom Communications	Subscription
	£12.99	Canva	Subscription
	£12.99	Zoom Communications	Subscription

Expenditure was agreed.

**DATE OF NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING: Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

Date of January Council meeting.

To note that the January meeting date clashes with the Mayorial charity Burns night supper to which some members will want to attend. An alternative date could be considered. The decision to change the date of this meeting was deferred to the November meeting.

With no further business the meeting was closed at 9.07pm