

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE
MONDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 7.30 PM

Present: Councillors S Jones (Chair)
 A Dodwell
 C Palmer
 G Perham
 M Freeman
 R Goodchild
 D Bowater (substituting for R Berry)

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio, Town Clerk
 S Sandiford, Deputy Town Clerk
 M Jahn, Committee Officer
 Cllr V Harvey

Members of the public: 3
Members of the press 0

382/PF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Owen, Kharawala, Scott and Berry (substituted by Councillor Bowater).

383/PF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Palmer declared a personal interest as a member of the Friends of Leighton-Linslade in Bloom and Councillor Bowater as a member of Leighton-Linslade Rotary Club.

No pecuniary interests were declared and no dispensations were requested.

384/PF QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC (3 minutes per person; maximum 15 minutes)

A member of the public spoke in support of the Energy Crisis agenda item 15, expressing that she felt it was important for the Town Council to publicise the measures it intended to take as well as offering residents practical and tangible suggestions for saving energy and navigating the cost of living crisis.

385/PF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

(a) The Committee received the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meeting held on 25 July 2022.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meeting held on 25 July 2022 be approved as a correct record and were

signed accordingly.

(b) Updates arising from the minutes were given:

Minute reference 378/PF (Henry Finch Memorial Fountain): it was confirmed that the partial refurbishment of the fountain had been completed.

Minute reference 367/PF (South Side of the High Street): a question was raised as to whether any updates had been received from Central Bedfordshire Council. It was anticipated that the Interim Head of Place Delivery from Central Bedfordshire Council would attend the next meeting of the South Side Working Party.

386/PF LEIGHTON BUZZARD MARKET CROSS

It was confirmed that no further update or grant application had been received to date from the Townlands Trust in respect of the Market Cross.

RESOLVED to withdraw the item until an application was received.

387/PF ROTARY CLUB OF LEIGHTON-LINSLADE

The Committee received and considered a request from the Rotary Club of Leighton-Linslade in respect of their annual May Day Fayre community event, which was a very popular event raising funds which were then distributed to a range of local groups and organisations. The Club was requesting a contribution towards rising event costs to ensure the continued quality and variety element of the event.

RESOLVED to approve funding of up to £7,000 to support costs incurred for the May Fayre 2023.

388/PF PAYMENTS

The Committee received schedules of payments for May (mid-month), July 2022 and August 2022 which had previously been approved for payment by the Town Clerk and countersigned by two signatories. There were no anomalies or matters of concern to draw to the attention of the Committee.

The schedule for May (mid-month) dated 19 May 2022 included BACS payments amounting to £42,881.00 (page numbers 3055-3059).

The schedule for July 2022 dated 23 June 2022 included BACS payments amounting to £24,505.72 (page numbers 3071-3074) and £186,891.80 (page numbers 3087-3105) including petty cash payments for White House of £250 and £83.18 for TACTIC and salaries of £102,647.26.

A cash book report for July 2022, including details of all direct debit payments, was also received.

The schedule for August 2022 dated 11 August 2022 included BACS payments amounting to £108,262.66 (page numbers 3108-3120)), including petty cash payments to White House of £24.50 and salaries of £100,505.83. A cash book report for August 2022, including details of all direct debit payments, was also received.

A question was raised regarding payments made for Proms in the Park. It was confirmed these would not be refundable in this instance.

RESOLVED to receive the schedules of payments for invoices received in mid-May, July 2022 paid in August 2022 and invoices received in August and paid in September 2022.

389/PF COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES AND WORK PLAN

The Committee received the Committee Work Plan and Objectives for 2022-2023.

RESOLVED to note the Committee Work Plan and Objectives for 2022-23.

390/PF SUB-COMMITTEES AND TASK & FINISH GROUPS

The Committee received the draft minutes of the Health Services Task and Finish Group held on 1 September 2022.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Health Services Task and Finish Group held on 1 September 2022.

391/PF ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2021-22

The Committee received the external auditor's certificate and opinion on the annual return for 2021-22. It was noted there were no causes for concern or recommendations for actions identified by the external auditor.

RECOMMENDED to Council to receive and accept the Auditor's Certificate and Opinion on the Annual Return for 2021-22.

392/PF EXTERNAL AUDITOR APPOINTMENT

The Committee received and considered correspondence from the SAAA (Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments) in respect of the potential to opt out of centralised procurement arrangements for external audit for the next five years. After discussion the Committee agreed not to opt out of the centralised procurement arrangements for external audit.

RESOLVED to retain the centralised procurement arrangements for external audit for the next five years.

393/PF COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

The Committee received a report in respect of communications, including the Town Council website social media channels, electronic signage and overall communications strategy.

Members were informed a new page had been added to the website entitled Advice, Support and Wellbeing. A request was made to add information on Citizens Advice in Leighton Buzzard and the Leighton Linslade Community Food Bank to this new page.

The Committee agreed that the communications work arising from the death of Queen Elizabeth II had been excellent and thanks were given to all who contributed to this.

RESOLVED to note the information regarding Town Council communications.

394/PF SOFTWARE REVIEW

The Committee received an update report on the recent software review and considered the recommendations therein. On the whole, it was concluded that the Council should remain with current software suppliers, with just two minor changes recommended which would be within budget. It was however noted that the software market continued to develop, especially in respect of local council specific software and this would be kept under review. A bigger decision needed to be made regarding meetings software and this was subject to a separate report.

RESOLVED to note the review findings in the report and to support changes in software for surveys, electronic marketing and (in future) risk management, with costs to be met with the existing I.T. budget.

395/PF LAND SOUTH OF THE HIGH STREET

A meeting had taken place with the appointed consultant regarding creating a 3D visual masterplan for the Land South of the High Street. The plan would be brought to the next meeting of the South Side Working Party with the consultant joining via Teams to discuss with the Group. The Interim Head of Place Delivery from Central Bedfordshire Council would also be invited to this meeting.

Councillor Harvey noted the lack of one-bedroom accommodation, assisted living accommodation and community hub space in the town centre and repeated the need for a social infrastructure needs analysis.

Land south of the High Street had also been discussed in a recent informal

meeting with Central Bedfordshire Councillor I Dalgarno regarding traffic movement in the High Street, noting that this parcel of land should be considered at the same time as any future plans for the High Street.

RESOLVED to note the information.

396/PF ENERGY CRISIS

A motion was submitted to the Committee by Councillor Harvey regarding the ongoing energy crisis as well as the cost of living crisis:

In light of the fact that the energy and cost of living crisis will be ongoing, this council will spend up to £5000 to invest in a series of measures to help residents and local independent businesses reduce their costs for the long term. This will cover active support for increased insulation, reduction of energy usage, support for local food etc. This is the most long term effective use of tax payers money to help residents and local businesses in the town. Short term financial help from the taxpayer without long term measures to reduce bills is ultimately using taxpayers' money for dividends for shareholders in energy Companies

Working in partnership with CBC and in line with LLTC's declaration of Climate Emergency, This Council will;

1. Lead by example in its own buildings and activities by using a range of energy saving measures, from keeping doors shut to heating the buildings at a lower level where appropriate, more blinds/ curtains on the windows etc .
2. Will create (working with partners) a list of energy saving tips, advice on insulating homes and businesses and installing low carbon and renewable energy for residents as well as a list of available grants to be posted on the LLTC website
3. Will create a list of local firms who install insulation, solar panels, heat pumps etc to go on the LLTC website
4. Will put more staff time into managing allotments so that more residents can grow their own food.
5. Will draw up a plan for the next P&F 14th November 2022 as to the best way to help with the energy crisis such as; helping with access to affordable food such as allotments and working with the market traders, funding a programme of small scale insulation for the most vulnerable in the town, and working with businesses to roll out a widespread programme of insulation such as magnetic or rock wall or such like. This plan will need to work in support of and complementary to the plans on the Climate Emergency. The plan will likely entail drawing down more funding from reserves and/or cutting other budgets in light of the energy crisis.

This plan of action will incur staff time/external resources and this money will be used to cover these additional costs as the Town Clerk deems most appropriate.

The Committee wholly supported the principle of the motion but felt more detail was needed and that it was important to tap into national sources of advice. An update from Central Bedfordshire Council was received and it was

noted that neither council could endorse specific suppliers or providers. It was agreed that information and tips could be added to the Council's website as soon as practically possible, including the links provided by the local authority. In terms of providing a report to the next meeting of the committee, this would depend upon workload but officers would aim to bring something to that meeting, recognising that this was likely to require ongoing work. It was also noted that the fourth point regarding staffing was already due to be considered by the Personnel Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED:

- i) That this Council will lead by example in its own buildings and activities by using a range of energy saving measures.**
- ii) To include information on the cost of living and energy crises on the Town Council website as soon as practicable.**
- iii) To bring a report to a future committee meeting regarding the energy crisis.**

397/PF EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that, under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded on the grounds of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted which involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. The public and press to withdraw from the meeting during consideration of detailed discussion regarding: Meetings Management Software and Boundary Review Decision.

398/PF MEETINGS MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

The Committee received a report in respect of access to meeting documents. As part of the software review, four board management products had been reviewed and this had identified a range of other considerations to be taken into account.

RESOLVED:

- (a) To note the report including information on current meetings management, alternative options available, use of personal devices and councillor feedback from the recent survey.**
- (b) To endorse that providers be invited to give an informal presentation to the Council where appropriate, to share information on ethos, approach and product/service range.**
- (c) To endorse that an additional meeting of the Committee be scheduled for October 2022 for the purpose of reviewing options for I.T. support functions from 1 December 2022 as well as meeting management options from May 2023, to meet with contract notice periods an forward planning, taking into consideration the 2023-24 budget setting process as well as planning for the next Council administration in 2023.**

399/PF BOUNDARY REVIEW DECISION

The Committee received and considered a report setting out potential options.

It was suggested that clarification be sought on the “12 month check in” agreed by the principal authority following its decision.

It was noted that the decision might necessitate a review of some town council services and fees.

It was proposed that Counsel advice be sought to better understand the potential options. A recorded vote was requested (see Appendix A). On being put to a vote, the Motion was carried (5 for, 1 against and 1 abstention).

RESOLVED:

(a) To note the report.

(b) To seek Counsel advice on potential options.

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A CORRECT AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER 2022.

Chair

14 NOVEMBER 2022

APPENDIX A: RECORDED VOTE (minute reference 399/PF):

COUNCILLOR	VOTE
D BOWATER	ABSTAINED
A DODWELL	AGAINST
M FREEMAN	FOR
R GOODCHILD	FOR
S JONES	FOR
C PALMER	FOR
G PERHAM	FOR