

LOUGHTON TOWN COUNCIL

RESOURCES AND GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held on Wednesday 12 April 2023 at 7.30pm at Loughton Town Council, Council Chamber, 1 Buckingham Court, Rectory Lane, Loughton IG10 2QZ.

Present:

Councillors: M Owen (in the Chair)
S Murray
J Riley (as substitute for B Cohen)
M Stubbings
S Fontenelle (as substitute for R Brookes)
D Wixley (as substitute for J Jennings)

Officers: M Squire (Town Clerk)
K Lumb (Deputy Town Clerk / RFO)

There was 1 member of the public present.

RG208 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Jennings, Cohen and Brookes. Cllr Fontenelle had been nominated as substitute for Cllr Brookes, Cllr Riley for Cllr Cohen and Cllr Wixley for Cllr Jennings. The Town Clerk reported that Cllr Owen (Vice Chairman) would chair the meeting in the absence of Cllr Jennings.

RG209 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Murray declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 5, as a Trustee of Citizens Advice – Epping Forest, and Cllr Wixley declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5, as a member of Citizens Advice – Epping Forest.

RG210 Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2023 were CONFIRMED as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

RG210 Public Representations

There were no public representations.

RG211 Citizens Advice – Epping Forest District

Councillors NOTED the presentation given by Jenny Skinner, The Deputy Chief Executive of the Citizen's Advice – Epping Forest District, on their work. The update included information on:

- their history.
- their work and client base in terms of the types of problems encountered.
- colleagues and changing ways of working both through and post COVID pandemic.
- statistics and the types of enquiries and issues,
- confidentiality

Following discussion and questions, the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Jenny for the update.

Cllr Fontenelle arrived during this item.

RG212 Town Clerk's / Chairman's Report

The Town Clerk provided the following updates:

- The Committee were asked to note the changes to the employers' pensions rate for 2023/24, which has increased to 24.8% from 23.3% previously.
- A Town Councillor has requested a distinct Loughton Town Council (LTC) email address. The Town Clerk advised this will be put on the agenda for discussion at the next Resources and General Services (R&GS) Committee meeting.

The Chairman had nothing further to report.

RG213 Annual Town Meeting

Members NOTED the draft minutes for the 2023 Annual Town Meeting held on the 15 March 2023, had been circulated, and no issues had arisen requiring further consideration by the Town Council.

RG214 Staff Salaries 2023/24

The Town Clerk advised that the 2023/24, National Employers pay offer of an increase of £1,925 for salary scales (SCP 2-43) or 3.88% for salary scales (SCP44 and above), both paid pro rata, has not yet been accepted, and it is likely that it will be some time before the outcome is known.

The Committee NOTED the update.

RG215 Staff Appraisals

Members NOTED that all staff appraisals have now been completed.

RG216 Meetings Schedule

The Town Clerk confirmed that Epping Forest District Council (EFDC), will be imminently publishing their schedule of meetings for 2023/24, following which he will publish and distribute (subject to members approval) LTC's schedule of meetings for 2023/24, at the earliest opportunity.

EFDC's Full Council meeting dates would be avoided, as well as EFDC's Area Planning Sub-Committee South and the Development Control Committee dates.

RG217 Financial Assistance 2023/24 – Application 15b – St Mary's Church

The Committee AGREED that the original 2023/24 grant award for St Mary's Church defibrillator still applied.

RG218 Finance

218.1 Current Financial Position

The Committee's financial position as at the 28 February 2023 along with available funds in ear marked reserves as at 28 February 2023 were NOTED.

218.2 Accounts Paid

The Committee NOTED that payments totalling £399,026.62 as detailed on payment schedules nos. 368-371 have been made since the report to the meeting on 8 February 2023, and that schedules and accompanying invoices are available for inspection at the Council offices.

RG219 Internal Financial Check

Members NOTED Cllr Murray had visited the office on 30 March 2023, and undertook an internal financial inspection on invoices and payment/cheque runs from 01 April 2022 to date.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Murray for his support.

RG220 Annual Insurance

The Committee NOTED the annual insurance premium for 2023/24 (year 2 of a 3-year contract with Zurich), which also includes fully comprehensive insurance for the Council's new lease van

RG221 Governance and Accountability

The Committee NOTED and AGREED the following reviews and risk assessments.

221.1 Internal Audit

221.1.1 Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Audit

221.1.2 Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control.

221.2 Risk Assessment and Management

RG222 Year End 2022/23 Accounts

Members NOTED the tight time frame to complete the Year / End Financials for 2023/24.

The Town Clerk reported that the financial challenges as previously discussed in the preceding Committee budget meetings were coming to a head. The sharp increases in utility costs were of particular concern (typically gas charges rising c3 to 4 times and electricity costs increasing 4-5 times) on the previous year's costs.

These increases were being 'felt across the board,' and the busy Murray Hall is heavily impacted. The Town Clerk advised that all Murray Hall utility bills will be dissected to identify any potential savings. If necessary, an independent energy survey on the existing heating system, and scope for potential utility cost savings would be sought. As previously discussed, in the longer-term, solar panels may be a route that the Town Council may wish to consider.

Another area highlighted was the expense of tree management and this budget area may need to be increased in future years.

RG223 2023/24 Fees for Hall Hire; Football Pitches and Licence Fees

The Committee NOTED the report.

RG224 2023/24 Cemetery Fees

The Committee NOTED the report.

RG225 2023/24 Chamber Room, Buckingham Court Fees

Members reviewed and AGREED to set the following 2023/24 hire fees for the Chamber Room at Buckingham Court:

- Charity Rate £15.00 plus VAT per hour
- Standard Rate £31.00 plus VAT per hour
- Commercial Rate £50.00 plus VAT per hour

The Town Clerk provided an update on the National Health Service (NHS) enquiry and confirmed that NHS Hertfordshire will be using the Chamber Room in Buckingham Court, as agreed, on a Saturday (and potentially Sunday) from 22nd April 2023 to approximately mid-June 2023 (excluding the Coronation weekend) at a rate of £15.00 plus VAT per hour. This charge aligns with the levies that the NHS are paying elsewhere. Should the booking be extended past mid-June, a mechanism to cover any additional utility costs accumulated, will be investigated and discussed.

Officers have also secured a booking for the Chamber Room in April 2023 for an Annual General Meeting and a further booking in December 2023.

**RG226 Policy Review
Loughton Citizenship Awards 'LCA'**

The Committee reviewed and AGREED the criteria for the Loughton Citizenship Award, making the following additions:

- Adding a "certificate of recognition" to be awarded, as appropriate
- To include the previous year's Town Mayor on the award panel to ensure a majority vote can be obtained, if required.

RG227 Electric Vehicle Charger

The Town Clerk provided further background information and options, on the installation of a permanent electronic vehicle charger at Murray Hall, for the new electronic Council van. He also shared a message received from Essex County Cllr M Vance.

The Town Clerk also advised that since the issuing of the agenda, he is continuing discussions with Clarke Hillyer (immediate neighbour), to see whether there is a potential for an electronic vehicle charge point to be installed within Buckingham Court for general use. In the meantime, the team will be using the facilities at Morrisons, to re-charge the van.

Following detailed discussions Members AGREED to put on hold a decision, whilst the outcome of discussions with Clarke Hillyer are understood. Further research will be undertaken as a separate project, to understand whether there is a demand for the potential installation of public use charger at Murray Hall, the implications, and whether this project could be feasible and cost effective.

The Town Clerk also confirmed the new defibrillator was being installed at Murray Hall on the 13 April 2023. As highlighted by a member, further defibrillator training could be beneficial.

RG228 COVID-19 Memorial

The Town Clerk shared with members a message received, from Essex County Cllr M Vance.

The Committee discussed potential ideas for a memorial, with the Memorial Garden; Kings Green and St John's Church being identified as possible locations for a suitable memorial.

The Town Clerk agreed to explore the following 2 options, to be considered at a future R&GS Committee meeting:

- The cost / possibility of a commemoration plaque on the bench at Kings Green; or a new bench and plaque at a location to be agreed
- The cost / possibility of a tree and plaque at a location to be agreed

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 9.11 pm.

Signed:

Date: xx July 2023