

5. Louth Town Council Information



The following subjects are covered in this hand out which relate to Louth Town Council and may not be relevant to other parishes:

Louth Parish Wards and Councillors,
Louth Town Council Meeting Place,
Louth Town Council Committee System,
Louth Town Council Meeting times and dates,
Louth Town Council Councillors Allowances,
Louth Town Council Governing Documents,
Louth Town Council - Council Meetings,
Louth Town Council Assets,
Louth Town Council as a Consultee,
Louth Town Council Working in Partnership,
Louth Town Council as an employer,
Louth Town Council Annual Meetings and Annual Return,
Louth Town Council Budgets,

Louth Town Council (LTC) has three councillors for each of its seven wards (areas within Louth), East Lindsey District Council also has one Councillor for each ward and Lincolnshire County Council has 2 Councillors who cover the town. County Council elections took place in 2017 and the next Town (Parish) and District Elections are scheduled for May 2019. Residents within any area of Louth could have as many as five Councillors to represent them and help resolve issues, there is also a Member of Parliament covering Louth, Mablethorpe and Horncastle and surrounding rural areas. Some Councillors may be members of more than one tier of authority which reduces the number of councillors available to electors but can assist more flexibly where an issue might fall under more than one authority such as drainage or flooding.

Louth Town Council operates from premises purchased in 2011 at The Sessions House, Eastgate which enables the Town Clerk and Councillors to offer a very flexible accessible service to electors and to house valuable town assets. The Sessions House public areas include a large meeting space, in the former court room, The Foyer housing public displays and information and a small records room where archive records are kept and can ensure privacy when required. The Parish Notice Board is located outside the building adjacent to the ramped access to the entrance door and with all public areas on the ground floor ensures all ability access to all facilities. The remainder of the building houses an office for the Town Clerk and Office staff and storage areas for archive records, art works and all materials supporting all town Council activities. Hubbards Hills and LANALS (Louth Museum) also have storage facilities within the building.

Louth Town Council operates a Committee system which currently comprises Planning, Governance and Finance, Community Resources and Personnel. The Town Council has an Annual meeting each year at which the first agenda item must be the Election of a new Chairman, followed by the same for the Vice Chairman. As we are a town, in Louth, the Chairman and Vice Chairman may also be known as the Mayor or Deputy Mayor respectively; there is no difference in these roles although the Mayoral term may be more associated with civic and public duties, however, neither have any more powers than any other Councillor who is elected to serve Louth.

Council meetings in Louth are usually held on Tuesday evenings with a public forum commencing at 6.45pm and meetings at 7.00pm and there may be any combination of different Council or Committee meetings on any evening. The meetings schedule for the year is usually prepared and approved in the March preceding the new Council year in May, this allows for forward planning to ensure that important deadlines are achievable and for staff and councillors to pre plan holidays. To meet timescales set for planning application consultation responses there will be a maximum of 3 weeks between meeting dates and a shorter gap if there is a heavier workload such as budget preparation and approval or to accommodate bank holidays. The meetings schedule has to be approved again at the annual meeting in May. The Town Clerk distributes general information, community publications or other authority press releases which is usually done by email and for those who do not have internet access they can be viewed at the office or in hard copy.

Each Committee is re-established at the Annual meeting together with its membership (number of councillors), remit and delegated powers to act on behalf of the council on specified matters such as decisions on planning applications. In 2017/18 council year members voted once again for every Committee (except Personnel) to comprise 100% of councillors. This enables all Councillors to be involved in discussions on all matters and for members to take on the opportunity of being a committee chairman or vice chairman in perhaps a specialist area such as Finance. This system means that all Councillors are required to attend almost all meetings; other Councils may operate committees with fewer numbers and therefore attend on fewer meeting dates. There are some important functions of the council that are covered by strict legislation but most other things can be altered within governing documents. The Committees are also supported by smaller working groups such as Planning, Christmas, Floral, and Finance, some meet regularly others operate on a task and finish basis.

Councillors Allowances

Louth Town Council considered the payment of an allowance to its members as part of the budget setting exercises for 2016/17 and agreed to continue paying no allowance. The exception to this is the Mayoral Allowance, currently standing at £2,200 per annum which is used towards the expenses of carrying out the civic role.

There are three main governing documents of the council, which is a corporate body, and they are further supported by detailed policies:

They can be found at <http://www.louthtowncouncil.gov.uk/Governance.htm>

Standing Orders - are based on a model provided by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) this lengthy document governs how the council operates within the bounds of legislation, tailored for Louth Town Council. The document is amended as required when new legislation is issued, or when the need arises and is adopted every year at the Annual meeting.

Financial Regulations – also based on model documentation from the National body in accordance with government legislation again tailored where possible for the way that Louth Town Council operates, amended when required and adopted annually. The regulations impact on how the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and Auditor function and how the council reduces risk by imposing and monitoring internal controls. The current RFO for Louth Town Council is the Town Clerk, who has a financial career background; however some councils use a separate employee or external service, and the current internal audit arrangements are via a quadripartite arrangement with Mablethorpe and Sutton, Alford and Skegness Town Councils.

Code of Conduct – this applies to Councillors and advises on how they are expected to act whilst carrying out their role and the consequences if not followed. Louth Town Council has no formal governance regarding a dress code for Councillors, which may range from conventional to characterful; however, members are encouraged to observe standards which the public could expect of their elected member.

Every council will operate within this framework but in quite different ways that suit the locality, character and aspirations of the community. For example Louth Town Council has a very traditional civic history and routinely incorporates robed town council meetings, civic parades and church services within the council year which councillors are expected to participate and assist in as a corporate body. Louth also has a Conservation Area and many Listed Buildings which means that additional planning policies have to be observed by the planning authority when applications are received. Louth Town Council is also the guardian of historic assets such as Brown's Panorama, Town Charters and many other art works and valuable items which whilst not a council function they all have to be cared for appropriately and safeguarded for the town.

Council Meetings -

Every meeting of the council has a chairman who applies Standing Orders to ensure that all matters are debated correctly ensuring that fair and informed decisions are made. The

Town Clerk and secretary make notes during the meetings, which are also recorded, ensuring that due process is followed and ultimately produce the minutes and carry out the actions resolved upon <http://www.louthtowncouncil.gov.uk/Minutes.htm> . Unless a councillor declares an interest which means they cannot vote, every councillor can vote, if they so wish, on every decision. The Town Clerk will also produce the agenda and formulate reports to inform councillors before decisions are made. National legislation determines that Councillors must receive their agenda with 3 clear days (excluding Sundays) to allow time to research items. The Town Clerk issues the, currently hard copy, agenda not later than Wednesday for the following Tuesday meeting, delivery may be by hand, post or collection depending on where the Councillor lives or is next expected at the office. Councillors are summonsed by the Town Clerk to attend the meeting which means that they should make every effort to attend. Whilst apologies for not being able to attend are reported to the Council or Committee they do not currently count against disqualification for non attendance. The agenda is also posted on the Parish Notice Board, placed on Louth Town Council website - <http://www.louthtowncouncil.gov.uk/Agenda.htm> and distributed electronically to the press and District and County Councillors. There is no set seating arrangement for councillors at council meetings, although in reality a pattern is usually formed through similarities or preferences. There may be several meetings on a 'Council Night' although Standing Orders prohibit a session exceeding 3 hours, including Public Forum, at which point any outstanding business will be deferred to the next scheduled meeting or an extraordinary one can be called if urgency is required.

Assets –

Most councils' have assets, some being materially more valuable than others. This can depend on how allocations took place in 1974 with the re-organisation of local government when Louth Town Council and East Lindsey District Council evolved. There are risks and liabilities associated with assets and these are safeguarded against by internal controls and risk assessments undertaken by the Finance Overview group, who report to the Governance and Finance Committee.

- Cemetery – opened in 1855 and has approaching 30,000 burials within the 23 acres that it covers. Louth Town Council is the burial authority for the cemetery and as such sets the regulations which controls the type of burials, memorials and health and safety aspects. The council employ a maintenance team of two who amongst tasks look after all maintenance aspects the cemetery including grave digging, memorial testing, hedge trimming, grass cutting and parking enforcement, an external contractor is used seasonally to cut grass in the larger and open areas. The Community Payback Team also has a regular presence on the site and with the use of a grant from a local funding body has created a wildflower meadow and orchard. Burials have reduced in popularity and currently number around 65 a year comprising full burials and the interment of cremated remains. There is office input to the granting of permissions for burials and erection of memorials and for the recording of the burial details for posterity. Family history searches have become more popular and feature regularly both at the cemetery and research using burial records. Louth Family History Society completed an exercise of electronically transcribing all of the manual records to assist all involved. Recycling of green waste

is encouraged within the cemetery which is then composted and recent additions are wildflower areas, bluebell walk and Meridian Orchard. The cemetery fees have been set to reduce the level of subsidy to that required to maintain the older areas which have little or no burial activity. The cemetery volunteer teams were given a special judges award in 2014 and again in 2017 by East Midlands in Bloom. The cemetery is not only used by bereaved families and family history research, but also used as an access by sports centre users, allotment holders and walkers. There are also chapels, workshops and a Lodge at the cemetery which are owned and maintained by LTC.

- The Pavilion Artificial Pitch – Louth Town Council entered into a new lease arrangement with Magna Vitae Trust in 2016. LTC receives a peppercorn rent for this site.
- Louth Athletics Club – Louth Town Council entered into a lease arrangement in 1991 for 99 years for the southern piece of Julian Bower Field for a club house for which a peppercorn rent is also payable.
- Julian Bower Field – Louth Town Council have been letting the field under agreement for seasonal hay cutting to a local farmer whilst its future is under consideration.
- Allotments -
 - London Road – owned by LTC and let under agreement to Louth Cottage Garden and Allotments Association who are responsible for all maintenance and insurance on the site.
 - Mount Olivet – owned by LTC and let under agreement to Louth Cottage Garden and Allotments Association who are responsible for all maintenance and insurance on the site.
 - Trinity Lane – leased (currently under review) and let under agreement to Louth Cottage Garden and Allotments Association who are responsible for all maintenance and insurance on the site.
 - Louth Town Council currently receives £550 rent per annum from the Allotment Association for all three sites.
- Hubbard’s Hills – gifted to the town in 1907 after being purchased by the executors of the late Alphonse Pahud’s estate. This area of natural beauty is covered by covenants excluding any development and attracts visitors from a wide area and local families and dog walkers on a regular basis. The site is maintained under agreement by Hubbard’s Hills Trust Ltd with operational costs met by a grant from Louth Town Council, in 2017 this will be £45,000. LTC insure the toilet block as the owners of the site. LTC also transferred £29,000 to the trust in 2009 to assist with match funding applications for a future management plan (in progress). Hubbards Hills Trust reports to the Town Council annually.
- Sessions House – purchased in 2011 for £200,000 using a public works loan of £170,000 on a fixed rate over 10 years. The building houses the council’s administration function, hosts all Town Council meetings, provides a display space for all of the art works and historic items including Brown’s Panorama. The building regularly hosts Heritage events which are open to the public. The Town Flagpole is located to the front of the building and is used to commemorate National Days and

local festivities. The front garden is also a showcase for Louth in Bloom exhibiting feature theme items for the entry.

- Brown's Panorama - was completed in 1847 and gifted to the town in 1948 after being rediscovered and purchased by the then Mayor Councillor Alex Slack. The two 9' x 6' paintings were restored and re-glazed in 2007 and transferred from the Town Hall to The Sessions House in 2011 when the Town Council relocated. Of national importance, they were loaned to the Usher Gallery for the Great Lincolnshire Exhibition in 2015. Two local ladies have acted as guides for the many tourists, community groups and school visits throughout the year.
- Bus Shelters – Louth Town Council own and maintain several bus shelters in Louth and in partnership with LCC (and a grant from ELDC) replaced a damaged shelter on Kenwick Road creating a local hub by including a notice board and planter to enhance the street scene.
- Public seating – Louth Town Council own and maintain many benches in all areas of Louth and within the cemetery. The seats are usually maintained by Interskill, a Social Enterprise Company and include a good example of a Festival of Britain commemoration seat on Kenwick Road.
- Notice Boards – as well as providing the Parish Notice Board at The Sessions House, Louth Town Council also worked in Partnership with the Coastal Grazing Marshes Project in 2014 to provide a uniquely themed Community Notice Board in the Town Centre. A new notice board was also provided with the Kenwick Road Bus Shelter.
- Planters – Louth Town Council own six large planters, three in the town centre, and one at Kenwick Road bus shelter and also have joint responsibility for a number of blue planters, in the cemetery and on Aswell Street green which have been used for community group and charity fund raising purposes whilst supporting Louth in Bloom. Louth Town Council also own and erect 40 half up the pole self-watering planters which are used seasonally, erected on lamp posts in the town centre with the permission of LCC.
- Town signs – the seven heavy oak painted signs on all of the entry roads at the Louth Parish boundary providing an attractive feature on the approaches to the town. Due to a deterioration of the condition some of the signs have been removed and are under review.
- CCTV – Louth Town Council sees the provision of CCTV in the town centre as an important feature of community safety and the prevention of crime. Louth belongs to the seven towns partnership supported by East Lindsey District Council, and has recently joined a wider agreement with monitoring based at Boston Borough Council. Louth Town Council own 12 CCTV cameras which are replaced every 10 years under the terms of a Service Level Agreement.
- Christmas Lights – Louth Town Council own a variety of strings and motifs that combine to provide cross street displays using a bolt and catenary wire support system. A local contractor has been used to store, erect and maintain the displays and decorate the Christmas tree purchased by the council for the town. The power supply is provided by property owners. The tree is erected with permission of LCC who own the Market Place, with power provided from a central supply maintained by ELDC.

- Christmas Crib and figures – Louth Town Council erect the crib and dress the display, which is then usually blessed by the Mayor’s chaplain. The large plaster figures are stored at The Sessions House for the remainder of the year.
- Town Charters – LTC has responsibility for six charters dating from 1564 to 1837 which have recently been framed and are on display at The Sessions House.
- Purchased by public subscription the Town Council has a default responsibility for the War Memorial, which saw major repairs following a road traffic collision in March 2015.

Louth Town Council as a Consultee

Louth Town Council is statutorily consulted on Planning Applications by East Lindsey District Council as the local Planning Authority or by Lincolnshire County Council for waste related matters and traffic regulation orders. Ward members of Louth Town Council may also be asked informally of their thoughts on proposals as a result of complaints or suggestions to another authority. Some property developers may also come to speak to the council in advance of putting their planning applications forward to invite feedback as part of a wider consultation exercise being undertaken.

Working in Partnership

Parish councils have different remits and responsibilities than their principal authorities which may have arisen historically or through legislation such as the Localism Bill 2011 but there is a current leaning towards more partnership working which ensures commitment and sometimes financial assistance towards bigger projects.

In 2014 Louth Town Council worked with Lincolnshire County Council, and used an ELDC Councillors grant, to provide a replacement bus shelter on Kenwick Road with LCC providing a grant and the planning and contracting expertise and LTC choosing the style, additional features and the balance of the finance required. Also in 2014 LTC worked with the Coastal Grazing Marshes Project to provide a new Community Notice board / bike rack in the town centre. The project had a finite term and the joint working with LTC means that it will be maintained into the future as well as using joint funding to assist both parties.

Following the River Lud flooding in 2007, Louth Town Council has hosted a Flood Liaison Group comprising Councillors, members of the public and officers from the Environment Agency. A project was mooted in 2009 for a flood alleviation scheme which has been supported by the group and the Town Council to bring this to fruition. Work is now completed at both sites and Louth Town Council is committed to partnership working with the EA, Lindsey Marsh Drainage Board, LCC and ELDC by funding the day to day maintenance costs for the 100 year life of the scheme. LTC has ensured that this is affordable for the town by putting monies into a reserve fund to subsidise the earlier year’s charges until the Sessions House loan is completed releasing larger sums of money. The larger authorities have provided the capital funds for the project which was officially opened in July 2017.

Louth Town Council as an employer

LTC now has four established posts including the Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk and a Maintenance Team. The Town Clerk reports to the Chairman of the council and other

employees in turn to the Town Clerk. The Personnel committee ensure that LTC complies with all aspects of employment law and members can be required to act in disciplinary matters. Similarly members of the council may also be involved if separation of duties is required and the Chairman of the Council is required to deal with matters of appeal against disciplinary outcomes. LTC is a member of Lincolnshire Pension Fund.

Annual Town Meetings

All parish councils are obliged to hold at least one town meeting during the council year when residents can come and join in meetings that may be held to gauge the opinion of residents rather than holding a more formal referendum. Louth Town Council has in the past used this method following the 2007 Floods, the proposed sale of Louth Livestock Market and high impact planning applications.

The Annual Town meeting has more of a formal structure when residents can attend to hear how the town council performed, attendance levels of town councillors and whether the plans identified for the year have materialised and what plans the council have for the year ahead. The finances of the council are again available for scrutiny and the calculation of the precept can be elaborated upon. Electors may ask for any number of items to be considered by the town council at a future meeting and explain their reasoning for doing so.

Annual Report

As the name implies Louth Town Council issue the Annual Report every year which contains information issued at the Annual Town Meeting and the Annual Return of the Council which is submitted to the External Auditor by a specified date. The report can be found in hard copy at the Sessions House, and on Louth Town Council website.

Budgets

Budgets are initially considered by each Committee who will look at their remit and responsibility and determine whether they would like to carry out any special projects the next year which should be supported by a business case. The Committee budget requests are then collated by the Financial Overview Group who makes recommendations to the Governance and Finance Committee regarding affordability and different sources of funding available. The budgets are then presented to the Town Council for approval and at that time the Town Council will also make final decisions regarding the Precept that is requested from the District Council and collected as Council Tax. The precept can never be more than the budgets that have been agreed, however it can be less if the council decides to use some reserve funds to 'subsidise' the budget and not pass on the full impact of the funding required. Parish Councils have not been capped in 2017/18, as principal authorities are.

If you would like more details on any of the items covered in this handout please contact the Town Clerk on 01507 355895 or clerk@louthtowncouncil.gov.uk or use our website www.louthtowncouncil.gov.uk