

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING WITH THE RNLI
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23rd AUGUST 2023 AT 10am IN THE MOOT HALL**

Present:

Cllr Webster
Cllr Haworth-Culf
Cllr Fellowes
Cllr Howard-Dobson
Dr Terese Coffey MP
Ross Barraclough (Head of Region RNLI)
Amber French (Area Lifesaving Manager RNLI)
George Pickford (Regional Support Lead)

There were no members of the public present.

Apologies: Cllrs Lumpkin, Fox, Jones, Langley and Bond

Cllr Haworth-Culf Deputy Mayor took the Chair.

Introductions took place around the table.

Dr Coffey expressed her disappointment with the recent decision taken by the RNLI as are the crew. She conveyed how important the lifeboat and crew are to Aldeburgh. There has been fundraising for Aldeburgh but with the RNLI being a National Charity concerns about money being spend elsewhere. There are also large amounts of legacy money from Aldeburgh people who expressly wished to leave money to the RNLI in Aldeburgh. So there is plenty of funding. It is key that the community has not been involved including volunteers (crew) and has caused resentment. There is a resistance to involving community and a culture of putting barriers up. The Chief Executive hid his visit. Dr Coffey expressed that she will keep going at the highest level in the Charity Commission for clarity.

A question was put forward on behalf of Cllr Lumpkin. What happens to the money raised for Aldeburgh RNLI over the years and now sits in the account? Cllr Ali Lumpkin was Guild Chairman for 5 years and also a member of the Aldeburgh Operations Management team (until July 2022) so he has a knowledge of information that isn't in the public domain. Cllr Lumpkin believes that any money raised in Aldeburgh should stay in Aldeburgh and there is a petition to represent this view with over 1600 signatures. Is this the case? Monies have been left in wills of people expressly leaving amounts to go towards the lifeboat in Aldeburgh and thinking this would be the case.

Cllr Haworth-Culf asked about Joyce's will and her wishes. Joyce had left a generous gift in her Will, which will not only fund the launch and recovery system for their new Shannon lifeboat but also help with shore works to prepare the station for its new craft. This was planned for 2022. Following Joyce's wishes, the state-of-the-art rig would be named Ralph. A press release a few years ago from the RNLI clearly stated that Aldeburgh RNLI would be having a Shannon Lifeboat, this news was widely celebrated as it confirmed and recognised the importance in having an All-Weather Lifeboat permanently sited on this stretch of coastline. It also recognised nationally, the imperative importance in having an All Weather Lifeboat (ALB) that can be launched directly from the beach into the North Sea was paramount, especially as tourism, water sports and energy projects increase. This Shannon lifeboat was to be funded through legacies left locally which you have received, and you have u-turned on peoples wishes, yet you continue to ask people to leave gifts to the RNLI within their Wills. This is unacceptable.

RB addressed the question by firstly stating that money matters are removed from the process when a review is undertaken as the main goal is about lifesaving. It is the case that

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finances are used nationally to spend where it is needed. Some areas are not so affluent but will still need the level of spending to ensure the lifesaving provision is met. There have been 2 large legacies in Aldeburgh and the Legacy Team is in conversation with executives. Locally raised money is however kept for the crew.

Cllr Fellowes made the point that the RNLI haven't before communicated that money is used nationally and that this expectation that local people have is not accurate.

Cllr Haworth-Culf asked if they have taken into account the thousands of people who visit on holiday. Also, with the building of Sizewell C, the biggest infrastructure construction of our time, have you considered the materials that will be brought in by sea. With more people working in the area there are likely to also be amateur boating activities.

RB reported that Aldeburgh is one of the quietest stations in the UK. There is a new policy based on the best decision for lifesaving and what is best for the coast. When a lifeboat is reviewed there is a rigid process to follow to determine the best provision. The Atlantic 85 is the best fit having followed this rigorous process.

Both Lowestoft and Harwich have a-float boats and nearby crews. If both pagers were let off there and the, Lowestoft would be at Aldeburgh before Aldeburgh hit the water. The Atlantic boat from Lowestoft is vastly superior to help paddleboards. There is also much help from EDF who have boats to visit their wind turbines. They also provide their own risk assessments.

A short discussion followed about Lowestoft being able to get here before our own boat hit the water. This comment was challenged as this is unbelievable. Time seems to be lost whilst crew are waiting for decisions and instructions. Surely it must be quicker to launch from Aldeburgh to cover this area.

Cllr Fellowes explained that the lifeboat in Aldeburgh is much more, it is part of the community that we all value and have pride in. Aldeburgh has paid for an all weather lifeboat and that is what needs to be achieved. The Town Council would support the crew and work with RNLI. Please do not underestimate community value. People have been gagged but again we just would like to work with you. Putting aside the review process is it possible to have an ALB, as it is possible to pay private for a new hip? Cllr Fellowes requested copies of the process to see if the report and evidence is equally weighted.

RB explained that the ALB recently installed at Wells-next-to-the-Sea pre-dated the new policy and didn't go through the process. This is the only natural harbour along that stretch of coastline and an ideal location.

Dr Coffey expressed that the crew are passionate about the job. There has been a culture of secrecy to not talk to the media. The process has not been at all transparent.

RB confirmed by will take back the points around consultation with the Council. They do currently consult with the Environment Agency, Coastguards and ascertain infrastructure and crewing provision.

Cllr Haworth-Culf finished by summarising the importance of communications to the community, people's perception and helping each other going forward. Please involve Aldeburgh Town Council more so we can support the RNLI and mitigate impact. Most importantly to have a lifeboat in the town.

The meeting ended at 11.30am

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Supplementary commentary received from Ross Barraclough 1st September 2023:-

- The reason that Mark Dowie (RNLI CEO) requested that the phone call with Dr Coffey remained private was because, at the time, we were still in the period of consultation for the Aldeburgh Lifesaving Effect Review and Mark had mentioned to Dr. Coffey in two separate letters the need for him to remain impartial as part of the decision-making process.
- Mark Dowie's visit to Aldeburgh Lifeboat Station on Thursday 1 June 2023 had been in the diary since January 2023 and had been communicated widely to the lifeboat station. It was not a 'secret' visit as stated by Dr. Coffey, but part of a scheduled trip to Suffolk and Norfolk, including a number of lifeboat stations and lifeguarded beaches. Mark regularly visits RNLI lifeboat stations and lifeguarded beaches and these are private visits with RNLI volunteers and staff where he can get a personal insight into operations and answer any questions they may have. This regional visit also coincided with two lifeboat naming ceremonies at Wells-next-the-Sea and Cromer. Due to the profile of these events within the community, these were widely covered by the media, but the other station visits were not publicised to the media, with the exception of Lowestoft where a journalist arrived unarranged to speak to the Cromer crew following a lengthy rescue and Mark happened to be there at the same time.
- The request from Dr. Coffey for us to provide an official RNLI statement to confirm that any of the monies donated to Aldeburgh would not be used to fund our humanitarian response in the English Channel is also something I would like to respond to. If any donations have been specifically restricted to Aldeburgh Lifeboat Station, we are legally obligated to solely use these funds in Aldeburgh and we will do so. As such, and as a charity whose sole purpose for more than 199 years is to save lives at sea, without judgement or prejudice, we will not be making any such statement.
- The request from the Town Council for us to share the paperwork as provided to the Trustees as part of the decision-making process is unfortunately not something that I can fulfil. As mentioned during the meeting we made redacted versions of these documents available to all the volunteers linked to Aldeburgh Lifeboat Station in an effort to be as transparent as possible. There was uptake within the volunteer cohort for this opportunity and I remain satisfied that we have fulfilled the request of the local RNLI volunteers to share these documents to the best of our ability.
- I look forward to Amber French (Area Lifesaving Manager) working closer with the Town Council in future, with the relevant introductions now having been made. We also have the opportunity offered to us next year where the 200 Anniversary of the RNLI will most likely coincide with the RNLB Freddie Cooper leaving Aldeburgh for the last time. The boat is something to be celebrated and I am sure that as a collective we can give her the send off she deserves.
- I have fed back to the team who manage the internal process that we follow to make many of our asset decisions of a formal requirement to interact with the Town Council as part of the process. This input has been welcomed by the team and they will now include this feedback as part of an ongoing review into how we can improve the process for other communities in the UK and Ireland.
- Your comments around improved local communication, specific to the asset change and other developments at the lifeboat station, has been fed back to my Regional Media Manager who will also liaise with National Media colleagues and see what we can do as part of our continual desire to improve.