

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3

Minutes of a meeting of the Operational Services Committee facilitated via the Zoom Video Conferencing System at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Monday 18th January 2021.

PRESENT

Cllr David Ambrose-Smith (Chairman)
Cllr Victoria Charlesworth
Cllr Lis Every
Cllr Julia Huffer
Cllr Mark Inskip
Cllr Daniel Schumann (Substitute for Cllr Christine Ambrose-Smith)
Cllr Paola Trimarco
Cllr Jo Webber
Cllr Christine Whelan

OFFICERS

Jo Brooks – Director Operations
Lewis Bage – Communities & Partnerships Manager
Tracy Couper – Democratic Services Manager
Caroline Evans – Democratic Services Officer (Committees)
Richard Kay – Strategic Planning Manager
James Khan – Head of Street Scene
Angela Parmenter – Housing & Community Advice Manager
Rebecca Saunt – Planning Manager
Anne Wareham – Senior Accountant
Karen Wright – Information Communication Technology (ICT) Manager

57. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

58. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith and Councillor Daniel Schumann was acting as Substitute.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interests were made.

60. MINUTES

It was resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 16th and 30th November 2020 be confirmed as correct records and be signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:

Agenda Item 49 Budget Monitoring Report resolution (i): amend last line to read 'planned'.

Agenda Item 54 ECSS Business Plan 2020/21 (Revised) page 2 second paragraph 7th line: amend to 'dependent'.

61. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman made the following announcements:

East Cambs Housing Service Recognised as Gold Standard

This accolade had only been given to a few councils nationwide and was testament to the time and effort which goes into the service day-in, day-out, to ensure it was of the highest standard for our residents.

I would like to share my personal congratulations to all of the officers who have worked tirelessly to make our Housing, Community and Advice Service the best it can be.

COVID-19 Support Grant

Our officer-led Covid Recovery Group were recently successful in securing a bid for £200,000 from the Covid Outbreak Management Fund held by the County Council. This funding is to assist our residents, communities and Community Hubs.

The Community Hubs assist our residents with things such as shopping, collecting prescriptions, befriending services, etc.

Part of our bid was to provide small, one-off grants to the Community Hubs to support them in supporting our residents. There weren't specific criteria, as each Community Hub would have different needs to help our residents. The grant was for a maximum of £500 per Hub, of which we had 42 which covered the whole of our District.

Committee Membership

There had been a slight change to the substitutes - Councillor Anna Bailey had been replaced by Councillor Josh Schumann.

62. SERVICE PRESENTATION – PLANNING SERVICE

The Committee received a presentation by the Planning Manager, Rebecca Saunt, on the work of the Council's Planning Service. The presentation covered statistical information and comparisons between 2019 and 2020 for the following areas:

- Number of applications received by month
- Comments received
- % applications acknowledged within 5 working days
- Applications received by category
- Decision Notices issued
- Tree Officer consultation responses statistics

- Conservation Officer consultation responses statistics
- Appeals
- Enforcement
- Changes made to processes since March 2020 due to Covid-19

The Planning Manager highlighted the increase in 2020 in the months where the Team were achieving or exceeding the target of 75% of applications acknowledged as valid within 5 working days, which was a great achievement by officers in the light of the pandemic. As a result of Covid-19, there was a greater use of E-mailing of correspondence in relation to applications, which resulted in savings in printing and postage costs. Pre-App and Planning Committee meetings were being held via Zoom, which had received good feedback from all interested parties and the public. The Planning Manager thanked and paid tribute to her Team for how they had adapted to the challenges faced by them.

In response to questions by Members regarding arrangements for informal contact between members of the Team via lockdown, the Planning Manager reported that weekly Team Leader meetings and full Team meetings every 2 weeks had taken place via Zoom, but she acknowledged that there still were benefits to round the table face-to-face meetings where you could share plans, etc.

The Chairman and Members of the Committee commended the excellent work of the Planning Service Officers.

It was resolved:

That the Planning Service presentation be received.

63. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered a report, V124 previously circulated, which detailed the financial position for services within the responsibility of Operational Services Committee.

In response to a question by a Member on the Housing underspend due to the non-use of the Bed and Breakfast Budget and the potential impact in the future of Covid-19, the Housing & Community Advice Manager reported that the service was preparing for the potential for a greater level of homelessness due to the economic impact of Covid-19 on people and families, by having available a contingency provision of 5 'floating rooms'.

It was resolved:

- (i) That it be noted that the Committee was currently projected to end the year with a revenue underspend of £74,500, when compared to its planned budget, of £5,650,903.
- (ii) That it be noted that the Committee had a projected capital programme outturn of £1,166,380. This was an underspend of £2,655,950.

64. HOUSING & COMMUNITY ADVICE SERVICE – UPDATE ON IMPACT OF COVID-19

The Committee considered a report, V125 previously circulated, which gave an update on the Housing and Community Advice Service and impacts arising from Covid-19.

The Housing & Community Advice Manager reported that a full service had been maintained via Zoom and telephone and staff continued to undertake an extensive programme of training as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report. The Housing & Community Advice Manager highlighted the significant rise in requests for Foodbank vouchers and stated that the end of the moratorium on Section 21 or Section 8 evictions, due from the end of March, was likely to result in a rise in homelessness cases. The service had dealt with 9 settled status applications and ECDC was the only authority in the area still undertaking this service. The Housing & Community Advice Manager referred to the case of a Polish worker who had escaped modern slavery for whom the Team had successfully completed this process.

A commitment had been given to undertake a review of the Advice Service following the first 12 months of in-house delivery and this was due to be undertaken in the near future.

In concluding, the Housing & Community Advice Manager expressed her great praise and pride for her staff, for the outstanding manner in which they had risen to the challenges created by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Members also commended the outstanding work of the Team during the Pandemic.

A Member referred to an apparent discrepancy in the actual and percentage figures relating to Housing Advice cases and the Housing & Community Advice Manager clarified this and agreed to provide Members of the Committee with a breakdown of the cases. Another Member referred to the large percentage of prevention cases at 29% where the outcome was not known. The Housing & Community Advice Manager explained that this was due to the ability to use an 'other' category on the database, which now had been removed, but again she agreed to provide Members of the Committee with a breakdown of the cases.

In response to a question by a Member on the timetable for the Advice Service review and reporting to this Committee, the Chairman stated that this would be discussed by himself with the Director Operations, as Lead Officer for the Committee.

It was resolved:

That the update report be noted.

65. **EAST CAMBS ENVIRONMENT ACTION PLAN – PROGRESS REPORT, INTERIM TARGETS AND PARTNERSHIP FORUM SET-UP**

The Committee considered a report, V126 previously circulated, which provided:

- an update on progressing the 'Top 20 Actions' within the Environment Plan;
- possible options for interim targets towards 'net zero' carbon emissions for discussion; and
- further update on the progressing of a Community Partnership Forum.

The Strategic Planning Manager reminded the Committee that the second ECDC Environment Plan scheduled for June 2021 should include interim target(s) towards the Council's long-term carbon emissions ambitions. Therefore, commentaries were included in the report regarding possible different targets for Member discussion at this stage, prior to more detailed consideration in June. A key factor in this was the position with regard to the fleet of refuse vehicles, the current lack of availability on the market of low emission vehicles suitable for use in a rural District and the delay in the Government Waste Strategy.

During discussion of the content of the report, the following comments were made by Members:

A Member queried the impact of the replacement of all the Council's street/car park lighting with energy efficient LEDs and moving to a renewable energy electricity tariff, and the Strategic Planning Manager confirmed that, whilst lighting was not a source of significant emissions for the Council, both actions made a statement of intent to the principle of lowering energy usage and emissions.

A Member asked for information on the likely individuals/organisations to be invited to be part of the Partnership Forum and the Strategic Planning Manager agreed to provide Members of the Committee with details of these.

Members welcomed the range of options set out in the report for interim emissions targets and expressed support for the principle of 'frontloading' of the target. A number of Members expressed support for the target being set by near neighbouring Councils detailed in paragraph 3.38 of the report, which was similar to that propounded by the Tyndall Centre. Members acknowledged the need for the Council to set an ambitious target but also to be flexible and to take into consideration any County-wide target set by the Combined Authority.

A Member commented that other Councils around the country were using low emission refuse vehicles and some of these were rural in nature. The Council could approach such comparable Councils to obtain further information.

A Member also suggested that the Council should contact the Tyndall Centre for information and advice.

Other Members commented on the need to await the Government announcement of the Waste Strategy before committing ourselves in relation to the purchase of costly waste vehicles.

Members supported the proposal for the conducting of a short preliminary investigation into the potential of ECDC generating its own commercial scale renewable energy.

With regard to the appointment by the Committee of a Natural Environment and Climate Change Member Champion, Councillor Julia Huffer was proposed and seconded.

In concluding, the Chairman and Members of the Committee commended the Strategic Planning Manager on the excellent quality and comprehensive nature of the report.

It was resolved:

That the Committee:

- (A) Welcomed the progress made to date, in respect of achieving the June 2020 Environment Plan's 'Top 20 Actions'.
- (B) Noted the progress made to date in terms of establishing a Partnership Forum and the establishment of district-wide baseline climate related data and agrees that officers should continue to progress on the basis outlined in the submitted report.
- (C) Noted the commentary on the options in respect of setting an interim carbon emissions reduction target for ECDC, and agrees that the options and commentary as set out in the submitted report form a reasonable basis for further investigation, with the intention of this Committee establishing an interim target at its meeting in June 2021.
- (D) Agreed that a short preliminary investigation into the potential of ECDC generating its own commercial scale renewable energy be conducted and brought to Committee at the earliest opportunity.
- (E) Appointed Councillor Julia Huffer as Natural Environment and Climate Change Member Champion.

66. REVIEW OF GRANT TO CITIZENS ADVICE WEST SUFFOLK

The Committee considered a report, V127 previously circulated, which detailed the outcome of a review of the grant awarded to Citizens Advice West Suffolk (CAWS) for 2020/21 and whether a grant should be awarded for 2021/22.

The Communities and Partnerships Manager reported that the proposal to award a grant for the forthcoming year acknowledged the need for the continuation of delivery of a service during the current pandemic.

Councillor Daniel Schumann left the meeting at 5.40pm and did not return.

Members referred to the importance of maintaining a service to the residents in the south of the District. Therefore, it was proposed and seconded that a grant be awarded for a 2 year period rather than 1 year.

In that connection, the Chairman referred to the review of the Housing and Community Advice service being conducted and it was reported that a 2 year Service Level Agreement would not allow the flexibility to revise arrangements as a result of this review.

Other Members commented that a 2 year grant would give CAWS greater stability and the proposals for the extension of Community Hubs would not benefit villages in the far south of the District.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion to award a grant for a 2 year period was declared to be lost.

The recommendations in the submitted report then were moved and seconded and declared to be carried.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the review findings be noted.
- (ii) That a grant of £23,166.03 be awarded to CAWS via a Service Level Agreement for 2021/22.

67 QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT: WASTE & STREET CLEANSING SERVICES

The Committee considered a report, V128 previously circulated, which provided the updated performance information for delivery of the Waste and Street Cleansing Services.

In response to a question by a Member regarding the sourcing of wheelie bins, the Head of Street Scene stated that an increase in requests for recycling bins just after Christmas had meant that the stock had been depleted, as an order placed with the supplier in November had yet to be delivered. Customers were being supplied with clear sacks for recyclables as an alternative.

Members commended the Team on the excellent service provided and in maintaining service levels during the pandemic.

It was resolved:

That the performance and service delivery for the third quarter of 2020 be noted.

68. FORWARD AGENDA PLAN

It was resolved:

That the Forward Agenda Plan be noted and the reviews of the Housing and Community Advice Service and CAWS provisionally be included on the Agenda Plan for the July meeting.

The meeting concluded at 6:10pm.