

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4 (a)

Minutes of a meeting of the Operational Services Committee facilitated via the Zoom Video Conferencing System at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Monday 16th November 2020.

P R E S E N T

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

OFFICERS

Nigel Ankers – Finance Manager, East Cambs Trading Company
Lewis Bage – Communities & Partnerships Manager
Jo Brooks – Director Operations
Maggie Camp – Legal Services Manager
Richard Kay – Strategic Planning Manager
James Khan – Head of Street Scene
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Anne Wareham – Senior Accountant
Karen Wright – Information Communication Technology (ICT) Manager

35. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

36. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no apologies nor substitutions for this meeting.

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Every declared a personal interest in agenda item 8, as she was the Chair of the Trustees for Voluntary and Community Action East Cambridgeshire and stated she would not take part in the item.

38. MINUTES

It was resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

39. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded the Committee that following the despatch of the agenda, and after consultation with the Council's Monitoring Officer, exempt agenda item 15 had been de-exempted and would be discussed in public. It would also be moved up the agenda and discussed as the first decision item.

40. EAST CAMBS STREET SCENE ACCOUNTS 2019/20

The Committee considered a report, V101 previously circulated, which detailed the East Cambs Street Scene statutory accounts for 2019/20.

The Finance Manager, East Cambs Trading Company, went through the Financial Statements and advised the Committee of the following points:

- Pages 1 and 2 – this was the Directors' report and stated their responsibilities. They could only approve the accounts if they believed them to be a true account. The accounts made some prudent estimates in some cases. All the information had been declared to the auditors.
- Pages 3 to 5 – this was the Auditors' report, which stated the financial statements gave a true account and had been properly prepared. The content was in line with the financial statements and gave a high level of assurance.
- Page 6 – showed an income of £3.2 million, which included £2.7M for the contract with the District Council, £15K for a Government grant, £9K revenue for additional bins and £9K for external contracts. The cost of sales was mostly due to labour and material costs of £1.7 million. The costs were higher than anticipated due to the employment of agency staff. Administration costs were also higher, as detailed on page 23, as were salaries. The rates bill had not been charged last year, motors costs were higher and included for new vehicles. Personal protective equipment costs had decreased, as only replacement uniforms had been obtained. Insurance was £23K less than previously, due to no claims being made, and general office costs were £8.6K. This meant that overall a pre-tax profit of just under £6K had been made.
- Page 7 - £32K had been included as a non-current asset for 2020, which related to a mobile teaching van. A new asset item had been added that was based on an assessment of the fuel for the company's vehicles and the trade waste bins. Nett assets amounted to £4.5K.
- Page 9 – set out the cash flow statement, showing the business was cash positive.
- Pages 10 to 29 – was a comprehensive set of notes explaining about the accounts. It included details of the impact of COVID-19 on the business and showed the Company had sufficient reserves.

The Committee queried the sufficiency of the reserves, as the Company had asked the Council for a further loan of £91K in July. The Council's Finance Manager explained that the loan related to the date the accounts had been signed off, as the Company needed the funding to move forward.

It was resolved:

That the report, including the statutory accounts as attached at appendix 1, be noted.

41. PRESENTATION – INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICE

The Committee received a presentation by the ICT Manager on the work of the Council's Information Communication Technology Department.

The ICT Manager advised the Committee that the Department's responsibilities included for a Help Desk and the Street Naming and Numbering service. The latter service worked within statutory legislation and gave the local authority the right to number properties and name streets. It also dealt with issues concerning existing properties and formed part of the Local Land and Property Gazetteer. There was one database that included all properties, including land and parks and non-postal addresses. The information it held also fed into the National database and was used in other software and functions of the Council, such as for Elections, Planning and the land terrier system. The Help Desk answered around 6500 calls annually.

The Department was also responsible for handling software and hardware licences, asset management of equipment, maintaining and securing servers (about 60 in total) and systems for the Council and its two trading companies, and for network and data security.

Regular copies of data were stored in three different places: on-site; off-site and cloud backups. Backups were completed every two hours with a once-a-day backup to the cloud. Monthly a full backup was completed. These were in case of a disaster recovery being required and this was currently undergoing a refresh.

In response to the COVID-19 situation, all staff members were working from home where possible. The previous system would not have been able to cope with that, so licences had been increased and the capacity of the system had been extended. Previously only 20 members of staff had worked from home, but by the end of May 2020 this had risen to account for 98% of staff. The previous system had limitations, so a new system had been obtained and had been rolling out since September. It was a better system, easier to use, now included the telephone system and could handle virtual meetings. Although the ICT staff mostly worked from home, the service had been able to continue unabated.

The Committee were very appreciative of the Department's work and help provided, which had continued in spite of the difficulties faced. In response to its queries the ICT Manager revealed that no further investment was needed at present, as the Department were managing to configure and test the equipment and were purchasing the laptops needed within the existing funding package. There were only 5 physical servers, with the rest virtual ones.

42. LOCAL ELECTRICITY BILL

The Committee considered a report, V95 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on progress made in respect of the Local Electricity Bill.

The Director Operations reminded the Committee that it had discussed this issue at its September meeting. The Council had written to the two Members of Parliament (MPs) representing East Cambridgeshire requesting their response so the Council could decide on whether to support the Bill or not. Their responses were included with the report and showed that Mr Barclay MP was awaiting further information from his colleagues before providing a response, whereas Ms Frazer MP, whilst giving a fuller response, had suggested that the Council liaise with Mr Aldous MP, who had introduced the Bill.

The Committee were disappointed that there had been no clarity in the MPs responses and were concerned that the Council were in danger of not making a decision in time. It was noted that a growing number of MPs had offered support for the Bill.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith therefore proposed an amendment to the report's recommendation by adding that the Council support the Local Electricity Bill and write to the local Members of Parliament to ask them to support that Bill. This was duly seconded and agreed.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the contents of this report be noted;
- (ii) That East Cambridgeshire District Council support the Local Electricity Bill and write to the local Members of Parliament to ask them to support that Bill.

43. REVIEW OF GRANT TO VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ACTION EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE

The Committee considered a report, V96 previously circulated, which detailed the review of the grant awarded to Voluntary And Community Action East Cambridgeshire (VCAEC).

The Communities and Partnerships Manager reminded the Committee that a grant of £19,928 had been awarded by the Committee to VCAEC, with an instruction to review the grant. VCAEC had been consulted during the review and the services it provided were outlined in Appendix 1. It delivered projects to local people through the use of local volunteers. This included supporting action in response to COVID-19, with advice and guidance offered plus the delivery of a COVID magazine.

The review sought to identify any similar or identical services provided, assess demand for services and an evaluation of those services. The review also included an options appraisal.

Paragraphs 6.0 and 7.0 of the report set out the recommended option, which recognised the effects of the pandemic and the services that needed to be in place. This option would cause minimal disruption, would not require a tender process, which would risk a nil response, and would offer the chance for services to continue.

Members of the Committee asked a number of questions and they were informed that the car sharing scheme was deemed as being carbon neutral, as it was an alternative mode of transport. It was used mainly for medical related visits, was an alternative to using taxis and was cheaper for the users. The vehicles were owned by the volunteers, so the use of electric vehicles in the future would be their choice.

The grant would be issued for one year, for the time being, to ensure that the services could continue during the pandemic, as the provision of those services was in place. The situation would be reviewed again next year with one of the recommendations being to include more reporting measures to the Committee. Once the Council had a better understanding of the situation then longer agreements could be factored in. Under normal circumstances the services would be put out for 'expressions of interest', but with the pandemic the Council wanted some consistency and continued support for residents. Performance Indicators would be included in the Service Level Agreement with VCAEC reporting back to the Committee three times per year.

The Committee considered the services provided by VCAEC over and above that provided by other organisations and was a great help to residents, as the volunteers aided residents more than others would. It was a vital and valuable service and should be supported.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the review findings be noted;
- (ii) That a grant be awarded to VCAEC for a Service level Agreement for 2021/22 as set out at 6.0 and 7.0;
- (iii) That VCAEC be requested to report to this Committee three times a year on progress against the Service Level Agreement.

44. EAST CAMBS ENVIRONMENT ACTION PLAN – OPTIONS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INCLUDING CITIZENS ASSEMBLY

The Committee considered a report, V97 previously circulated, which outlined the principles of what community engagement should comprise of.

The Strategic Planning Manager reminded the Committee that in the ECDC Environment Plan (June 2020) an action (Action 14) was for a Partnership Forum to be set up to help develop a separate wider East Cambridgeshire Plan. To help inform the public debate, data would be captured about the amount of energy used in the district, who was producing it and what renewable energy was being generated. Thereafter wider engagement on the district's issues and

actions could be started, by collecting the priorities of residents, businesses and investors. However, consideration had to be given on the most appropriate form this partnership forum should take. Paragraph 3.9 set out the questions that had to be answered.

Paragraphs 3.11 to 3.21 gave consideration to a Citizens Assembly as a possible forum and the specific issues that entailed. It was deemed that this option was not suitable at the present time, as it was not quite needed and would use up all current available resources.

Paragraphs 3.22 onwards gave consideration to other options and set out some examples of how a partnership forum could work. If this model was agreed then a further report to the January meeting would be presented on how this could proceed.

In response to Members questions, the Committee was informed that the ideas offered through the Ideas Forum had been acknowledged and people contacted. The Ideas Forum would be promoted again, as the number of ideas received had dipped recently.

There were no definitive cost figures for running a Citizens Assembly, but if a low budget one was instigated it would likely be ineffective. People would likely need to be paid to attend the Assembly to encourage a wider and larger audience and to ensure that its ideas were not skewed. This could result in significant payments being made. Experts would also be invited to attend and they also would want paying. Overall a Citizens Assembly would be a big commitment at potentially a cost of £100K, so was unfeasible at this stage.

The recommendation was to form a partnership forum by engaging with relevant organisations to start with. It should not be fully 'owned' by this Council. The partners would be expected to contribute their time and participate in developing plans to take action. It was intended to be a long-term partnership and would evolve over time. The key to its working effectively would be having the right organisations in it.

The Committee agreed that looking at a forum, rather than the Assembly, was the right way forward, but would need to ensure that the forum would not be taken over by one-issue groups, as a whole range of views would be needed. Although this was the right approach, it was acknowledged that it might not be easy to get the partners together. There were also some reservations about paying people (via the Citizens Assembly option) to attend and the input that might be generated, so that had to be managed. The report did not rule out a Citizens Assembly, which could include broad representation of the community and would allow anyone to contribute, and more investigation of its potential costs could be undertaken.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the continued progression towards a 'partnership forum', on the basis of the approach set out in the agenda report, be agreed;
- (ii) That a Climate and Natural Environment Citizens Assembly is not progressed at this stage, but does not rule out such an Assembly at a later date;
- (iii) That engagement commences on potential representatives for the Partnership Forum, but that no decision on representatives be made at this stage;
- (iv) That a further update on the options for the setting up of the partnership forum (or similar) be given at its meeting in January 2021.

45. ECDC WASTE AND STREET CLEANSING SERVICES FLEET MAINTENANCE

The Committee considered a report, V98 previously circulated, which detailed the review of the Waste and Street Cleansing vehicle maintenance Service Level Agreement (SLA).

The Director Operations advised the Committee that there was a SLA between this Council and Cambridge City Council to maintain the vehicles, at a cost of around £300K per year. This sum was likely to fluctuate as the vehicles got older. Appendix 1 set out the SLA, showing the routine maintenance schedule and all-in service, which the City Council had provided to an excellent standard. The current SLA was due to expire in March 2021, so a low-level marketing exercise had been carried out for the new contract. Three organisations had been contacted, but had declined to participate. Other potential suppliers were identified but, as they were located outside the district, would not be suitable due to the necessary travelling and consequent additional carbon output.

Therefore, a further SLA with the City Council would include for an enhanced service with key performance indicators included. It would also include a six-month termination clause for either party. Normal procurement rules would not apply and, as it would provide a one-stop service, would save resources and minimise the carbon footprint, it was recommended to agree to a new SLA with the City Council.

The Head of Street Scene reminded the Committee that the vehicle fleet was aging but the Government's upcoming Waste Strategy might change vehicles' specifications, therefore obtaining new vehicles would be delayed. This should proceed once the next consultation has been released.

Members of the Committee acknowledged the efforts to find alternative suppliers and accepted the good working relationship with Cambridge City Council. As the working relationship was good there was no reason why this should not continue.

The Company had to be mindful when replacing the vehicles, as they had a significant carbon footprint, so greener options should be considered.

In response to Members questions, it was explained that the contract was between the Council and Cambridge City Council, however the day to day operation, responsibility and risks lay with the Company. If the City Council failed to meet the Key Performance Indicators then a conversation would be conducted to see if it was outside of their control. Since 2018, when the contract was first entered into, there had been a couple of issues. However, these had since been ironed out. Full and frank conversations had been held with Cambridge City Council and regular meetings had been held. A penalty clause had not been included in the contract, as it was not considered an issue, as the partnership relationship was excellent. If any big issues arose it would be brought to the Committee for consideration.

It was resolved:

- (i) That the review and three-year extension to the Fleet Maintenance Service Level Agreement with Cambridge City Council be approved;
- (ii) That the Director of Operations be instructed to enter into a new three year Service Level Agreement with Cambridge City Council.

46. ASSISTED WASTE COLLECTION REVIEW

The Committee considered a report, V99 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the first annual assisted waste collection review.

The Head of Street Scene recommended that the review be deferred. In September 2019 officers had been tasked with reviewing the assisted waste collection service to ensure that the right people were getting the service and that it was efficient. An initial review had showed that the right people were getting the service. However, with the impact of the pandemic, extra strain would have been put on residents and the National Health Service (NHS) to provide evidence that people were eligible for this service.

In reply to the Committee's questions, it was revealed that the reduction in properties eligible for the service had reduced from 1100 to 395. The service had not been reviewed for between 3 and 5 years and the criteria had not changed. The reduction in properties for this service followed the initial review, as some of the residents had changed and many of the residents did not need the service. The Committee considered it eminently sensible to delay the review, with a suggested date of September 2021.

It was resolved:

That the deferral of the first annual assisted waste collection review until September 2021 be approved, due to the increased risk this would pose to vulnerable residents and increase pressure already placed on the NHS and local GPs.

47. QUARTER 2 WASTE PERFORMANCE

The Committee considered a report, V100 previously circulated, which provided the updated performance information for delivery of the waste and street cleansing services.

The Head of Street Scene advised the Committee that many of the staff had shielded, due to COVID-19, but all had returned to work by August. Although the Company had suffered, once fully recovered after COVID the performance figures would rise. The Company followed the COVID guidance and promoted this through posters and messages on vehicles. The Company had appointed a new Manager and had liaised with Ely Cathedral to light up its lantern in green to promote recycling. Waste tonnages, including recycling, had increased. As household waste was also increasing, the campaign to reduce it would continue.

The Head of Street Scene responded to Members' questions by stating that the campaign to recycle more had followed the waste analysis. There was a lot more to do, the Government's new Waste Strategy could help, and it was about driving the message home. The drop in the figure for September for refuse requests was due to the increased pressure on the services because of COVID-19 and the annual delivery of black bags. This figure was expected to improve. The Company had to follow Government guidance about COVID-19, so there was a risk if employees were affected by the track-and-trace system. As the second lockdown was not at the same level as the first, it was anticipated that the impact would probably be less.

It was resolved:

That the performance of service delivery, for the second quarter, be noted.

48. FORWARD AGENDA PLAN

The Committee considered its forward agenda plan.

A special Committee meeting would be held shortly to consider East Cambs Street Scene's revised business plan and management accounts. The work on the Youth Strategy by Cambridgeshire County Council had re-started and a report for the Committee was expected in the new year.

The forward agenda plan was noted.

49. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered a report, V102 previously circulated, which detailed the financial position for services under the Operational Services Committee.

The Senior Accountant advised the Committee that at the end of Quarter 2 of the financial year, the Committee's revenue budget projected an underspend of £49.5K and the capital budget an underspend of £2.6million. This last figure was mostly due to the delay in the maintenance of the fleet of waste vehicles.

In reply to a Member's question about the refurbishment of the depot, the Committee was informed that options were still being looked into. The depot had not been refurbished for many years, so a variety of options had to be considered. It was hoped that this issue would be considered during the early part of next year.

It was resolved:

- (i) To note that this Committee was currently projected to end the year with a revenue underspend of £49,500, when compared to its planned budget of £5,650,903;
- (ii) To note that the Committee had a projected capital programme outturn of £1,084,486. This was an underspend of £2,655.950.

The meeting concluded at 6:38pm.