

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 23rd April 2020

Time: 11.10a.m. – 13.00p.m.

Present: Councillors Bailey, Bates, Boden (substituting for Councillor Bywater), Connor (substituting for Councillor Criswell), Count (Chairman), Dupré, Hickford, Jenkins, Kindersley, Meschini, Nethsingha, Sanderson, Schumann, Shuter and Whitehead

238. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Bywater and Criswell.

No declarations of interest were made.

239. MINUTES – 28TH JANUARY 2020 AND ACTION LOG

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2020 were agreed as a correct record and it was agreed that they would be signed by the Chairman when the Council returned to its offices.

In noting the action log, attention was drawn to one ongoing action.

240. PETITIONS AND PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No petitions or public questions were received.

241. INTEGRATED FINANCE MONITORING REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDING 29TH FEBRUARY 2020

The Head of Finance explained that the report presented forecasts up to the end of February 2020, before the extent and implications of the coronavirus pandemic could be anticipated. The Council expected material financial impacts to occur in the 2020-21 financial year, utilising the grant described under recommendation (b). The Committee was informed that a forecast year-end pressure of £0.5m was being predicted, which was a decrease on last month's forecast. It was noted that the number of older people supported had risen across the year whilst the number of children open to social care had decreased. The key exception to report this month related to waste management where there was an underspend due to a breakdown at the Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facility. Attention was then drawn to the recommendations on page 6 of the report.

Individual Members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- queried when Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) would reopen to address the increase in fly tipping. The Chairman reported that he had been involved in national discussions about this issue. At the moment, the Council would continue to following the guidance issued by Government which set out only four reasons to leave home. It would therefore be

inappropriate to open HWRCs until the Government changed this guidance. As far as he was aware only one Council in the country had opened a HWRC. The Council was looking at a plan to reopen these centres once Government changed the guidance. The Chairman added that it was important to make sure that these Centres once reopened did not impact on the local highway network and that social distancing could be maintained. He also reported that a number of staff at the Centres had been redeployed to help in other areas.

- expressed concern about restrictions on bulky waste collections which was impacting seriously on those living in small flats or terraces. The Chairman reported that as far as he was aware there were no restrictions on the collection of bulking items and refuse, which was a District Council responsibility, although some areas had stopped collecting garden waste, which had resulted in incidents of fly tipping and anti-social behaviour. One Member highlighted the fact that the City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils were not collecting green bins and could be reviewing the collection of blue bins. He hoped that these Councils would reconsider this policy. Another Member reported that South Cambridgeshire District Council had announced that it would be resuming green bin collections.
- expressed concern about the conflict between Government HWRC guidance to the public, and to local authorities, as the guidance for the latter envisaged HWRCs being open.
- highlighted the fact that the breakdown of the MBT might be positive on a financial level but it was not good news for the environment.
- highlighted the significant capital underspend in Place and Economy and queried whether some of the funding could be used to fund the Council's A14 Improvement Scheme contribution rather than prudential borrowing. The Head of Finance explained that this would happen once the refinancing had gone through in the new financial year. However, in the meantime, the Council needed to create this additional budget for the Scheme.
- expressed concern regarding the A14 contribution which had been agreed in 2013 before the establishment of the Combined Authority. A Member suggested that the Council was borrowing money in order to pay a third party, which had been deprecated by CIPFA in relation to good accounting practice. The Council was in this position because a decision had been made seven years ago when the Integrated Transport Block (ITB) had been considerably higher than it was now. The Council's contribution had therefore moved from being 10% of the ITB to a third. It was therefore queried whether it could be renegotiated. The Chairman of Economy and Environment Committee explained that the Council had signed a legally binding agreement with Highways England four years ago. The Chairman of General Purposes Committee reported that the A14 was the most significant infrastructure project at this point in time and would be invaluable to local residents and further afield once it was completed. He reminded the Committee of the opposition to the Council putting funding into this project but without this funding the project would not have

happened. He was of the view that it was not appropriate to renege on a legally binding contract when a project was being delivered ahead of schedule.

- highlighted the significant achievement of only having a projected year end overspend of £0.5m which was 0.1% of the Council's overall budget, which represented work over previous years as well as this financial year. The Chairwoman of Adults Committee thanked Adult Social Care staff for their contribution which had not come at the expense of outcomes and services. She drew attention to the Quality of Life Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework where the Council ranked 10 out of 149 social care authorities and the fact that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were in the top 15 in the Empower - What is good in Adult Social Care. This was a testament to front line staff who were performing to a high standard whilst making significant savings.

Councillor Boden, as the Local Member for Whittlesey North, drew attention to the Kings Dyke Level Crossing Closure Scheme. He reminded the Committee that the level crossing on the A605 was often closed for 25 minutes in each hour, which resulted in delays for thousands of people as this road currently took approximately 15,000 vehicle movements each week day. The situation was further exacerbated at times by the closure of the B1040 and North Bank due to flooding where vehicle movements then increased to 23,000. He explained that it was an impossible situation which needed to be resolved.

He highlighted the proposal in the report which represented good value for money. He informed Members of the discussion at Economy and Environment Committee where there had been unanimous agreement to go ahead with the scheme subject to the funding being provided by General Purposes Committee. He was delighted to note that the best bidder in terms of price was also the best in terms of quality. He reminded the Committee that this scheme had been discussed for over 40 years and was therefore significantly overdue. The Benefit Cost Ratio was over 8, which was very high, and when the B1040 and North Bank were closed it then rose to over 100. He congratulated the Chairman on rejecting the previous bid and retendering which had resulted in a saving of £10m.

Councillor Connor, as the Local Member for Whittlesey South, supported the comments made by the other Local Member. He hoped that the scheme would be completed as quickly as possible.

The Chairman apologised to people who used the A605 for the delay to the Kings Dyke Level Crossing Closure Scheme. He stressed the Scheme was long overdue. He was disappointed that it had not been possible to issue a contract over a year ago. However, he reminded the Committee that it had been the decision of the Economy and Environment Committee not to proceed with the contract due to the exorbitant cost of the tender. It had therefore been the right decision to review the process, which had saved the Council £10m. He highlighted the performance of officers during the new tendering process resulting in the agreement of a new contract by Economy and Environment Committee.

One Member raised an issue in relation to the Performance Report for Quarter 3 which was not on the agenda as it did not require a decision but had been circulated to the Committee. The issue concerned indicator 62 relating to health and in particular the reasons for a reduction in health checks. The Chairman asked officers to provide the Committee with a written report. **Action Required.**

In conclusion, the Chairman reported that everything which had been discussed at the meeting paled into insignificance compared to the overwhelming impact of Corona Virus on the community. However, it was important to note that part of the battle with Corona Virus would be how the Council returned to some semblance of normality and therefore continuing to operate as close to normal as possible was vital to ensure the Council came out of this situation in the best position.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the allocation of the Levy Account Surplus grant (£219,368) to the corporate grants account within Funding Items, as set out in section 5.1;
- b) Approve the earmarking of the unringfenced grant received (£14.612m) for the purposes of responding to the coronavirus pandemic during 2020/21, as set out in section 5.2;
- c) Approve the debt write-offs of £27,170.32, £26,589.16 and £26,324.23 (totalling £80,083.71) relating to the estates of service users where there was now no prospect of these debts being recovered, as set out in section 6.2;
- d) Approve additional prudential borrowing of up to £2.018 million in future years for the completion of the Kings Dyke Level Crossing Closure scheme, reducing to £807,200 once the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) has approved its 60% share of the increase, as set out in section 7.7;
- e) Approve additional prudential borrowing for the creation of a £1.5 million Covid-19 risk contingency for the Kings Dyke Level Crossing Closure scheme, as set out in section 7.7;
- f) Note the additional 2019/20 contributions of £677k expected in relation to the Combined Authority funded Wisbech Town Centre Access Study scheme, as set out in Appendix 3;
- g) Approve additional prudential borrowing of £808k in 2020/21 for the Outdoors Centres scheme, as set out in Appendix 3;
- h) Approve the allocation of the Business Rates Relief Reconciliation of Authorities' 2018/19 Tax Loss Payments grant (£188,008) to the corporate grants account within Funding Items, as set out in Appendix 3.

It was resolved to:

- i) Approve additional prudential borrowing of £1m in 2020/21 for the A14 Improvement Scheme contribution, as set out in Appendix 3;

242. CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Chairman reported that officers had been asked to bring a report on the Covid-19 response to date for those services for which each Policy and Service Committee was responsible. A similar report would be brought to each future meeting until further notice. He explained that he had asked the Chairs of Policy and Service Committees to use reserve dates as a minimum so that the public received regular updates, which included adding an additional meeting of General Purposes Committee in May. Given the rapidly changing situation and the need to provide the committee and the public with the most up to date information possible, the Chairman reported that he had accepted this as a late report on the following grounds:

1. Reason for lateness: To allow the report to contain the most up to date information possible.
2. Reason for urgency: To enable the committee to be briefed on the current situation in relation to the Council's response to Covid-19 for those services for which it was responsible.

The Chief Executive introduced a report on the Council's response to the current Corona virus pandemic, the progress made on assessing financial, service and community impact, and the Council's initial approach to recovery. Section 2 of the report provided context to the UK response to the emergency. She then drew attention to Section 3 which set out the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum's response. Section 4 set out the County Council's response in relation to governance, its immediate focus, workforce, Adult Social Care, Co-ordination Hub, schools and settings, Public Health, planning for excess deaths, communications, data and insight. Section 6 set out the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's immediate operations and its longer term achievement of strategic objectives. Whilst Section 7 focused on how the Council would contribute to recovery and redesign.

The Deputy Chief Executive/Chief Finance Officer explained how the Council was accumulating and monitoring costs as set out in Section 5 of the report. It included Government announcements on funding and the financial impact analysis. On the 17th April the Council was projecting a gap of funding between the projected financial implications and external financial support (via the Government and the Clinical Commissioning Group) of £9.928m.

The Chairman reported that he was incredibly proud of the organisation's response to the Covid-19 crisis and the Council's professional set up. Officers had worked above and beyond what would normally be expected. He expressed his gratitude to both Councillors and officers for the way they had acted in this crisis. He asked the Chief Executive to pass on his thanks to all

the officers. He was concerned about health and mental health of the community and the Council's officers and Members. He therefore urged everyone to look out for each other and to spot signs when people needed more support. It acknowledged that actions had been taken to help staff work within their own capabilities but more work was needed. The Council would need to discuss after the crisis how it recognised this work.

He acknowledged that more recovery work was needed with District Councils and communities with regard to the economic impact and to support individuals who had contracted or lost people to the virus. He reminded the Committee that a Recovery Group had been established to keep Cambridgeshire a great place to live in for all residents. He expressed his gratitude to the Government for releasing a further £1.6b of funding for local government. However, it was noted that local authorities had asked Government to keep the lines of communication open as the full impact of the virus would not be known for years.

The Leaders of the Liberal Democrat and Labour Groups echoed the thanks to staff particularly those dealing with changes in the care sector and with the NHS. The Liberal Democrat Group Leader also thanked the public and in particular those small organisations who had picked up looking after their neighbours. It was impossible for the County Council to protect everyone so it had relied on District and Parish Councils, residents associations, and mutual aid groups to support their local neighbourhoods.

Individual Members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- expressed concern regarding the Virtual Meetings Protocol as it was critical the public had faith in their institutions. One Member was particularly concerned about the way public questions and concerns were being dealt with in virtual meetings. She stressed the need to find a better way of involving the public in the democratic process. The Chairman reminded the Committee that the protocol would be reviewed after full Council in May.
- queried when the involvement of Members would be reinstated in the decisions currently being taken during a period of sudden emergency as set out in the Constitution and reported in Section 4.5 of the report. The Chief Finance Officer reminded the Committee that this was the first time it had met since the start of the lockdown. He confirmed that decisions would now be taken by the Committee rather than executive powers.
- queried whether the Public Health reserve would be used to fund the residual pressure of £648k on health which was not covered by Public Health England or Government. The Chief Finance Officer acknowledged the sentiments and reported that the Council would be seeking flexibilities from Government regarding the way the grant was utilised.
- highlighted the need for sanitisation and disinfection in order to reuse Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) rather than it being thrown away. There was concern about the throwaway nature of this equipment and how it was being disposed of. It was acknowledged that any solutions needed

to have the protection of workers as the main priority. The Chairman suggested that the Director of Public Health should be asked to provide a written response. **Action Required.**

- highlighted the need to include the risk of domestic abuse in the list of “immediate priorities”. It was acknowledged that actions were taking place but it was hoped that it was a priority for the Council and should as such be added to the list. The Chairman reported that this list referred to the emergency priorities for the last three weeks only. The Chief Executive added that this issue would be considered in detail at the next Children and Young People’s Committee. It had been discussed by the Strategic Co-ordinating Group as the Police, Children’s Services and range of organisations had concerns.
- acknowledged the work being carried out by the Co-ordination Hub. However, it was not clear whether the County Council was responsible for just the shielded group or the vulnerable people as well. The Chairman explained that the report was not stating that the County Council was solely responsible for the shielded and vulnerable although it did have a statutory responsibility for former. It was just highlighting the need for these people to be looked after. He paid credit to District Councils and voluntary groups who were working well together with the County Council.
- highlighted the need for clarity in relation to the conflicting Government guidance regarding the HWRCs. The Chairman reported that the County Council’s position remained unchanged to the Government’s position on leaving the home.
- queried whether the range of Skanska activities could be extended given the fact there were less vehicles on the road. The Chairmen of Economy and Environment and Highways and Infrastructure Committees had raised the issue with the Executive Director: Place and Economy. It was noted that the Executive Director: Place and Economy would be asked to provide a briefing note on this issue. **Action Required.**
- requested more information on the sufficiency of PPE in the county particular for care homes/settings. The Chief Finance Officer explained that the PPE in the report related to its own workforce. The Chief Executive added that care homes/settings were able to source PPE from the PPE Hub at Alconbury. She confirmed that there was sufficient PPE available. The Chairman explained that the County Council had been one of the first to set up a mutual aid for facility for PPE.
- queried whether any consideration had been given to dealing with multiple peaks in Corona virus post June without more testing and contact tracing. The Chairman explained that this particular point in the report related to the financial impact only. The Chief Finance Officer reported that he was referring to the impact over a number of years.
- highlighted the importance of identifying data for Cambridgeshire relating to infection rates. The Chairman acknowledged the importance of releasing data from a credible source. He highlighted the need to raise

with Public Health what data could be released – **Action Required** (*Note – the following has been identified since the meeting*

https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/covid-19-case-tracker-area-quick-view-1?mod-area=E10000003&mod-group=AllCountiesInCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup)

- welcomed the weekly update reports from the County Council.
- highlighted the need to learn from the agile and flexible way the Council had been operating during the crisis in order to reduce bureaucracy in the future. It was important to move to agile and flexible decision making. The Chairman reported that the Council had been working hard to make the organisation more agile. However, it was also important to retain Member oversight and there was a need to analyse risk which was not necessarily the case in an emergency situation. However, he acknowledged the need to identify the lessons to be learnt. He reminded the Committee that the next report would focus more on plans for recovery.
- highlighted the work of parishes who had literally started operating volunteer groups within hours and had therefore taken responsibility away from councils who had lots of other things to do. The Chairman raised the benefits of the Community and Partnership Committee over the last two years which had really come into its own during the crisis. It was acknowledged that the Council needed to continue to build on this work.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) note and comment on the progress made to date in responding to the impact of the Coronavirus; and
- b) note the current projected financial implications associated with managing the implications of the Coronavirus pandemic as set out in section 5 of this report.

243. CAMBRIDGESHIRE LIFELINE PROJECT BUSINESS CASE

The Committee considered a report detailing a Transformation Fund bid to support the business case for the Cambridgeshire Technology Enabled Care Services to become a Lifeline Provider that included a tender for an Alarm Receiving Centre for a four year contract. Members noted the background, a summary of the Transformation Fund Bid and the main proposal. Attention was drawn to the importance of the Cambridgeshire Lifeline Project which would deliver considerable advantages to customers, Technology Enabled Care and Social Care. It would also minimise the risks for the digital switchover and increase the preventative and early intervention offering. In year 3 the project would cover its operational costs and would make a new saving of £182,608 in year 5.

In welcoming the proposal, one Member asked if customers on benefit would receive the service. It was noted that for those customers on benefits and who were in receipt of a Council funded care package and underwent a financial assessment, the assessment would take into account their payment

for a community alarm system. Another highlighted the importance of emphasising the ongoing savings, which had huge cost avoidance for the whole system.

The Chairwoman of Adults Committee thanked the Service Development Manager and her colleagues for providing an excellent Business Case to cover a complex area. She explained that this project would simplify the process and was absolutely key to early intervention and prevention as most people who had a Lifeline were not in receipt of a care package. It was life changing for individuals to feel safe and secure and to provide peace of mind for carers. She explained that when the Lifeline was triggered the first call was usually to a family member but if this person did not respond the Enhanced Response Service then attended the call. It was important to note that in many cases it avoided calling an ambulance and hospital attendance. She add that the system also enabled other technology to be put in the home. The majority of people who received the service free of charge for six weeks usually kept it and were happy to pay for it.

The Chairman acknowledged that the report had undersold the savings which could be achieved as there would be significant implications on this service and other Council services. He was important the Council offered the best possible service to its customers, which would be more encompassing than a commercial operator. Whilst he acknowledged the need to manage funding pressures, he felt that the report had undersold the outcomes as well as the finance particularly given the fact that the authority was an outcome based Council. He reported that he would be liaising with the Chief Executive regarding identifying the outcomes in all proposals rather than just the funding. **Action Required.**

It was resolved unanimously to:

approve the application for up to £172,406 Transformation Funding over the next two years.

244. GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE AGENDA PLAN, TRAINING PLAN AND APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES, AND INTERNAL ADVISORY GROUPS AND PANELS

The Committee considered its agenda plan which included the addition of an additional meeting on 14 May 2020.

It was resolved unanimously to review the agenda plan.

Chairman