

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 27th January 2015

Time: 10.00a.m. – 12.45p.m.

Present: Councillors Bailey, Bourke, D Brown, Bullen, Cearn, Count (Chairman), Criswell, Harty (substituting for I Bates), Hickford, Hipkin, Leeke, McGuire, Orgee, Reeve, Rylance, Sales, and Whitehead

Apologies: Councillor Bates

85. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

86. MINUTES – 6TH JANUARY 2015 AND ACTION LOG

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th January 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. The completed Action Log was noted:

87. PETITIONS

No petitions were received.

88. LGSS ASBESTOS REMOVAL FRAMEWORK CONTRACT

The Committee considered a report detailing the procurement of an Asbestos Removal Framework Agreement to commence on 1 June 2015 for four years, to operate across the LGSS works and to also be open for LGSS customers to use. The Framework would complement the Asbestos Consultancy Contract procured in late 2014. Services were currently procured via the use of ESPO framework contractors, the procurement of an LGSS framework would allow improved control of health and safety, quality and specification.

During discussion, Members queried the Council's relationship with ESPO. The Chief Executive explained that ESPO was a successful collaboration with a significant trading base. The Council had a complementary relationship with ESPO in approximately 95% of cases. Members were advised that this framework would give the Council total control of its contractors thereby avoiding any interference from other organisations. The Committee queried whether asbestos was still a major problem. It was noted that asbestos issues were regularly identified in works for buildings built pre 1999.

Members queried the opportunities for trading services with others. It was noted that LGSS was already trading with Central Bedfordshire, Chelmsford and Academies in Tower Hamlets, which had created benefits for the founding authorities. These organisations currently accessed the ESPO framework through LGSS but in future LGSS would signpost its services. The Chairman queried the finance information detailed in the report and was informed that it reflected the worst case scenario. The situation would improve if the Council could attract more clients.

It was proposed with the agreement of the Committee to amend the recommendation to make reference to Member involvement.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- (a) approve the commencement of procurement of a framework of asbestos removals contractors with the intention that the new service provider(s) will commence on 1st June 2015 for a duration of 4 years; and
- (b) delegate authority to the LGSS Director Law, Property & Governance and the Head of Property Services, in consultation with the Chairman of the LGSS Joint Committee, to appoint framework contractors following a competitive process and complete all necessary contractual documents in accordance with Council procedures.

89. MARCH – ESTOVER ROAD SITE – DECLARATION OF SURPLUS

The Committee was reminded that it had deferred, at its December meeting, a report detailing a proposal to declare the Estover Road Site in March surplus to requirements in order to allow for discussions taking place with March Town Council and to obtain more information. Attention was drawn to the background to the proposal to establish an alternative use for the Estover Road site, and to enter into any appropriate Agreements, which might include disposal (by sales or by lease), or development by the Council. It was important to bear in mind that any decision regarding development would not determine the future of the site as this would be decided as part of a planning application to Fenland District Council.

The Chairman reported that a copy of his proposed motion to Council, a plan and a copy of Mr Shermer's written submission had been circulated to the Committee as background information. He invited District Councillor Mike Cornwell, Mick Jordan of the Estover Playing Fields Association and Mike Shermer to address the Committee.

Councillor Cornwell explained that he supported options to return the Estover Road site in its entirety to the people of March. Funding to modernise sporting facilities was being sought from March Town Council and Fenland District Council. Also speaking as the District Council's Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Councillor Cornwell explained that March was 48 acres short of outdoor facilities for a Town of its size. Participation levels were also well below the national and regional averages. There was therefore significant support locally for a multi sports facility which would include a floodlit all weather pitch.

Mr Jordan reported that the site had been used by the people of March for in excess of 70 years. The Playing Fields Association had been looking after it for the last sixteen years. He informed the Committee that there was a shortage of football pitches in the area. He felt it was untrue to suggest that the current condition of the existing playing fields was unsustainable. The land was well maintained and well used. He acknowledged that the changing rooms needed improvement but the Association needed a longer lease in order to attract external funding. He reported that March Town Council was proposing to bring forward a Neighbourhood Plan in order to retain the site as a playing field and prevent residential development in the future.

In response to questions, Mr Jordan reported that the Association wanted to retain the site in its entirety, which included three full size football pitches. He explained that proposals for investment were for multi-use and not just football. He advised that a minimum lease of 30 years would be needed in order to access external grant funding from the FA or Sport England.

Mr Shermer expressed concern about the possible loss of land for local people. He felt that the report contained a number of misleading statements. He reminded the Committee of the background to the ownership and use of the land. He drew attention to the Inspector's report on the Fenland District Local Plan. The Inspector had agreed with the District Council's view that no residential development should be allowed at all in the March North district due to inadequate infrastructure and poor drainage. He also reported that Planning Practice Guidance stated that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built upon. He therefore asked the Committee to support the proposed motion to Council.

In response to questions, Mr Shermer reported that he would prefer a longer lease but there were legal reasons why a split lease had been proposed, as this avoided a long drawn out process to seek the Secretary of State's approval.

Councillor McGuire proposed an amendment to offer the land in its entirety to March Town Council on a 99 year lease at a peppercorn rate, seconded by Councillor Count. He reminded the Committee that it had deferred the previous report because of a lack of information. Members now had a greater sense of the community feeling surrounding this land. Councillor Count acknowledged that local people had been suspicious about the proposal for a split lease. He therefore suggested that, subject to the vote, a letter to the Secretary of State with the signatures of each of the Council's Group Leaders might add more add weight

Speaking as a Local Member, Councillor Count reminded the Committee that public health was a primary duty of the Council. It was important to keep people fit and healthy, which in the long term would benefit the Council financially. Councillor Cornwell was proposing £100k funding towards sports investment to March Town Council and Councillor John Clark, as leader of the District Council, was proposing that Fenland District Council do the same. He explained that this funding would enable a charitable trust to seek match funding from the FA and Sport England.

During discussion of the amendment, members made the following comments:

- the need to bear in mind, regardless of the respect for local opinion and knowledge, the fact that the Council was facing budget cuts of £150million. It was vital if services were under threat that the Council should seek to earn money. Members therefore had an obligation to consider whether they were achieving the best business case by leasing the land at a peppercorn rate. Some Members expressed grave reservations about foregoing a capital receipt.
- requested an estimate of the loss of income. The Head of Strategic Assets reported that independent valuation advice had confirmed that the Council could achieve between £300k to £6m, which reflected the range from no units to the maximum of 249 and no playing field.

- confirmed that this individual capital receipt had not been included in the Business Plan.
- acknowledged the importance of sharing the prosperity of the South of the County with other parts of the County such as Fenland. As a result, the Council would be considering a report “Connecting North Cambridgeshire: Infrastructure for Growth”, which was encouraging policy makers to take into account improvements to transport infrastructure when considering economic needs. Housing did have significant local benefits such as employment and an increase in the number of tax payers to the area. It was therefore suggested that a detailed cost benefit analysis was needed before a decision could be made.
- acknowledged the value of housing but clarified that the housing would happen anyway and it was just a case of where it would be built. It was important that the Council did not make a quick windfall due to the laxity of the Fenland District Council Local Plan.
- queried the reason why the Committee was not debating the original proposal, which had included a compromise for housing and playing fields with better facilities. One Member could not understand why there was no support locally for this compromise proposal.
- reported that the Committee should not be going against the needs of the local community in order to achieve a need to increase revenue. Welcomed the intention to bring forward a Neighbourhood Plan which would provide a way of testing the reasonableness of development. It was important that the Council did not go against its own Corporate Priorities of “Helping People Live Healthy and Independent Lives”. It was suggested that the Council should review its governance arrangements to identify where it had gone against the needs of the community in order to increase revenue.
- highlighted the need to consider the total picture. It was suggested that any decision to build on land at Estover would only increase the problem of a lack of sporting facilities for the number of people in March. It was important that the Neighbourhood Plan considered the infrastructure needed to support the Town.
- the need to bear in mind that the Council had a responsibility for public health. It would be able to achieve savings by encouraging active lifestyles in order to achieve better health outcomes.
- highlighted the fact that a shortage of sporting facilities was echoed around the County. It was therefore important that the Council facilitated quality provision. One Member drew attention to the fact that an Academy was reducing public access to sporting facilities. Unfortunately, it was not possible to cross-subsidise such provision.
- queried the Chairman’s position in relation to March Town Council. The Chairman reported that he had resigned from the Town Council in order to avoid any conflict of

interest. He felt that as the Local Member for March North he should be fully involved in the debate.

- queried approximately how long it would take the Secretary of State to make a decision regarding the lease. The Head of Strategic Assets commented that it was unpredictable but suggested between 3 to 6 months. The Chairman asked all Group Leaders, if the amendment was successful, to sign the letter to the Secretary of State.
- welcomed the proposed change in recommendation since the meeting in December, which demonstrated that politicians had listened to the views of the local community. There was scepticism regarding the proposal in the motion to grant March Town Council a 7 year peppercorn lease over part of the land as this could allow for housing development in the future. One Member apologised to the people of March for the Council's failure to grant a long lease earlier as it would have enabled them to access grant funding. He requested a review into other pockets of land across the county which had short leases preventing local communities from applying for grant funding.
- the need to set conditions if approving a 99 year lease to ensure that inclusive sporting facilities were provided and not just facilities for football. The Chairman reported that it was proposed to establish a charitable trust so it would be up to the people of March to decide what they wanted. The Chairman invited the Mayor of March, Councillor Kit Own to comment. He explained that the Trust would involve fit and proper people and be established under the auspices of Town Council.
- queried whether the "Public Health Implications" section in the report had been prepared in consultation with the Public Health Team. It was noted that it was a general statement. It was suggested that the report should be referred back to allow for a cost benefit analysis and a public health analysis to be prepared.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

Councillor Bourke proposed a further amendment to add the need for confirmation from the Director of Public Health that the public health benefits of this proposal outweigh the benefits of the previous proposal, seconded by Councillor Sales.

During discussion on the amendment, the majority of Members acknowledged the sentiment but suggested it was totally impractical. One Member highlighted the fact that there was no request for an analysis of the lack of facilities for a town the size of March particularly if housing was proposed. In response other Members highlighted the need for some sort of analysis. The Chairman of the Health Committee confirmed that he was not seeking absolute precision.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

It was resolved:

- i) in respect of the County Council owned land known as Estover Fields, to grant a lease for a term of 99 years at a peppercorn rent, to an organisation

duly established and constituted for the purpose of managing the land as a community sports facility.

- ii) authorise the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee, subject to the following conditions:
 - a) compliance with all legal requirements and processes;
 - b) following conduct of due diligence in respect of the transferee organisation, and
 - c) Fenland District Council and March Town Council having entered into binding agreements committing each to provide £100k funding to the transferee organisation for the improvement of the sporting facilities at Estover Fields.

to enter into any agreements necessary or incidental to the implementation of these proposals.

90. BUSINESS PLAN 2015-16

The Committee received the Council's Business Plan covering the period 2015-16 in detail, and 2016-17 through to 2019-20 in outline. Attention was drawn to the small number of amendments to the draft revenue proposals since the last update to the Committee on 6 January, which included the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme and the New Homes Bonus. The Chief Finance Officer explained that it had been a challenging process to achieve a balanced budget position for 2015-16. It was important to note that there was still a financial gap in the budget for 2016-17.

During discussion, members made the following comments:

- thanked both Members and officers for the hard work involved in preparing the Business Plan.
- queried the impact of foregoing the capital receipt for the Estover Road site. The Chief Finance Officer reported that F/R.5.001 in the table on page 5 reflected decisions in the capital programme regarding rephasing. There was an assumption made in the programme of a sale of assets totalling £5m. It was noted that this was a generic sum and primarily related to the County Farms Estate. It was expected that this sum would be achieved next year and would not be impacted by the Estover Road decision.
- the proposed increase in Council Tax. The Leader of the UKIP Group reported that his group would not be supporting the Business Plan as it included an increase in Council Tax. The Chairman said he was disappointed that UKIP had not put their proposals through the committee system.
- expressed concern about the use of 40% of the New Homes Bonus to fund the City Deal revenue costs (non-project costs). There was concern that this funding had been ringfenced for the City Deal, which would not benefit the whole of the County.

The Chief Finance Officer reminded Members that the vast majority of the New Homes Bonus had been generated by growth in Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire. This funding was needed to support non-project costs to access funding of approximately 0.5 billion pounds. Members were informed that the City and District Councils were putting in four times the amount allocated by the County Council. He reassured Members that the costs associated with the City Deal were subject to scrutiny and challenge by the Board and Assembly. The Chairman added that this funding should be seen as leverage to deliver infrastructure.

- expressed concern that the Community Impact Assessment (CIA) for Cambridgeshire Future Transport on page 313 underplayed the impact.
- suggested that some CIAs under estimated the impact of savings on communities. It was important to consider a more joined up approach to community resilience to encourage the community to deliver more services. The Member Champion for Localism reminded Members of the cross council working on community resilience and his expectation that it would be referred to in future CIAs.
- highlighted the need to reflect changes to the CIA on page 334 relating to winter maintenance. There was also the need to review the CIA relating to Net Access, which did not take into account rural isolation.
- highlighted the need to link the Budget Consultation with Council Tax. It was important that the public were aware of what the Council could do with the funding.
- reported that it was proposed to send each resident a letter setting out exactly the budgetary pressures affecting specific services. They would also be invited to consider donating funding in addition to their Council Tax.
- explained that officers were considering responses to a consultation in relation to the CIA on the Early Help Offer. It was possible that Children and Young People Committee would submit a slightly different proposal but this would only impact on the CIA and not the budget.
- stressed the need to avoid reprinting the draft Business Plan. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the Plan would not be reprinted. Instead Members would be provided with updates for full Council. The final Business Plan would be published on the Council's website and there would be a restricted circulation of this document.
- highlighted the fact that the level of public health ring-fenced grant was below the national average. The Health Committee Chairman reported that public health had scored well with residents who had identified it as a priority. It was therefore important that it was embedded across services. He felt that there should also be more integration across Councils in order to achieve public health outcomes. He was concerned that a proposal, following the Member Led Review of Disability Access, to fund community organisations to build capacity in the community was not included in the Business Plan.

It was resolved to:

1. Consider the Business Plan, including supporting Budget, Community Impact Assessments, Consultation Responses and other material, in the light of all planning activities undertaken to date.
2. Recommend to Council the following:
 - a. That approval be given to the Service/Directorate cash limits as set out in each Service/Directorate table in Section 4 of the Business Plan.
 - b. That approval be given to a total County Budget Requirement in respect of general expenses applicable to the whole County area of £767,883,000 as set out in Section 3, Table 5.4 of the Business Plan.
 - c. That approval be given to a recommended County Precept for Council Tax from District Councils of £244,122,035.27 (to be received in ten equal instalments in accordance with the fall-back provisions of the Local Authorities (Funds) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 1995), as set out in Section 3, Table 5.4 of the Business Plan.
 - d. That approval be given to a Council Tax for each Band of property, based on the number of "Band D" equivalent properties notified to the County Council by the District Councils (213,344.9), as set out in Section 3, Table 5.5 of the Business Plan reflecting a 1.99% increase in the County Council element of the Council Tax:

Band	Ratio	Amount (£)
A	6/9	762.84
B	7/9	889.98
C	8/9	1,017.12
D	9/9	1,144.26
E	11/9	1,398.54
F	13/9	1,652.82
G	15/9	1,907.10
H	18/9	2,288.52

- e. That approval be given to the report of the Chief Finance Officer on the levels of reserves and robustness of the estimates as set out in Section 3 of the Business Plan.
- f. That approval be given to the Capital Strategy as set out in Section 7 of the Business Plan.
- g. That approval be given to capital expenditure in 2015-16 up to £218.6m arising from:
 - Commitments from schemes already approved; and

- The consequences of new starts in 2015-16 shown in summary in Section 3, Table 5.10 of the Business Plan.
- h. That approval be given to the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Section 8 of the Business Plan.
 - i. That approval be given to the Prudential Borrowing Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix 3 of Section 8 of the Business Plan.
3. Endorse the priorities and opportunities as set out in the Strategic Framework (Sections 1 & 2).
 4. Authorise the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make technical revisions to the Business Plan, including the foregoing recommendations 2a to 2i to the County Council, so as to take into account any changes deemed appropriate, including updated information on District Council Tax Base and Collection Funds, Business Rates forecasts and Collection Funds and any grant changes.

As set out in Part 4 - Rules of Procedure, Part 4.4 - Committee and Sub-Committee Meetings, Section 14 of the Council's Constitution, Councillors Bullen, Reeve and Rylance requested that their votes opposing the recommendation be recorded in the minutes.

91. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Committee considered a report detailing the current status of the corporate risk. Attention was drawn to risks marked as red – 'Failure to secure funding for infrastructure' and 'Failure to effectively plan how the Council will deliver services over the 5 year Business Plan'. A new risk regarding the 'Increasing manifestation of Busway defects' had been included.

During discussion, Members expressed concern about Risk 9 'Failure to secure funding for infrastructure' particularly whether the Homes and Communities Agency would be able to deliver its statutory obligations.

Members acknowledged the difficulties associated with preparing a 5 year Business Plan. However, it was suggested that it should be made clear that this was not a reflection on competence rather the current financial circumstances. Members highlighted the importance of communicating with partners to assist the rewiring of public services. In conclusion, the Committee requested an update briefing on the Guided Busway. **Action required.**

It was resolved to note the position in respect of corporate risk.

92. GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE AGENDA PLAN AND APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Committee was asked to review its agenda plan and to consider appointments to the Rewiring Public Services Group and Treasury Strategy Review Group.

It was resolved to note the agenda plan and the appointment of the following:

Rewiring Public Services Group

Group Leaders
Cllr Criswell (Con)
Cllr Cearns (LD)
Cllr Bywater (UKIP)
Labour – TBC **Action required.**
Independent - TBC **Action required.**

Treasury Strategy Review Working Group

Cllr Hickford (Con)
Cllr Nethsingha (LD)
Cllr Bullen (UKIP)
Cllr Hipkin (Ind.)
Labour - TBC **Action required.**

[Note – Since the meeting, the Labour Group have appointed Councillor Kavanagh to the Rewiring Public Services Group and Councillor Walsh to the Treasury Strategy Review Working Group]

Chairman