

Assets and Procurement Committee

Date: 21 March 2024

Time: 10:00 – 12.35

Venue: New Shire Hall

Present: Councillors Ambrose Smith, Beckett, Criswell, Count, Ferguson, Goldsack, Gough, Hathorn (Chair), Meschini (items 41-43 only), Nethsingha, Rae (Vice-chair) and van de Ven

33. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillors Boden, Bywater, Connor, Dupre and McDonald. Councillor Criswell was substituting for Councillor Bywater, and Councillor van de Ven was substituting for Councillor Dupré.

There were no declarations of interest.

34. Minutes of the meeting held 16 January 2024 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held 16 January were agreed as a correct record.

An updated Action Log had been circulated to the Committee.

35. Petitions and Public Questions

There were no petitions or public questions.

36. Procurement of Water and Wastewater Services

The Committee received a report which considered options for procurement of mains water and wastewater services for the Council's sites, i.e. those assets where the Council is liable for water and/or sewerage bills, for 27 October 2024 onwards, after the current contract expires.

Due to the tightly regulated nature of the industry, there was little difference in price between suppliers, with quality of service being the greatest differentiator. The recommendation was to enter into a new contract with "Wave" through ESPO.

In response to a query about waste water infrastructure, officers advised that the contract related to the provision of meter readings, billing, administration, etc. Physical waste water arrangements would not change, the wholesale water provider remaining as either Anglian Water or Cambridge Water, and those arrangements would be unaffected by this decision.

A Member congratulated the report author for the clear, concise report.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) approve the use of the new ESPO framework (no. 1008_23, ref 1181) for water, wastewater and ancillary services to enter into a contract for those services effective from the date after the Council's current contract expires;
- b) delegate authority for awarding and executing a contract for the provision of mains water and wastewater services starting 27 October 2024 for a period of up to 3 years (and extension periods if required) to the Executive Director Place and Sustainability in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Assets and Procurement Committee.

37. Land and Property Strategy 2024-29

Members considered the Land and Property Strategy for 2024-2029. There had been extensive consultation on the Strategy, including service areas, and Member workshops. Officers outlined the background and main issues relating to the Strategy.

Councillor Hathorn proposed a minor amendment to the wording, and this amendment was seconded by Councillor Rae (additional text italicised):

approve the Land and Property Strategy 2024-29, *subject to any minor amendments by the Executive Director of Finance and Resources, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Assets and Procurement Committee.*

The amendment was carried unanimously.

Arising from the report:

- whilst noting references to Solar PV, a Member observed that there was little mention of onshore Wind power, which could be a huge opportunity for the Council. Another Member suggested that this would represent a significant change of policy and would require approval by the relevant Service Committees. Other Members commented that there needed to be a detailed review of the Council's approach to sustainable energy generation technologies, e.g. with regard to the sources of anaerobic digestion inputs. Officers confirmed that the strategy was aligned with the Council's Environment Strategy;
- a Member suggested that there should be greater clarity on defining protected assets, using the example of Old Shire Hall;
- a Member commented that there was a lack of detailed financial information on the required savings, which were alluded to in the covering report. There were also a number of broad statements in the report that were not backed up with data e.g. "we will have an efficient estate". Another Member agreed, observing that there were many laudable strategic objectives, but these needed to be measurable through KPIs. A timeline/action plan on when key projects would come forward also needed to be developed;
- a Member queried the plans for Facilities Management, given that there had been major cuts to the Facilities Management budget in the 2024/25 Business Plan.

Officers confirmed that there had been cuts, as part of the savings in the Accommodation Improvement Plan, but the £100K reduction in the Facilities Management revenue budget was only for one year. This formed part of the Change programme, which would be considered by the Committee at a future;

- it was noted that there would be alignment with other Council policies e.g. in relation to sustainable technologies and what the delivery vehicle for sustainability would be. An Asset Management Plan and range of individual policies would sit beneath the Land and Property Strategy, which would cover some of the detailed issues such as office occupancy rates given home-working, etc. Additionally, as proposals were brought forward, savings would be identified. The main aim of the document was to provide a high level framework which decisions would comply with in future. The Committee noted that highways land (verges, pavements, etc) were exempt from this Framework, but there were some surplus areas which were included;
- asked to what extent the framework was being informed by future service delivery? It was confirmed that it was very much Service/community led, rather than asset led;
- suggested that the scoring matrix should be a Member decision rather than an officer decision. It was confirmed that this would be included in the next phase, which would be considered at a future Committee meeting;
- referring to a diagram on the Asset Valuation of £764M, which gave figures for each sector of the County's assets, it was confirmed these figures were the *actual number of assets* in each category, rather than value, e.g. 268 schools. It was suggested that this needed to be made clearer in the diagram;
- in response to a Member question, it was confirmed that the forthcoming Asset Plan would provide further detail regarding future development and resultant land value increases.

It was resolved unanimously to approve the Land and Property Strategy 2024-29, subject to any minor amendments by the Executive Director of Finance and Resources, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Assets and Procurement Committee.

38. Commercial, Commissioning and Procurement Framework

The Committee considered the draft Commercial, Commissioning and Procurement Framework, which brought together all elements of the commissioning, procurement and contract management cycle.

The purpose of the Framework was to ensure effective consistent delivery of procurement and contract management, using the centralised procurement function in tandem with the service delivery model, making the best use of resources and expertise available across the Council. The Framework would enable the Council to maximise the flexibilities introduced by the new Procurement Act. The delivery of the Framework would be overseen by the Procurement Governance Board, and updates would be considered by the Assets and Procurement Committee. Adults and Children's Commissioning services and the Corporate Leadership Team had reviewed the proposed Framework.

Arising from the report:

- a Member suggested that within roles, “data/business intelligence” should be in the “review” column, as well as at the beginning of the journey. Officers agreed to make this change. Another Member suggested that it would be helpful to describe exactly what each role entailed in terms of the decision making process;
- noting that whilst supplier performance and failings were included, a Member observed there was nothing around the Council’s own failings within that process. Officers confirmed that this was covered by “lessons learned” but agreed to make that clearer within the Framework;
- a Member suggested that there could be greater focus on community satisfaction, in addition to VFM. It was confirmed that Procurement colleagues work closely with commissioners, and that KPIs were embedded in contracts as part of the contract management process, including user experience;
- a Member observed that it appeared that each one of the four steps had a “decision gate”, and it would be useful to formalise that. Officers explained how the process worked. The Member suggested that it would be good to note the formal gates, and that more thought may be needed on how to operationalise this, as it was important that everyone involved knew exactly what their role was;
- a Member welcomed the report and hybrid approach, but suggested that it needed to be more carefully defined. It was unclear what control mechanism was in place to ensure that the correct approach/weighting was given to competing objectives i.e. commercialisation balanced against service delivery in each case. As part of the procurement process, it was suggested there should be dip testing outside of that process. Officers agreed to discuss with the commercial team how that might be achieved;
- a Member commented that it would be useful to have some type of diarised calendar instructions for the end of the contract term, to avoid the need for urgent decisions to be taken where there had been insufficient planning. It was confirmed that the team was looking to expand the current e-tendering system, which would flag to contract managers that a contract was approaching its end;
- in response to a Member question, it was confirmed that for contracts *under* £100k, there was always an identifiable individual contract, rather than department;
- it was agreed that the relevant tables could be updated to reflect Member involvement, and to provide greater clarity on roles and responsibilities. A Member commented that whilst the commissioning stage was nearly always considered by the relevant Service Committee, often the final detail was delegated to the Chair/Vice Chair, and it would be helpful to specify how those discussions should take place;
- a Member commented on timing, noting that when a contract/commissioning issues was considered at a partner Service Committee, issues were often picked up from a different perspective.

On a general point, a Member suggested that where there were delegations to the Executive Director in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair, and further work was agreed e.g. to a strategy document, it would be helpful for the final version to be circulated to the Committee. It was agreed that this would take place for all future delegations. **Action required.** It was confirmed that Spokes considered draft reports prior to their publication.

It was resolved unanimously to:

review and approve the Commercial, Commissioning and Procurement Framework.

39. Assets and Procurement Committee Agenda Plan and Appointments to Outside Bodies

The Committee reviewed the Committee Agenda Plan.

It was resolved to:

note the agenda plan.

40. Exclusion of Press and Public

To resolve that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following items contain exempt information under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

41. Cromwell Leisure Park

The Committee considered a report relating to Cromwell Leisure Park.

It was resolved unanimously to approve the report recommendations.

42. Lease Renewal of the Queen Mark Centre, Wisbech

Members considered a report relating to the renewal of a lease for tenants of the Queen Mary Centre, Wisbech.

It was resolved unanimously to agree the report recommendations.

43. Lease of Land at Whitehall Farm, Littleport for a Battery Energy Storage System

Members considered a report on the option of a lease land to for a battery energy storage system (BESS) site on Whitehall Farm, Littleport.

It was resolved, by a majority, to agree the report recommendations.