

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4

Minutes of a meeting of the Operational Services Committee facilitated via the Zoom Video Conferencing System at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Monday 14th September 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

Jo Brooks – Director Operations
Stewart Broome – Senior Licensing Officer
Richard Kay – Strategic Planning Manager
Angela Parmenter – Housing & Community Advice Manager
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Anne Wareham – Senior Accountant

24. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

25. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no apologies nor substitutions for this meeting.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

27. MINUTES

It was resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20th July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

28. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements.

29. LOCAL ELECTRICITY BILL

The Committee considered a Motion passed from full Council relating to the Local Electricity Bill.

The Proposer of the Motion reminded the Committee that it had been nearly a year since the Council had declared a Climate Emergency. The Motion as proposed back in July related to the Local Electricity Bill, which was another step that the Council could take to help address the challenges of climate change and the goal of zero carbon. In the context of community scale energy, this had a huge potential to help towards zero carbon and would benefit the local economies. That was being blocked by the current energy market and legislation. Anyone wishing to buy electricity from local renewable sources could not and it was only available from utility companies or via the national grid. Becoming a supplier of energy for local consumers would have huge set up costs and had added complexities. The idea behind the Local Electricity Bill was to solve those problems by making the costs and complexity of selling local energy proportionate for local communities. So it would give energy generators the right to become local suppliers and make it financially viable. The Bill aimed to set up a new mechanism via Ofgem to ensure local suppliers faced proportionate costs. Ofgem were to consult with experts and stakeholders to create agreements to move forward with this. If successful, local councils and community groups could get involved in renewable energy generation projects that work in the local community.

The Bill had cross-party support, with over 200 Members of Parliament in support. Other local authorities had passed similar motions in support and this Council was being asked to do the same, as it would be consistent with the Council's previous decisions. This would allow a lot of community groups to look at getting involved.

In making comments about the Bill, a Member pointed out that although the Bill had many merits there were also some concerns. The principal of requesting resources and powers for local authorities would be helpful and could be supported, as those authorities would be reducing carbon emissions locally. However, the proposal to not allow carbon offsetting would be opposite to this Council's and the County Council's commitments. It was unlikely to achieve zero carbon emissions, so there would be a need to offset in some way, through planting trees throughout the area. Fortunately, some local growers were already supplying trees in the district, with plans to make Soham a demonstration town for their trees and this was to be encouraged. The Bill suggested many international carbon offset schemes were not working, though there were local schemes that were doing good work. The County Council was working to set up a local carbon offsetting scheme for local businesses to invest in local community infrastructure. The Bill would limit the opportunity for local businesses to invest in future green energy projects.

Within the body of the Bill there was no more carbon offsetting, so no companies would spend money in tree planting or replacing trees as there would be no incentive nationally or internationally to do so. Pressure needed to be kept on, particularly internationally, to get other countries to do more. The Bill would

undermine that and remove the incentive to do that. The impact on communities had to be discovered as, if the Bill was supported as it was, then there would be no going back to change it.

It was therefore proposed that the following amendments be made to the Motion: Under part (v) the first bullet point be amended to read: “write to local MPs, asking them to provide information on the impact of the Bill and if appropriate support the Bill” and the second bullet point to read “following a response from local MPs bring a report back to this Committee and then decide if East Cambridgeshire District Council wishes to write in support of the Bill.” This was duly seconded.

Another Member revealed that Soham Town Council were in support of the Bill, but was unsure about what impact planting trees would have. It should be possible to have both. The District Council should support town councils in relevant projects they were interested in.

The Proposer was confused about the amendment, as the Bill did nothing to discourage offsetting, so it should not be a concern. The Bill was about the supply of energy, its regulation by Ofgem and about enabling local community generators to get schemes off the ground. Ofgem did not regulate carbon offsetting, but many organisations were taking part in offsetting schemes already. Offsetting should not be used to delay the original motion, as matters had already been delayed since July. If the motion was supported it could be ‘on the table’ when Parliament debated the Bill again, otherwise if the amendment was passed this would delay matters until November and the Council’s view would be left behind. The Bill had cross-party support, so this Council should proceed to support the Bill. Other initiatives, relating to offsetting, could be brought back to this Committee for consideration, so this matter should not be delayed.

The amendment was then put to the vote and the results were:

For (5): Councillors C Ambrose Smith, D Ambrose Smith, L Every, J Huffer and J Webber.

Against (4): Councillors V Charlesworth, M Inskip, P Trimarco and C Whelan.

The amendment was therefore agreed.

As no Member wished to speak on the new Substantive Motion, it was put to the vote and agreed unanimously.

It was resolved that this Council:

- (i) acknowledges the efforts that this council is making to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote renewable energy;
- (ii) recognises that councils can play a central role in creating sustainable communities, particularly through the provision of locally generated renewable electricity;
- (iii) further recognises
 - that very large financial setup and running costs involved in selling locally generated renewable electricity to local

- customers result in it being impossible for local renewable electricity generators to do so,
- that making these financial costs proportionate to the scale of a renewable electricity supplier's operation would create significant opportunities for councils and local community co-operatives to be providers of locally generated renewable electricity directly to local people, businesses and organisations, and
 - that revenues received by councils that became local renewable electricity providers could be used to help fund local greenhouse gas emissions reduction measures and to help improve local services and facilities;
- (iv) accordingly resolves to support the Local Electricity Bill, currently supported by a cross-party group of 187 MPs, and which, if made law, would make the setup and running costs of selling renewable electricity to local customers proportionate by establishing a Right to Local Supply; and
- (v) further resolves to:
- write to local MPs, asking them to provide information on the impact of the Bill and if appropriate support the Bill;
 - following a response from local MPs bring a report back to this Committee and then decide if East Cambridgeshire District Council wishes to write in support of the Bill.

30. PRESENTATION – LICENSING SERVICES

The Committee received a presentation by the Senior Licensing Officer on the work of the Council's Licensing Department.

The Senior Licensing Officer advised the Committee that the Department consisted of only three officers, who dealt with 1822 live records. Most of these related to hackney carriage or private hire licences, with other licences such as for alcohol selling, animal welfare, breeding and boarding establishments, gambling and lottery collections being handled. Since July this year there had been extra work involved around temporary pavement licences, which was due to end in September 2021. The Department also registered street traders, which enabled control of potential rogue traders in the district, and looked after scrap metal dealers' sites and the Licensed collectors.

The purpose of all licensing activities was to balance all factors to prevent harm to the community and this was the main consideration when deciding on granting permissions. The Licensing Committee was involved in setting policies, licensing conditions and charges, with due respect to the relevant legislation. There were also two Sub-Committees which dealt with different licensing issues, although these could be referred to the main Committee.

The Council's licensing policies aimed to guide applicants, holders and the Council in relevant matters, but also have to adhere to the appropriate legislation, statutory guidance and codes of practice. Legislation and regulations could

change very quickly, potentially generating grievances. The Department had developed good relationships with the trade and Councillors, and aimed to assist businesses to cope.

The Committee were very appreciative of the work done by the Department, how accessible it was, its relationships and clear processes which were of huge value. The team had impressed when having to deal with recent legislation that had been published 20 minutes before coming into force and had done an excellent job under difficult circumstances. The small hard-working team had worked wonders this year during the pandemic and were an extraordinary team.

31. HOUSING AND COMMUNITY ADVICE SERVICE – UPDATE ON IMPACT OF COVID-19

The Committee considered a report, V58 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the Housing and Community Advice Services and the impacts of COVID-19.

The Housing and Community Advice Manager advised the Committee that the Department had still managed to provide its services, by conducting interviews by telephone. Face-to-face interviews would be re-started soon. The number of cases being dealt remained steady, with only nine Section 21/8 cases currently. The situation regarding those notices had been reviewed by Government and landlords would have to issue six-month notices to quit, commencing from August 2021.

The number of community advice cases and for tenancy support had increased, with enquiries also up. Officers had received extra training during the lockdown period, so could now deal with a range of topics, including the settlement of European Union citizens.

COVID-19 had not impacted that much so far, but the Department was preparing for when the furlough scheme ended, so officers were ready for the expected influx of cases. The Department was also liaising with other organisations to get the community hubs up and running.

The Committee were impressed by the amount of training that had been undertaken and were mindful of the potential increase in demand on services due to evictions, the delay in the COVID-19 impact and the expiry of the mortgage 'holiday'. It appreciated the work being done alongside the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Questions were asked about the European Citizens and their pre-settled and settled status and whether there was enough available accommodation to cope with homeless residents.

In response, Members were informed that the department had taken steps to inform relevant citizens, via advertisements, the Rosmini Centre, information sent to local factories and through developing information on the Council's website. Direct letting with private and social landlords had continued throughout the pandemic and a number of bids had been made to Sanctuary. Temporary

accommodation was still available in Burwell, Ely and Littleport. Attempts were always made to accommodate people near family or work or school where possible, though some people had to move to more rural areas. Those people were given continuous support, including regular visits and checking that they were getting the support they needed. It was hoped that bed-and-breakfast accommodation would not be needed.

It was resolved:

That the update in this report be noted.

32. ECDC ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - AN UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, V59 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the progress of the Council's 'Environment Plan'.

The Strategic Planning Manager reminded the Committee that the Environment Plan had been agreed in June. Appendix A attached to the report set out the targets and these were on track to being met, though some matters had progressed more than others. Paragraph 3.6 of the report set out a few highlights, such as securing a new electricity contract and replacement of street lighting. A Supplementary Planning Document would be going to the Finance & Assets Committee about Nature and Climate Change.

Responses from the Ideas Forum had been published online and a paper would be presented at the November meeting of this Committee on a Citizens Assembly. The January update report would be a discussion on interim targets and these would be incorporated in the June 2021 Action Plan. Councillors David Ambrose Smith and Julia Huffer had signed up to the Open University environment course and Members of the Committee were encouraged to do the same.

The Committee acknowledged that it was important to receive regular updates on progress and on the Ideas Forum, which had generated a lot of public interest in climate change ideas. It was looking forward to the Citizens Assembly report, as it would bring in the wider community and help build enthusiasm for the work to be done. The results of a recent survey on cycling and walking would add in to this, but when would the report be received, as the consultation ended in May? There was some danger that the Council could miss out on the County Council and Government initiatives. When would the result of the bus survey be considered by the relevant Working Party?

The Ideas Forum had also highlighted tackling idling motor vehicles, but would this be extended to other vehicles? The consequences of this affected children's ability to learn, so something similar near schools should be considered.

The Government had announced the first tranche of grant funding for home insulation, but had this Council made a bid for any of that? The scheme had made money available and there were properties in this district that would need

it. Although some ideas for renewable energy were outside the powers of this Council, was there more it could be doing to encourage energy initiatives?

In relation to transport, the Council should do better to provide more electric charging points, rather than just the two at The Hive. What plans were there to install further charging points before 2025? There was some funding available to create an infrastructure for electric vehicles.

How was the new assessment on Council decisions going to be different?

The Strategic Planning Manager responded by stating he was not aware that a bid had been made for grant insulation funding, as he thought the criteria set was not a totally open process. The Council had so far focussed on what it was doing as an organisation first, before considering wider issues to promote climate change ideas. There was a need to pick up a district-wide plan, which would be made separately and in conjunction with other organisations. There was an action point already included to increase the number of electric vehicles charging points within its own assets. The Combined Authority were already doing work across Cambridgeshire and this Council was already involved. Reports to Council and committees would include a Carbon Impact Assessment to help understand if there would be a carbon impact following Council's decisions. Service Leads had been approached to see how this was working and whether it could be improved. It would be difficult to enforce drivers to stop their vehicles idling, but this might be an initiative for a district-wide plan.

It was resolved:

That the progress made to date with delivering the Environment Plan commitments be noted.

33. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered a report, V60 previously circulated, which provided details of the financial position for services under the Operational Services Committee.

The Senior Accountant advised the Committee that this was the first quarter budget for 2020-21. So far there had been a lot of underspend, mostly due to the rolling forward of grants that had not been spent during the previous year. The forecast for the year end was an underspend on the revenue budget. Some savings had been made by not filling a customer services employee post during lockdown. The Committee was informed that this was due to people working from home, training of a new recruit being very difficult and there was not such a need during the lockdown period. Now that the Council was opening up again appointments were being taken.

It was resolved:

- (i) To note that this Committee was currently projected to end the year with a revenue underspend of £57,000, when compared to its panned budget of £5,593,903;

- (ii) To note that the Committee had a projected capital programme outturn of £3,750,436. This was an overspend of £10,000.

34. FORWARD AGENDA PLAN

The Committee received a copy of its forward agenda plan.

A question was raised about the Youth Strategy report being missed off the agenda plan. It was disappointing to see that the Youth Advisory Board had been delayed and nothing had happened since last January. When the report was finally considered it would be out-of-date, so the Board should be set up as soon as possible.

In response, the Director Operations agreed that the situation was disappointing, but a survey had been carried out, work with schools had been undertaken and the County Council had been starting to set things up when COVID-19 hit. The County Council had decided not to pursue the Youth Advisory Board during the height of the pandemic, but this Council had still continued to work on it. The County were now reviewing this and the Youth Strategy would be coming back to this Committee early next year. Although this Council was ready to go it needed to wait for the County Council and the Board.

The Committee was then informed that the County Council had to go into the schools to identify Board representatives. This had started and would go ahead. The Board would have money to commission services that it identified and which sat alongside the Youth Strategy.

The meeting concluded at 6:12pm.