

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4 (b)

Minutes of a meeting of the Operational Services Committee facilitated via the Zoom Video Conferencing System at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Monday 30th November 2020.

P R E S E N T

Cllr David Ambrose Smith (Chairman)
Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith
Cllr Sue Austen (as a Substitute)
Cllr Lis Every
Cllr Julia Huffer
Cllr Mark Inskip
Cllr John Trapp (as a Substitute)
Cllr Jo Webber
Cllr Alison Whelan (as a Substitute)

OFFICERS

Jo Brooks – Director Operations
John Hill – Managing Director, East Cambs Street Scene
James Khan – Head of Street Scene
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Anne Wareham – Senior Accountant

50. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

51. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Councillors Victoria Charlesworth, Paola Trimarco and Christine Whelan.
Councillors John Trapp, Sue Austen and Alison Whelan substituted for those Members respectively.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

53. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements.

54. EAST CAMBS STREET SCENE BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21 (REVISED)

The Committee considered a report, V118 previously circulated, which detailed the East Cambs Street Scene revised Business Plan 2020/21.

The Managing Director offered apologies for Mr Paul Remington, Chairman of Street Scene, who had been unable to attend the meeting. The revised Business Plan had been necessary due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The

overall message had been to continue services to the public through the pandemic. A tribute was paid to the Head of Street Scene and the staff for enabling this to happen, and was due to brilliant leadership.

The Head of Street Scene advised the Committee that the Company had been negatively impacted by COVID-19, meaning it had not been possible to meet many targets set. The areas affected were set out in the report. This included the intended implementation of a new trade waste service, which had been due to commence last April but the country had then gone into lockdown. It was now intended to review the possibility of this service operating next year, but was heavily dependant on the climate and demand at the time. Many commercial income streams had decreased as a result, though some losses had been offset by the increased income from bulky waste collections.

The communication and education programmes had also been hit, so the service had been unable to engage with schools. The effects of COVID had pushed the Company into trying other forms of communication, such as creating its own Facebook page to share valuable information and improve the relevant Council website pages.

As a consequence of the COVID impact, the budget had been reviewed and funds re-aligned from areas with underspends to service with overspends. The money allocated for depot improvements had been re-allocated elsewhere, as the intended work had been delayed. Information surrounding recycling credits had also been delayed, so the budget had been adjusted after receiving updated information. Overall it was expected that the Company would break even at the end of the year.

After a Member pointed out a couple of typographical errors, it was confirmed that the figure on page 5 of Appendix 2, Street Cleansing for Dec should have read 84 not 64, and on page 6 the penultimate sentence should end with 'in accordance with **the policy.**'

The Committee were interested in how successful public engagement was through social media channels, such as the Council's website and Facebook pages. The visitor figures were not to hand but would be obtained and circulated to Members. The Facebook page had 122 followers and 104 'likes'. This was an area of growth, which had been an aspiration for next year but had been brought forward. No targets had yet been set, as it was new initiative, but would be next year.

Questions were asked about additional expenditure, specifically the increase of £44K and why the Company had obtained £91K additional funding from the Council. Income had increased, so that additional funding was not needed. The Committee was being asked to agree the revised Business Plan, even though it still included the £91K figure.

It was explained that income from the Materials Recycling Facility had increased due to the lockdown period and the increase in tonnage collected. This increase had not been continued to the end of the year so the company was unsure whether this effect would continue. Although income from bulky waste collections

had increased, there had been income lost from other commercial streams. Additional spend had also occurred due to the COVID pandemic, as agency staff had been used to cover staff shortages, which had been detrimental to the budget. The additional funding obtained from the Council had been an estimated amount to cover potential shortfalls, as at the time there was no knowing how long the impact of the COVID situation would last, and was made in good faith. The situation remained changeable, but a more accurate assessment would be undertaken later and adjustments made as necessary at the end of the year. The final costs of the COVID impact were not yet known. The area was just coming out of the second lockdown into a Tier 2 situation and the impact of using agency staff was still not fully known. This was not a reason to reject the revised Business Plan.

Other Members thought that the £91K might be an underestimate of the funding that could be needed, as it was not yet the end of the pandemic, so it should not be judged at this stage. The Council had made a good decision to keep the services going, but it had come at a cost.

In response to Members' questions, it was revealed that using online platforms and Zoom meetings to deliver the schools programme had been considered. Currently it was difficult to engage with the schools due to the COVID situation, as schools were under a lot of pressure. It was hoped to be able to take this forward next year. Lots of channels were being used to communicate with the public, including using calendars and notices. Maintaining an open dialogue was proving to be a good avenue and very positive feedback had been received.

A neighbouring local authority had recently obtained an electric vehicle and the Company had hoped to work with them to go through the process of testing it. Unfortunately, it had not been possible to fully investigate its progress due to the impacts of COVID. That authority used it successfully in an urban area but it would have problems performing in a larger rural area. Currently the supply chain for these types of vehicles could not supply them to the necessary specification for such areas.

There had also been problems with staff training, as the providers from last year had not been able to provide it. All drivers had to have some training but they had struggled to complete it. It had been difficult to be sure about the requirements of the COVID lockdown over travelling and people's 'bubbles', so testing and learning had been affected. This matter was being monitored with the aim to get the training delivered as soon as practicably possible.

The previous budget had predicted a 2% profit but it had to be adjusted to account for the difficulties being faced. The Company did not have to make a profit so, as the budget was tight, it had been removed. The previous profit would have been achieved through efficiency savings on expenditure.

The revised Business Plan was recommended for approval and when it went to the vote it was declared carried.

It was resolved:

That the ECSS Business Plan 2020/21 (revised) as set out in Appendix 1 be approved.

55. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESS

A Member sought clarification why the following agenda item was an Exempt item. So, the question was put to the vote and:

It was resolved:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining item no. 7 because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the item(s) there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1, 2 and 3 of Part I Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

56. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered an Exempt report, V119 previously circulated, which updated the Committee on the 2020-21 financial year and actual expenditure incurred as at 30th September 2020 for East Cambs Street Scene.

No questions were received, so the report was noted.

It was resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5:36pm.