

Minutes of the meeting of the Commercial Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016 at 5.30pm

**P R E S E N T**

Councillor Richard Hobbs (Chairman)  
Councillor Allen Alderson  
Councillor Steve Cheetham  
Councillor Lorna Dupré  
Councillor Lavinia Edwards  
Councillor Lis Every  
Councillor Andy Pearson  
Councillor Stuart Smith

**OFFICERS**

Lewis Bage – Project & Engagement Officer  
Emma Grima – Director, Commercial & Corporate Services  
Victor Le Grand – Business Development Manager (Leisure Services)  
Janis Murfet – Democratic Services Officer

**I N A T T E N D A N C E**

Councillor Sue Austen  
Councillor Bill Hunt  
Dr Batul Dungarwalla, Chief Executive, Rural Cambs Citizens Advice  
Mrs Victoria Holden, Chairman, East Cambs Access Group  
3 members of the public attended the meeting

51. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

52. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Coralie Green, Mark Hugo and Dan Schumann.

53. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

54. **MINUTES**

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

55. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- The Chairman announced that Mrs Victoria Holden, Chairman of the East Cambs Access Group was present and would address Members regarding the Public Conveniences Review. Rather than have her speak under Public Question Time, he had asked her to speak at Agenda Item No. 8;
- The Chairman offered congratulations to the Open Spaces & Facilities Manager and his team for securing the Grounds Maintenance contract until 2020. This contract was worth over £1 million in income to the Council, and was a valuable service to Sanctuary residents;
- A leisure centre update would go to Council for the next stage in May;
- The cinema site was up and running, with the road markings having been put down.

56. **RURAL CAMBS CITIZENS ADVICE – A PRESENTATION BY DR BATUL DUNGARWALLA, CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Dr Batul Dungarwalla, Chief Executive, Rural Cambs Citizens Advice, gave a short presentation.

She commenced by giving Members some background information. Rural Cambs covered the whole of East Cambridgeshire and there had been an office in Ely for approximately 40 years. The charity itself had been around for 76 years, offering free, impartial advice and it also acted as a consumer champion. Citizens Advice was a trusted brand and organisation.

It used the experiences of the people it helped to campaign for change, and help in Ely was delivered by 3 part time staff and 37 highly trained volunteers, all of whom were very dedicated. More and more people were seeking help for a wide range of issues which included debt, housing, welfare, and immigration. Assistance had been given to 2,821 individuals, covering over 12,000 issues. Of the queries received, 80% were dealt with at the first point of contact and two out of three people would have their problems solved within six months.

Each volunteer provided £5,000 of leverage, and last year £185,000 worth of volunteer time was given back to the community. However, more volunteers were needed.

Dr Dungarwalla said she was thankful for all the funding received but it did not cover costs: it took £325,000 to fund the call centre. For every £1 given, 85p was given back to front line services.

Looking to the future, the organisation needed to balance the books and manage its money better. With regard to welfare reform, the impact of Universal Credit had yet to affect East Cambridgeshire residents, but when it did, Citizens Advice would need to help them. Consideration was being given as to how to transform the service to make it more cost effective. A number of possibilities were under discussion, such as co-locating to The Grange, offering web-chat, email services, and developing app's about advice. The aim was to deliver advice in the way that people wanted it, but it should not be forgotten that there would be clients who were digitally excluded because they did not have access to the internet for a number of reasons.

The Chairman commented that things had changed a great deal, and with technology moving on, Citizens Advice did not need to be on the High Street any more. In connection with this, he asked if this had helped to cut costs. Dr Dungarwalla replied that it had, but those who could not get online still needed support.

Councillor Pearson, having noted that a lot of the problems in this area were finance related, asked if there were immigration issues with people being exploited and having language difficulties. Dr Dungarwalla confirmed that Citizens Advice went out to factories and farms to offer assistance where needed to economic migrants and those on zero hours contracts. The services of a translator could be accessed when necessary.

There being no further comments or questions, the Chairman thanked Dr Dungarwalla for coming to the meeting. He offered congratulations to her and her colleagues and hoped that their work would continue.

## 57. **GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS**

The Committee received a report, Q215, previously circulated, from which Members were asked to note the performance and emerging issues identified by three of the voluntary organisations funded by East Cambridgeshire District Council, and to agree their funding allocations for the 2016/17 financial year.

The Project & Engagement Officer said his report covered performance for the period April to October 2015 and he would speak of each organisation in turn.

Much of the information relating to the Citizens Advice Rural Cambs office in Ely had already been presented by Dr Dungarwalla. It was noted that there had been a total of 2,926 issues presented by 1,296 East Cambridgeshire residents in the first six months of 2015/16, with the top three issues being debt, benefit advice, and employment advice. The figures reported did not reflect the thousands of clients that did not seek advice as their issues had previously been resolved by the service. The Project & Engagement Officer

reiterated that there had been £14,690 worth of housing benefit payments gains and £417,307.50 of debt negotiated for residents of the District.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambs conducted a survey during 2014/15 to determine the impact of the service on the lives of residents who had sought help. It was found that two out of every three people said their problems had been solved within six months of making contact and 78% of clients said they would not have been able to resolve their problems without the help of the service.

Referring next to Citizens Advice Newmarket, the Project & Engagement Officer said that there had been a total of 594 new issues in the first six months of 2015/16 that had arisen from 215 residents of East Cambridgeshire. These included support with welfare benefit loss of income, debt advice, support for rent and or mortgage arrears that had reached re-possession stage, and also disability related issues. Using a Treasury approved formula, it had been calculated that in 2014/15, for every £1 invested, £23.05 in benefits was recovered to individuals.

Voluntary & Community Action East Cambs (VCAEC) had training for 32 people from 8 member groups on issues including safeguarding adults and child protection. Two funding fairs had been organised for parish councils and voluntary groups to meet prospective funders and learn more about the funding opportunities available to member organisations. A workshop had also been presented at the East Cambs Parish Conference in April 2015.

It was noted that VCAEC had placed 14 volunteers into local projects and businesses, and had itself benefitted from 1,535 hours of volunteer time to help run the organisation. The Social Car scheme remained in great demand, enabling residents without access to a vehicle and/or unable to use public transport to attend medical appointments. The Helping Hands service was generally aimed at elderly residents and helped sustain people in their own homes as well as supporting the social housing sector. This service had seen a positive effect on volunteers who came from a variety of backgrounds, and the gardening element of the project had completed 104 jobs for clients who would not otherwise have been able to get the work done.

Turning next to the emerging issues, Members noted that Citizens Advice Rural Cambs had seen an increase in demand for its debt advice services. The majority of the cases were due to welfare reform, benefits sanctions, mandatory reconsiderations and delays in Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claims. The roll out of Universal Credit would impact on residents of East Cambridgeshire in April 2017, with long term benefits claimants having to manage a fund that was previously managed for them by the Department of Work & Pensions. Citizens Advice Rural Cambs also expected to see more clients who were digitally excluded because they did not have the resource to access benefits on-line, pay their bills on-line or because they did not have adequate IT literacy skills. It was aimed to provide digital support to such clients by offering a "tablet" scheme, but funding would have to be sourced for this.

Debt and welfare benefits continued to be the most frequent issues raised at the Citizens Advice Newmarket and the link between ill health and debt issues was becoming more prevalent. Approximately one third of the client

group had long term physical or mental health difficulties which created additional challenges in accessing the correct benefit support. It was noted that Universal Credit was introduced for new applicants under the age of 35 in East Cambridgeshire on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015, however, this had, to date, had a minimal impact on service. There was anxiety around the changes in Working Tax Credit, as it would mean a substantial reduction in income for some families. The statistics in Appendix A of the report showed Burwell, Cheveley and Fordham as being the main communities of concern.

The Project & Engagement Officer said that the challenge for VCAEC was improving the sustainability of the organisation. Securing grant funding was becoming more challenging and they needed to be able to plan more effectively in the medium to long term. The priority continued to be ensuring that voluntary groups and volunteers were supported within the community and that communities were helped to become more resilient. In order to achieve this, VCAEC were exploring other potential income streams to make the organisation more sustainable.

The District Council recognised that the voluntary and community sector played a crucial role in meeting a wide variety of community needs, including supporting the vulnerable, and improving community cohesion. Support was historically offered through the provision of funding linked to Service Level Agreements with the three organisations.

The District Council's financial contribution was essential to their sustainability and ability to deliver the services that supported the most vulnerable. It was therefore proposed to maintain the same level of grant funding in 2016/17 as was awarded in 2015/16, and this could be funded from existing resources in the Community & Leisure Services budget.

The Chairman reminded Members that someone from Citizens Advice Newmarket would be attending the meeting of Committee in April to give a presentation.

Councillor Dupré asked whether VCAEC's Social Car scheme was part of this District's pilot "Total Transport" scheme. The Project & Engagement Officer replied that he would have to consult the Project Manager of the organisation to check this and it was agreed that he should circulate the answer to Members before the next meeting. Whereupon,

It was resolved:

- 1) To note the latest performance information relating to Voluntary & Community Action East Cambs and the Citizens Advice organisations;
- 2) To note the emerging issues identified by the voluntary organisations;
- 3) To approve the annual grant contributions for the 2016/17 Service Level Agreements:
  - Citizens Advice Rural Cambs - £47,346.80
  - Citizens Advice Newmarket - £23,166.03
  - VCAEC - £19,928

58. **PUBLIC CONVENIENCES REVIEW**

The Committee received a report, Q216, previously circulated, from which Members were asked to consider recommendations from the Asset Development Committee held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2016.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs Victoria Holden, Chairman of the East Cambridgeshire Access Group, addressed the Committee and read from a prepared statement. A copy of the statement is attached to these minutes as Appendix 1.

The Director, (Commercial & Corporate Services) then summarised the main points of her report and asked Members to note the tabled amendment to the recommendation:

It was proposed by Councillor Allen Alderson and seconded by Councillor Lavinia Edwards:

*“Retain 2.1(iii) and (iv)*

*Amend 2.1 (i) and (ii) to read:*

*To refer back and recommend to Asset Development Committee, as a matter of urgency, specifically:*

- i) Transfer (at the value of £5.00) the freehold of the public conveniences at Carter Street, Fordham to Fordham Parish Council (subject to a reversion clause in the event of the asset ceasing to be utilised as a public convenience) and the one off payment of £9,555;*
- ii) Retain the public conveniences at Barton Road, Ely for 2016/17, subject to a contribution of £8,000 from City of Ely Council and an annual review.”*

Councillor Dupré said that on a point of procedure, the tabled paper referred to a revised “motion” and this was incorrect, because what was before Members was an amendment.

She proposed the following amendment to the amended recommendation:

*“Delete 2.1(iii) and 2.1 (iv).*

*Add new 2.2: Members instruct Officers to work with the Access Group to develop alternative proposals for Palace Green and Sacrist’s Gate that will ensure accessible toilets in the immediate vicinity of the Cathedral.”*

Her amendment was not seconded.

Councillor Dupré next raised what she considered to be a potential conflict of interest. There were Members of this Committee who served on both the District Council and the City of Ely Council, and one council was paying money to offset the costs of the other. She asked what legal advice those Members had taken in connection with this. The Chairman replied that he had not taken any advice. As a City of Ely Member, he had voted to keep

the Barton Road conveniences open and he would be content not to vote on this amendment. He did not see what legal risk there could be. Councillor Every concurred, adding that the issue was being referred back to the Asset Development Committee, so this meeting was not making a decision.

Councillor Dupré said her final point related to substance. There was an unsatisfactory position with the Access Group because they had not been consulted until after the recommendation had been made to the Asset Development Committee. Disadvantaged groups would be affected by the closure of the accessible toilet. The Access Group had highlighted 150 comments, and she herself had a petition, which contained over 500 signatures, opposing the proposed closures.

Councillor Dupré continued, saying that Ely was an international centre for visitors, but unlike other places, it did not have department stores. There would not be enough toilets if the proposal went ahead, and yet there was enough money in the Council's budget to keep them open. The Council should be providing what people wanted. She said that she would vote against the amendment because it was insufficient to meet the needs of the disabled, parents, grandparents and visitors to the City. She wished to see Sacrist's Gate and Newnham Street stay open and absolutely did not want Barton Road to close.

The Chairman reiterated that he would not vote on the proposed amendment to the recommendation, and the Committee duly returned to the motion proposed by Councillor Alderson and seconded by Councillor Edwards. When put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

Having been proposed and seconded, the substantive motion was now put to the vote and declared carried.

It was resolved:

**To refer back and recommend to Asset Development Committee, as a matter of urgency, specifically:**

- 1) To transfer (at the value of £5.00) the freehold of the public conveniences at Carter Street, Fordham to Fordham Parish Council (subject to a reversion clause in the event of the asset ceasing to be utilised as a public convenience) and the one off payment of £9,555;
- 2) To retain the public conveniences at Barton Road, Ely for 2016/17, subject to a contribution of £8,000 from City of Ely Council and an annual review;

It was further resolved:

To approve the recommendations of the Asset Development Committee (Ref: 1<sup>st</sup> February 2016, Agenda Item 6), specifically, the closure of the public conveniences at:

- Newnham Street, Ely; and
- Sacrist Gate, Ely and meet the costs of £5,000 for the surrender of the lease.

59. **SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FUNDING (LEISURE CENTRES AND SPORT FACILITIES) 2016/17**

The Committee received a report Q217, previously circulated, from which Members were asked to agree funding for the 2016/17 financial year for leisure centres and sport facilities. Table 1 set out the funding bids and recommendations.

The Business Development Manager (Leisure Services) reminded Members that Service Level Agreement (SLA) grants were originally introduced to support specific marketing or other development initiatives

In more recent years grants had tended to be absorbed into Centre revenue budgets as a fixed subsidy and with this in mind, the bidding process for the coming year sought to place more emphasis on specific projects or programmes. The aim was to encourage the Centres to plan for financial self sufficiency for day to day purposes, whilst actively supporting them in developing their business.

It was noted that the Centres had responded positively to the approach taken, and the proposals offered some real prospects of development. The recommended allocations reflected this and gave priority to such proposals where they appeared realistic and deliverable. The Business Development Manager said that one organisation had asked for some breathing space and his recommendation reflected this. However, help would still be given to ensure a more future focussed approach rather than maintaining the status quo.

The move away from a revenue approach would need “light touch” monitoring to ensure that funds were applied as intended, and a progress report would come to Committee to provide Members with an update on the expenditure committed.

Councillor Every congratulated the Business Development Officer on his approach to this issue, saying it was well thought through. Whereas two years ago the funding was just given to the Centres and they did not have to do anything for it, now they had to plan for the future. Councillor Alderson concurred, commenting that it was a very encouraging report and things were moving in the right direction.

Councillor Dupré said she wished to raise a couple of points. Firstly, she noted that the total sum of the bids amounted to less than the total of the recommendation. The Business Manager apologised, saying this was an error on his part; the sums requested exceeded the amount available. Councillor Dupré then queried the rationale for awarding only £4,900 to the Littleport Leisure Centre when their bid was for £5,000. The Business Development Manager replied that he wanted to make sure all the recommendations fitted within the budget. In the case of Littleport, he had exercised some judgement and taken the award of funding as close as possible to the sum bid, but the shortfall could be made up.



It was resolved:

To approve the annual grant contributions for the 2016/17 Service Level Agreements, as set out in Table 1 of the submitted report.

## 60. **RURAL SERVICES GRANT**

The Committee received a report, Q218, previously circulated, from which Members were asked to consider the allocation of the Rural Services Grant of £122,000 announced for 2016/17 to fund rural initiatives within the District.

The Director, Commercial & Corporate Services introduced her report by reminding Members that Full Council had tasked the Commercial Services Committee with creating a framework to enable the distribution of the Rural Services Grant. The Local Plan (2015) was used to identify the settlements that could potentially benefit from the Grant.

Appendix 1 to the report contained a schedule of information relating to individual settlements and these had been divided into three categories:

- Category 1 – no-low growth areas;
- Category 2 – low-moderate growth areas; and
- Category 3 – high growth areas.

Members attention was drawn to paragraphs 3.4.1 – 3.4.3 of the report, which listed the settlements in each category and it was noted that a number of the settlements did not have their own local council; these were detailed in paragraph 3.6.1.

It was recommended that the Grant, once received by the District Council, be split equally between each of the settlements in Categories 1 and 2. It would be distributed to the local council of each settlement, but where there was no parish or community council, the Grant would be administered by the local council identified in paragraph 3.6.1 of the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Alderson, the Director informed Members that it was anticipated the Grant would be received in April, but she would ask the Chief Financial Officer to forward the details.

Councillor Dupré said she was not seeking to oppose the proposal, but she thought that if some settlements pooled their money, they could achieve more than by using it on an individual basis. She wondered why no thought had been given to this, believing it to be an option that could bring benefits of scale. Working on a collaborative basis settlements could deliver bigger and better. The Chairman agreed and Councillor Pearson added that the smaller communities should be given this option as long as there were no cost implications for the District Council.

Councillor Every questioned whether it would be possible for settlements to pool the money because paragraph 3.9 stated that the Grant could only be spent on initiatives that benefitted the community and each local council would be required to submit an annual report to the District Council to

show how the Grant had been spent. The Chairman agreed there should be flexibility, and a collaborative approach could get the best outcome for each community. He asked that Officers discuss this with the parish and community councils.

It was resolved:

That the recommendation, as set out in paragraphs 3.7 – 3.9 of this report, be approved.

## 61. **LEISURE CENTRES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME**

The Committee received a report, Q219, previously circulated, which provided Members with an update on developments in the Authority's work with the leisure centres.

The Business Development Manager (Leisure Services) reminded Members that an Indoor Sports Facilities Needs Assessment had been completed in January 2015. Following a service review in March 2015, it was decided to switch focus and resources from general sports and health development to targeted support to the leisure centres, with a remit to work with the trusts to agree and implement service development plans.

The aim was to encourage the leisure centres to become financially self sufficient and offer value to the community. There would be focus on building capacity where it was required but it should not be forgotten that many of the organisations were led by volunteers.

Engagement was a two-way process and the pace of development would be shaped by the needs and perspectives of the different organisations. This might change over time and with people coming and going, there would be times when a particular organisation might not be so robust. In such a case, the centre would be monitored and a response formulated to meet its needs rather than taking a proscriptive approach.

The Business Development Manager said that while the focus of this report was on the work with the leisure facilities, Members should remember that they did not operate in isolation. The proposed new leisure centre in Ely would enhance the leisure facility offer to the District as a whole.

With regard to capacity building and strategic partnerships, Members noted that work in these areas was still developing and had, so far, concentrated on some of the larger sites where there were specific issues. This included Littleport Leisure Centre, the Ross Peers Sports Centre in Soham, and the Ely Outdoors Sports association. There had been engagement with local clubs and the sport network "Club Matters", and there would be opportunities to work with Mepal, Burwell and probably Bottisham.

The Chairman asked if the leisure facilities were receptive and understood what was needed to get people to use them. The Business Development Manager replied that this was very much the case; he had good working relations with all the facility managers and committees. The Chairman

wished him every success and said he looked forward to visiting the leisure centres. Whereupon,

It was resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

62. **COMMUNITY FUND GRANT SCHEME**

The Committee received a report, Q220, previously circulated, from which Members were asked to note the grants offered under delegated powers from the Community Fund grant scheme. There being no comments or questions,

It was resolved:

To note the following awards offered under Officer delegated powers:

- 1) £1,000 to the East Cambridgeshire Arts Festival Society;
- 2) £1,000 to Relate Cambridgeshire.

63. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee considered the previously circulated Commercial Services Forward Agenda Plan.

Members were asked to note that Citizens Advice Newmarket, and Voluntary & Community Action East Cambs would each give a presentation at the next meeting of Committee.

It was resolved;

That the Forward Agenda Plan be noted.

The meeting closed at 7:02pm.