

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

19 NOVEMBER 2019

Present

Councillors: Barrett
Beauchamp
Birnie (Chairman)
P Hearn
Ransley
Riddick
Rogers
Silwal (Vice-
Chairman)
Taylor
Timmis
Woolner

Officers:	Bill Buckley	Interim Assistant Director
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration
	Fiona Jump	Group Manager - Financial Services
	Katie Mogan	Corporate and Democratic Support Lead Officer
	Craig Thorpe	Group Manager - Environmental Services
	Emma Walker	Group Manager - Environmental and Community Protection

Also in Attendance:

Councillor Alan Anderson
Councillor Julie Banks
Councillor Graham Sutton

The meeting began at 7.30 am

48 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and signed.

Matters arising from minutes:

Cllr Ransley raised a question regarding the money spent at Tring leisure centre. A reply was sent but it was a copy of a press release which said that £1.8 million was

spent by DBC. Cllr Ransley asked who spent the money and where exactly did the money come from?

Cllr Birnie asked the Portfolio Holders present which officer would be best placed to answer this and it was suggested that it would be Mark Brookes. Cllr Birnie said that he would ask Mark Brookes and the reply would then be sent to the committee.

49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Hobson..

50 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

51 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

52 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN

None.

53 BUDGET MONITORING Q2

F Jump introduced the report.

£126k pressure. £32k underspend. Table 2 gives a summary of the overall position of the Authority. Table 3 gives a breakdown of how that pressure is made up.

Cllr Birnie – asked about the fuel overspend £50k He said that in 4.1 and 4.2 it explains pressure of £301k breaking down to £180k for staff, £70k for waste and £50k for the fuel, then in 4.3 – pressure of £185k is made up of £135k for maintenance and once again 50k overspend of fuel, which looks like double counting.

FJump replied that the fuel pressure should not be shown in 4.2 but that it is included in the £185k shown in 4.3. There are a series of minor pressures which add up to the figure of £51k that should be shown in 4.2. F Jump said that she could provide a breakdown and that she would send this out to the committee.

Cllr Birnie said that looking at the capital programme, he was a little concerned about The Bury and wanted to know if there were any more costs to come that have not been budgeted for?

J. Doe said that yes, there will be more costs. There was slippage this year and an asbestos survey and structural survey will be undertaken to ascertain the repair costs for the museum conversion. Even though there is an allocation in the Capital Programme for conversion works we need to understand what the repair bill will be before considering options.

Cllr Birnie asked if that meant that although the slippage is included in the current budget, there will be extra money required to identify what it is actually going to cost over and above the slippage?

J. Doe replied that although there is a provision for the project within the budget, the Council needs to make decisions about what shape the museum will take and whether any additional resources will be needed to top that provision up, but we need to understand what repairs are necessary first.

Cllr Birnie said that it may then be a question of whether we can actually afford it?

J. Doe answered that, yes, that is a further decision to be made by the Council

The report was noted.

54 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES Q2 PERFORMANCE REPORT

C Thorpe introduced the report.

Cllr Anderson said that they still intend to have a tour for the committee, once Cupid Green is in a better state and it has not been forgotten.

Cllr Timmis offered congratulations on the clothes swap success. Using page 12 of this report as an example, Cllr Timmis asked if an acronym is used please could you put what the acronym stands for, W.C. is obvious but there are quite a few others which are not. Going on to talk about the Splash Park, Cllr Timmis wanted to know if the maintenance was something that will happen every year and if so what will the cost be?

C. Thorpe replied that most of the work on the splash park is under warranty and a lot of the work is around changing mastic and doing the grass verges etc. It is not major engineering works, but rather tidying it up.

Cllr Birnie requested that the first time an acronym is used what it means should be put in brackets after it,. He observed that this applies to most officers when writing reports.

Cllr Timmis asked about the wild flower course and whether the idea was to plant up verges along roads with wild flowers.

C. Thorpe explained that they are looking at a number of different ways to manage land and flowers. Roundabouts have got wild flowers which have been well received and a report has been received on plant verges increasing biodiversity. So we may only cut verges twice a year, which will enhance wildlife habitats etc.

Cllr Timmis wanted to know if a tree that is taken out is then replaced

C. Thorpe explained that they do replace the tree where possible, but if the trees were taken down because they were unsafe they may not have been planted in the correct position. He added that we are committed to 1,000 trees being planted over the next year and at present they are identifying suitable land where they can be planted.

Cllr Beauchamp asked how the tree removal list for Councillors was sent as he doesn't recall seeing it and has been asked questions about trees being replaced so it would be useful.

C. Thorpe replied that it has been circulated to all members but he will resend

Cllr Beauchamp asked about the White Bridge project.

C. Thorpe explained that this was not under his remit.

Cllr Anderson said that he would find out who it falls under and get back to Cllr Birnie.

Cllr Woolner spoke about the teracycle recycling point in the forum and asked if there are any plans to roll it out more widely?

C. Thorpe said that he was as yet, not sure. He does not know how much of a success it has been as the colleague responsible is on holiday at present.

Cllr Hearn asked what parts of the borough has the education awareness been carried out in?

C. Thorpe replied that it has been done in Hemel Town Centre, the High Streets in both Tring and Berkhamsted and a lot of schools.

Cllr Barrett expressed concerns about weed spraying and road sweeping, judging by the amount of grass and weeds remaining after spray dates. He asked if we audit what the spraying company is doing?

C. Thorpe said that he will come back on frequency and how the contract is monitored.

Cllr Barrett added that in Bovingdon there is little evidence of road sweeping either.

Cllr Birnie suggested it may have been affected by shortage of equipment.

C. Thorpe said that that was only more recently, the small sweepers are past their sell by date and they were taken off the road as they were not cost effective to maintain.

The report was noted.

55 **ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION Q2** **PERFORMANCE REPORT**

E Walker introduced the report.

Cllr Timmis asked about percentages on page 20, but percentages of what?

E. Walker stated that the Appendix contains the actual numbers e.g.on Page 25 states the targets and 796 fly tips were reported and 80 percent of these were attended to within 3 days.

Cllr Timmis said that HCC together with DBC have issued leaflets to households about not allowing unlicensed traders to take waste, but she feels that nothing is being done about those who are doing the fly tipping and asked why that was when it is occurring in such huge numbers.

E Walker said that we do have a high number but it's comparable across Herts. She added that in terms of catching fly tippers, we do get high numbers of Fixed Penalty Notices and similar numbers of prosecutions compared with other authorities. E Walker said that it is incredibly hard to catch people and they are looking into different cameras to pilot over next few months to see if that is successful. These new cameras are relatively inexpensive and smaller they are for use predominantly in rural areas where there are more places to hide them.

Cllr Anderson told the committee that through membership of Herts Waste Partnership – a fly tipping group that does a lot of work to combat the problem, overall the the amount of fly tipping is coming down, and that needs to be recognised, although it is a very real problem. Cllr Anderson added that it is very difficult and expensive to prosecute and that there had been a prosecution of a fly tipper this quarter. He explained that the fly tipping group is lobbying government to make it easier for authorities to take effective action and he did not think it was fair to say nothing is being done.

Cllr Beauchamp commended the enforcement team for their rapid response to instances of fly tipping he has reported in Hemel town.

Cllr Beauchamp asked about the 41 accidents in Q2 shown in 2.8 and if it would it be possible to have a breakdown of the severity of these.

E Walker replied that she could circulate a breakdown and added that 2.9 shows the major accidents, the rest would be minor ones.

Cllr Birnie asked whether there had been a response regarding the three accidents reported to HSE.

E Walker explained that they don't have to respond and it is up to them if they wish to start an investigation.

Cllr Silwal asked how many cases of Hand Arm Vibration (HAV) there were.

E Walker answered that one staff member had HAV syndrome, the number of staff that could have been affected was about 80.

Cllr Anderson said that when Councillors visit Cupid Green, they can see equipment to prevent this.

Cllr Birnie asked the question - what is ECP?

E Walker responded that it is the department name of Environmental & Community Protection.

Cllr Birnie said that he did not understand the sentence in item 6.5.2.

E Walker explained that the Prevention of Damage by Pests act is an act allows us deal with rodent infestations on land and we served several notices to deal with these.

The report was noted

56 **PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION Q2 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

J Doe introduced the report

Cllr Rogers said that he believed there was a policy of holding back CIL money from being spent and asked if J Doe could expand on that.

J Doe replied that none of the CIL received has been spent, A proportion goes to Hemel and Bourne End Councillors as these are not parished areas. CIL is used to deliver infrastructure, but infrastructure is expensive. The policy is to amass enough to do something meaningful before distributing the CIL receipts. The governance procedure was approved by Cabinet. There will shortly be look at infrastructure pressures and members will be involved in this and decisions regarding how to spend the CIL in about April of next year.

Cllr Birnie asked if some of the money had already been dispensed to parishes.

J Doe said that parishes are entitled to 15% of receipts. Twice annual payments are made to parishes and non parished areas are held in ward members 'pots' for local decision making on how it is spent.

Cllr Anderson said that the committee scrutinised this process about two years ago.

Cllr Silwal said that in Grovehill they receive 25% because they have a neighbourhood plan.

Cllr Riddick asked why the figures on appeals were a dramatic turn around this quarter as previous quarters have been strong.

J Doe replied that you should not take one quarter out of context, as skewing this quarter are the three appeals against conditions which aren't a regular occurrence and officers would be monitoring closely to see if there is a recurring trend.

Cllr Birnie asked if there were any costs awarded against us?

J Doe responded that he was not aware of any.

Cllr Birnie said that he was aware DMC has a number of new councillors and that he was surprised there had been a number of appeals against conditions, as these are normally straightforward and approved by officers. He asked if perhaps more training for members would be in order.

J Doe agreed that training is always a good thing. Care must be exercised when attaching conditions. They have to be relevant and the development must actually be

unacceptable without the conditions. He said he felt it was too early to say if it was a consequence of the new committee make up because there is long lead in to appeals. Indeed, the results may actually apply to delegated decisions.

Cllr Riddick said that not having any costs against us seems like a slight victory, because if we were so wrong, we would have more awards of costs against us.

J Doe replied that you need to look at the data for the whole year as costs are not often awarded against us. We will review this on an annual basis.

Cllr Beauchamp wanted to know that if CIL was awarded to wards, how do ward councillor access funding?

J Doe explained that when setting up the system, guidance was provided to ward members for Hemel Hempstead, and Bourne End and he said that he would circulate that guidance again.

Cllr Rogers said that he had received a lot of comments from residents regarding online consultation and the difficulty of having to put in a lot of data before making a comment. He added that this could be a barrier to the number of contributions to consultations.

J Doe replied that we are encouraging people to submit comments online as it uploads direct to the system and his main concern was people who write or email in, as this is not uploaded to the webpage owing to labour constraints. He said that all comments were taken into account but that he would take that point away to discuss with the Group Manager for Development Management. J Doe explained that a new back office system was in place which had been live for a few days. This should be making it as easy as possible for people to comment online and to register a 'My Dacorum' account and to comment on the Residents Portal as well.

Cllr Birnie suggested that this is something that should go in the Dacorum Digest.

Cllr Timmis said that she had heard from Parish councils who have tried to access information and found it missing and that in two instances over the past few weeks there had been insufficient information for them to make a decision at their PC meetings. Cllr Timmis added that she also received complaints from residents finding it hard to get online to make comments. She added that if you email in you do not even know if it has been received and suggested that it was not unreasonable for planning officers to have an automatic response to emails which would acknowledge the information had been received.

Cllr Sutton said that these issues are being discussed already and work has been done to ensure the system is user friendly.

J Doe said he would take all the points away and that asked if Cllr Timmis could send details of where the information is incomplete as an application cannot be validated until all information received.

Cllr Ransley said that Tring TC rejected three plans over last few months because they were incomplete and a decision could not be made.

J Doe once again asked to be provided with all information so that he could look into this.

The report was noted

57 WATER GARDENS

Adrian Spray, who is a consultant working on the project introduced the end of project report for the water gardens and gave the presentation to members.

Cllr Timmis gave her congratulations on the project and remarked on the terrific changes that had been made. She asked what had happened to the Canada geese.

C Covington said that it was part of the management plan for site to deter geese and proactive measures, such as egg oiling and specially designed fencing have been undertaken and numbers have significantly dropped.

Cllr Beauchamp added his congratulations to the team on work. He said that it is a fantastic feature and a great asset and indeed the water was now being used by the model sail boat club.

Cllr Banks remarked on the legacy that is being left and that it is lovely to see the area being used by families.

Cllr Sutton said that it was due to the dedication of the team comprising the consultants, the DBC and Claire that we have seen massive improvement in the area and this is something to be proud of. Cllr Sutton added that there is a change in the character of the town centre where buildings that were offices are now residential and it is important to residents to have somewhere on the doorstep to visit and relax and we have achieved that.

Cllr Birnie said that he saw in the report that we had to go back to the lottery fund because of problems with the maintenance of the area, and asked that, if this was a one off grant, how would the facilities be sustained going forward.

C Covington replied that the request to the Heritage Lottery Fund was to extend funding for the Community Project officer for four months. Her role has been to support the Friends of the Water Gardens, other volunteers and community activities. Because so much time has been dedicated to these activities, there has not been enough time to support the Friends and volunteers to become more sustainable. So the four months will help deliver this and more training. She added that we will be looking to apply for external funding and corporate sponsorship to be able to continue once the HLF support has ended.

Cllr Birnie asked Cllr Sutton whether sufficient provision has been made to sustain the actual maintenance of the gardens.

Cllr Sutton replied that yes, it had been included in budgets

Cllr Beauchamp remarked that one of the original benefits of the water gardens was the individual sound of the waterfalls.

C Covington responded that the weirs are per original design and we only cleaned them, so whatever sound was there originally should still be in place.

Cllr Covington said that Hemel Movie Makers had created a series of short films which are a really good record of the project and would be of great interest the public and could perhaps be put on the website. The films were shown to the Committee.

Cllr Anderson suggested that a hobby and activity video perhaps featuring the remote control boat club would be a good idea.

C Covington replied that she could ask the film club if they would be happy to make another film.

The report was noted.

58 WORK PROGRAMME

Cllr Birnie asked if anyone wanted to add anything to the Work Programme, there were no suggestions.

The Meeting ended at 9.30 pm

