

Runnymede Borough Council

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

9 July 2020 at 6.30 pm via MS Teams

Members of the Committee Present: Councillors N King (Chairman), I Chaudhri (Vice-Chairman), M Adams, T Burton, D Clarke, M Harnden, C Howorth, A Neathey, J Olorenshaw and S Walsh.

Members of the Committee absent: None

Councillors S Dennett, J Hulley, R King, M Kusneraitis, S Lewis, I Mullens, N Prescott and S Whyte also attended the meeting

74 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 March 2020 were confirmed and signed as a correct record, to be signed when the Chairman was physically able to do so.

75 COMMUNITY SERVICES KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTER 4 AND OUTTURN 2019/2020

Item deferred to the next scheduled meeting in September 2020.

76 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTER 4, AND OUTTURN 2019/2020

Item deferred to the next scheduled meeting in September 2020.

77 PROPOSED BIKE TRACK FOR KINGS LANE OPEN SPACE

The Committee considered a proposal to provide a bike track, suitable for use by local young people, mainly from the residential area of the Forest Estate, on part of the land at Kings Lane Open Space in Englefield Green, utilising available S106 funding.

Members were advised that Kings Lane Open Space was also used by Egham Hollowegians, who leased a section of the land, and there was also a play area with facilities including a teen shelter, skate ramp and basket swing, outside of the lease where the proposed bike track would be installed, subject to Planning, Environmental and Equalities considerations, further public consultation (Covid-19 secure) and a detailed design being produced to be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

Officers confirmed that during the course of extensive consultation over a number of years, young people had identified either a skate park or bike track as the preferred facility. A quality skate park was too expensive, but there were S106 monies arising from the development of the former Brunel University Campus in Coopers Hill Lane (£12,949) and a number of other small local developments (£17,051), which were sufficient to provide a bike track at a cost of up to £30,000. Ongoing maintenance costs would be funded from existing Green Space revenue budgets.

Officers were asked to confirm the amount of Section 106 monies available for Englefield Green West from the Brunel Development at Coopers Hill.

The Committee noted the town and country planning and environmental protection implications for the proposals to develop this part of the open space would need to be fully taken into account as well as the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty and issues of access for those with mobility issues would need to be raised with the designers. Prior to any construction works taking place, assessments of the likely impact on biodiversity would be undertaken and any possible impacts avoided or mitigated wherever possible.

The Committee was fully supportive of the proposals which would demonstrate positive implications for young people by improving facilities for their health and wellbeing and agreed to seek approval from Corporate Management Committee to authorise releasing the funding of £30,000 accordingly.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the proposal to lay out a bike track as described in the report at Kings Lane Open Space, subject to planning and environmental considerations be approved; and**
- ii) Corporate Management Committee be asked to approve a capital estimate of up to a maximum of £30,000 to fund the bike track from S106 monies held by the Council**

78 PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS HAZEL CLOSE, ELMBANK AVENUE, HOLLY CLOSE, ILEX CLOSE, BLAYS LANE AND SWALLOWFIELD AND ADDLESTONE TOWN CENTRE

The Committee was asked to approve that the current Public Space Protection Orders in place in the borough which were due to expire in June 2021, be subject to a public consultation exercise and the results inform a review of the orders to determine their future operation.

Officers explained that each order had a number of prohibitions aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour and making each area covered a more pleasant and crime-free place for residents and visitors.

Members reviewed some statistical information generated by the Council and Surrey Police which appeared to suggest that the orders might not be needed in the future and that previous behaviours which had necessitated them had abated. This was supported by the low level of enforcement action that had been taken in the preceding 2 years since their introduction in 2018.

However, it was agreed that consulting the residents and other interested parties first would be prudent and then review the findings at the meeting of the Committee in November 2020. Officers confirmed that there would be an opportunity to retain and, if necessary, amend the orders should feedback demand it and the potential outcomes of a review were noted.

Some Members asked that other areas of the borough were looked at as they were aware of potential problem groups; for example in Egham Hythe. This was something that the overarching Joint Action Group could consider in liaison with Surrey Police and Environmental Health.

79 PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY UPDATE

Item deferred to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee in September 2020.

80 CHERTSEY MEADS MANAGEMENT LIAISON GROUP – MINUTES 3 MARCH 2020

Item deferred to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee in September 2020.

81 RUNNYMEDE TRAVEL INITIATIVE

The Committee considered a report on the future of the Council's discretionary Runnymede Travel Initiative (Yellow Bus Service), the main substance of which had been submitted to Corporate Management Committee on 25 June 2020. Members had deferred making a decision, pending consideration of further information they requested for the Community Services Committee to discuss, mainly around the option of providing an in-house model to replace the current contracted service, set to expire at the end of July 2020, with no option to extend. More detailed financial information had also been sought to enable Members to consider the financial implications of committing to an in-house service against the Council's current financial position, and the impact of Covid-19 thereon.

It was noted that the yellow buses were a discretionary service and Officers cautioned it was not currently financially or operationally sustainable and the current service specification was no longer realistic. This and the challenge of providing a 'Covid secure' service which met different and as yet unknown and changing requirements and which was also compliant legally and within the Council's Procurement regime was considered unfeasible and would be extremely difficult to deliver until further work had been undertaken, including more consultation with all the interested parties such as the schools, parents, staff and other partners, who it was recognised had different requirements and changing school day patterns which would inform the fleet and staffing requirements.

Officers had also given much thought to vehicle capacity of the current and any new service, what vehicles to use and how the service could be staffed sufficiently to support the whole Community Transport service. Consideration would also need to be given to the appropriate charging structure, pupil premium (which was paid by the schools), sibling discount, means testing, level of subsidy, potential funding and sponsorship sources and the support to be provided by the schools themselves. Officers sought to look at ways to enhance the service and how that could be funded.

It was appreciated that Officers had undertaken as much preparatory work that was possible in the current climate and within a limited timeframe and resources but were not yet in a position to present a final business plan or timescale for going ahead with either an in-house model, one delivered in partnership with a contractor or one of a more blended approach with a commercial operator. In the two weeks since the meeting of Corporate Management Committee in June, Officers had assessed the positives and identified weaknesses with the current service and had been in contact with two companies about the feasibility of a commercial operator model. Although discussions had been useful, there were too many unknowns for either to be able to make a tangible bid. The timeframe was key to making progress and this depended on several factors such as the procurement framework and other legal and employment related considerations. For example, if TUPE applied to the current contractor's staff as suggested it was, this could have an adverse effect on the budget. Officers had also met with the relevant Headteachers who had provided feedback suggesting that the service was valued, and they wanted it to continue.

The Committee questioned why the current contract was being terminated without an option to extend being part of its terms and conditions when first let in 2017, and that being the case why Officers had not planned for what to do earlier. They did accept that the current Corporate Head of Community Services was not responsible for that decision

having inherited the service following the restructure in 2019 and the Yellow Buses had been discussed at meetings of the Community Development Member Working Group during the latter part of 2019 and early 2020 and a report on the future of the service could not be finalised due to Covid-19 and the need to discuss further details with partner organisations. Since then the Officer had been heavily involved in the Covid-19 response for two Councils which had meant an earlier report to the Committee had not been possible.

Members were unhappy that full consultation had not taken place with the schools; and that there would be a gap in provision from the end of the current contract to the date on which a new service could be provided, subject to procurement of vehicles, additional staffing resources being recruited and the place of the yellow buses within the wider Community Transport service. The Chairman, other Members and Officers had attended meetings with the schools and parents recently and it was suggested that more surveys could be conducted and more statistical information than had been feasible to collate would assist. The Chairman took responsibility and confirmed he was happy to apologise to parents about the perceived lack of consultation. He was asked to make a statement at the next meeting of the full Council on 16 July 2020. In addition, it was suggested that it might be appropriate for the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee to review the contractual and procurement process of the current contract.

Members were all agreed they wished the service to continue and as an in-house model, despite the financial and operational risks and considerations which were explained in detail. Bringing the service in-house represented savings of approximately £65,000 but still represented a subsidy in the region of £231,892. Members were optimistic that sponsorship would be found, and income could be generated to make an in-house service viable. Various permutations of this and alternative options were discussed with suggestions made regarding piloting a new service for a set period, leasing vehicles while demand was assessed and how to maintain the provision without a gap which they felt was important given the current reliance on the service. There was an emphasis placed on the safe carriage of school children, assisting those most in need and being environmentally friendly by reducing school run traffic. The other environmental implications were noted. Members also felt that as the service had been running for nearly 20 years it was regarded as one which could not be discontinued, even in the current financial position the Council was in where each child was currently being heavily subsidised.

During the discussion of this report, motions to discontinue the service or defer a decision until later in the year were lost, as was an amended motion to bring forward provision of the service in-house.

After some debate regarding the logistics of an interim service and other options about timescale, delivery and cost of leasing and purchase or a combination of the two, the Committee re-confirmed its wish to proceed with the in-house service model proposed, noting an estimated increase from 399.5 hours to approximately 781 hours per week to run a future service. Officers outlined the potential to review driver salaries ahead of recruitment, and Human Resources would support this by submitting a salary benchmarking report to Corporate Management Committee.

The Committee agreed that a special meeting of the Committee should be convened before the end of July to discuss the feasibility, details, cost and practicality of interim arrangements. Officers would need to also seek advice regarding procurement of vehicles in the short and longer term and a possible extension of the current contract. In respect of interim arrangements and potential service operators, Officers were asked to discuss this with the Chairman and other Councillors beforehand.

The Committee considered that the financial and operational risks as discussed were worth taking to provide a valued service to the Community for which there was apparent demand and support. It therefore:-

RESOLVED that –

the Council proceeds with the in-house service model proposed and made the following recommendation to Corporate Management Committee accordingly:

- i) A capital estimate in the sum of £315,000 be approved for the purchase of the additional 7 buses and the committee establish the means for financing it;**
- ii) A capital estimate in the sum of £135,000 be approved for the replacement of existing Community Transport vehicles to be taken from the vehicle replacement budget held within the current capital programme; and**
- iii) The commencement date for the new service will be January 2021, subject to the fleet and employees required to deliver the service being available and subject to the ability to provide the service to comply with any relevant Government requirements in respect of the Covid-19 pandemic that may apply at that time.**

In voting for the original recommendation, rather than a combination of the alternative motions discussed, Councillor Neathey asked for it to be noted that his vote was made on the basis that the special meeting to discuss interim arrangements would take place.

[Note: subsequently, owing to the restricted timeframe, the Chairman agreed that Community Services Committee Members would be invited to the meeting of Corporate Management Committee on 30 July 2020 where the follow up report would be considered.]

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 9.17pm)