

Runnymede Borough CouncilCORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE25 February 2021 at 7.30 p.m. via MS Teams

Members of the Committee present: Councillors N Prescott (Chairman), J Gracey (Vice-Chairman), A Alderson, D Cotty, L Gillham, M Heath, C Howorth, J Hulley, R King, M Maddox, D Whyte and M Willingale.

Members of the Committee absent: None.

Councillors T Burton, D Clarke, E Gill, M Kusneraitis, S Lewis, I Mullens, J Olorenshaw, P Snow and J Sohi also attended.

448 NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Group mentioned below had notified the Chief Executive of its wish that the change listed below be made to the membership of the Committee. The change was for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting and thereafter the Councillor removed would be reappointed.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Remove From Membership</u>	<u>Appoint Instead</u>
Conservative	Councillor I Chaudhri	Councillor C Howorth

The Chief Executive had given effect to this request in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

449 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record subject to the deletion of the words "including the Minimum Revenue Provision" at page 6, line 5 and at page 7, lines 7 and 8 of the agenda. As the meeting was being held remotely using MS Teams, the Chairman would sign these minutes when this was physically possible.

450 ADOPTION OF REVISED EQUALITY POLICY

The Committee considered a proposed revised Equality Policy, as set out at Appendix 'B' to the agenda. The Equality Act 2010 required public authorities to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty introduced by the Act. In order to meet the obligations imposed by the Act the Council required a clear policy which set out what its various obligations were and identified behaviour which was unacceptable in the modern world.

During 2018 issues had arisen in respect of acts of antisemitism. This had resulted in the Jewish Leadership Council writing to local authorities inviting them to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. Members had asked officers to consider such a course of action. Officers advised that to adopt such a definition in isolation would not achieve a meaningful outcome and could be counter productive because other groups would question why the Council was not adopting definitions of other types of unacceptable behaviour. Therefore, officers had used this issue as an opportunity to review the Council's existing Equality Policy with a view to incorporating the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism into a revised Equality Policy. Regrettably, the lack of resources at the Council and the impact of Covid-19 had meant this revision had taken longer than officers would have wished.

Whilst in its role as an employer and a public sector body the Council led by example, it was not an enforcement authority and could not undertake prosecution against discrimination which occurred in a community setting. The Council could, however, seek to promote good standards of behaviour by promoting a culture in its community that equalities mattered and that discrimination would not be tolerated. An Equality Policy was not a solution on its own to these important issues but rather acted as a foundation to be built on through other Council policies and procedures and acted as a guide to the local community as to the standards to which they should aim. It was noted that contractors were required to abide by all of the Council's policies including the Equality Policy.

The revised Equality Policy set out the context for the creation of the Policy, a clear set of definitions of behaviour which were not acceptable, the obligations the Council had as a public sector body and the need to consider equality matters in service delivery and the role that the Council played in promoting equality in the community it served. The revised Equality Policy would underpin the Council's compliance with its various legal obligations and enable it to discharge its role in promoting equalities in the wider community.

The Committee commended the revised Equality Policy which had been the subject of inter party Member Working Party discussion and considered that it should be supported by all Councillors regardless of their political affiliations. A suggestion was made by a Member that the section of the Policy that defined antisemitic unacceptable behaviour might possibly be expanded to include certain types of criticism of the citizens of the state of Israel. It was noted that the Policy would be reviewed periodically and it was agreed that when the next review took place consideration should be given to whether the definition of antisemitism in the Policy should be expanded and, if so, in what way.

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL ON 4 MARCH 2021 that -

the revised Equality Policy, as reported, be adopted.

451 ANNUAL PAY POLICY STATEMENT – 2021/2022

The Committee considered the Pay Policy Statement for 2021/22, as set out in Appendix 'C' to the agenda. This statement was required by the Localism Act 2011. The Statement had to set out the Council's policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce and had to be published on the Council's website by 31 March 2021. Pay Policy Statements had to be prepared each financial year and had to be approved by Full Council. The Pay Policy Statement for 2021/22 would therefore be approved by Full Council on 4 March 2021.

Pay Policy Statements were intended to ensure that policies in relation to the pay and reward of the most senior staff were set out clearly in the context of the pay of the wider workforce and these relationships were set out as a series of ratios. The ratio between the lowest and highest paid salary was 1:7.85, a reduction from last year's ratio of 1:8.87. The ratio between the mean average earnings across the organisation and the pay of the highest paid employee currently employed was 1:4.98 and the ratio between the median earnings across the organisation and the pay of the highest paid employee was 1:5.17 – both of those ratios showed a small reduction from last year. There had been a steady improvement in these mean and median ratios over the last few years.

The current full-time salary ranges for Chief Officer and Deputy Chief Officer posts as defined under the Localism Act 2011 were noted. All of these posts were directly employed and the contract for one fixed term post would end on 31 March 2021. The Council's overall policies on pay had not altered since last year's Pay Policy Statement. The Statement was written for the financial year ahead but the pay data was based on the current year.

At present the jobs market was an employer's market due to the pandemic but following lockdown this situation should improve. In Surrey, there had traditionally been a competitive

market particularly in areas of skills shortage. Filling certain types of professional roles remained a problem, although this had lessened at present as a result of coronavirus. The Council had adopted a different method for sourcing agency staff which should result in future savings for the Council (i.e. a whole authority Vendor Neutral contract).

The introduction of the National Living Wage on 1 April 2016 had had the effect of eroding away Scale 1 and Scale 2 of the pay structure. The National Living Wage for those 25 and over would rise from £8.72 per hour to £8.91 per hour from 6 April 2021 and would then apply to those aged 23 and above instead of those aged 25 and above. This meant that the minimum annual salary in Grade 3 would rise from £16,284 per annum to £17,189 per annum for those of 23 years of age and over substantially reducing the range within Scale 3. The effect of this rise would be to increase the base annual salary of 9 permanent and 17 casual employees to the new level of the National Living Wage.

Some Members of the Committee considered that the Council should be aiming to pay the National Living Wage to all Council employees who were aged under 23 years on the grounds that the Council should not be discriminating against staff on the grounds of their age. It was noted that the Council had an increasing number of staff aged under 23 years as well as a more ethnically diverse workforce than previously. It also employed a number of apprentices at better rates of pay than other local authorities. The question of potential remodelling of the bottom end of the Council's pay structure had been one that Members had identified previously but had not yet been considered by the Human Resources Member Working Party as a result of other priorities. It was agreed that the Human Resources Member Working Party would receive a report on the cost of extending the National Living Wage pay rates to all Council employees aged under 23 years. The Working Party would then report to a future meeting of the Corporate Management Committee and it would be for the Working Party to decide whether it wished to make a recommendation that action be taken or a recommendation that the report be noted. It was agreed that the report to the Working Party would be circulated also to all Members of the Corporate Management Committee.

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL ON 4 MARCH 2021 that –

the Pay Policy Statement 2021/22, as reported, be approved.

(Councillor R King required that his abstention be recorded).

452 CORPORATE PROPERTY STRATEGIC MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Corporate Property Strategic Maintenance Programme for the next five years. A detailed survey of the corporate property stock had been undertaken and a budget had been prepared for a five year programme of works. The works had been divided into two categories, planned and reactive maintenance.

The Committee noted the provision made in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the programme and the budget for the maintenance programme over the next five years, based on the recent condition survey of the properties and historical information. As a result of the Council's current financial position, it had become necessary for the Council to reduce expenditure wherever possible. Officers had therefore reviewed the provision made in the MTFS and removed some non-essential maintenance work such as decorations and floor covering replacement but had left in all statutory health and safety servicing. The Committee noted the savings which would be achieved by these changes. The Committee was therefore recommended to approve Table 3 at paragraph 3.3 of the report.

The Committee considered that the report should have included more detail on the environmental impact of the proposed changes to the budget and that there should have been Member involvement in the proposed changes so that they could review the reasons for the reductions. It was agreed that all future Corporate Property Strategic Maintenance

Programme reports should include environmental implications and should be considered by the Service Chairs Member Working Party before they were submitted to the Corporate Management Committee.

In response to various questions by Members, officers advised that cost benefit analysis had been undertaken and that the timing of decoration had been altered to produce monetary savings. The Committee noted that, where possible, carbon deducting technologies would be used. There had been some compromise on the appearance of buildings which were not used by the public but not on those that were for public use. By combining power within service units, savings on contract values had been made which would not be detrimental to reactive maintenance budgets over the five year period. Members considered that environmental information in the report should have included issues such as whether LED lighting or photovoltaic technologies would be used or the effect of the changes on carbon emissions.

A Motion was moved proposing that this item be deferred in order for further detail to be included in the report before any decision was made. This Motion was lost as a majority of Members of the Committee considered that the verbal responses given at the meeting by officers in reply to Member questions gave them sufficient information to make a decision.

Accordingly the Committee

RESOLVED that -

the 5 year strategic maintenance programme of work and associated budgets, as set out in Table 3 at paragraph 3.3 of the report, be approved.

Councillor R King requested a named vote on the above decision and the voting was as follows: -

For (9) Councillors Prescott, J Gracey, Alderson, Cotty, Heath, Howorth, Hulley, Maddox and Willingale.

Against (2) Councillors R King and D Whyte

Abstention (1) Councillor Gillham

453 QUARTER 3 2020/21- PROJECT PORTFOLIO REPORTING

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee noted a report providing them with a progress update on the delivery of the Council's Project Portfolio up until the third quarter of 2020/21. The Committee noted project updates for the thirteen grade A and seven grade B projects ranging from the initiation to execution stages, the key project achievements over the third quarter of 2020/21 and the project execution delays highlighted and the corrective actions in place to address them. The Committee also noted a Project Portfolio Dashboard which provided a summary of the projects. The Committee commended the clarity of the report.

Regarding the project on the Employee Performance Review Implementation, it was noted that Covid-19 was still preventing some performance reviews from taking place. However, this project was closed because it related to the roll out of the training sessions which had been delivered. It was noted that as a new Corporate Head of Housing had been appointed, the Chief Executive or the Strategic Projects Manager would have a corporate role for Housing projects but the Project Sponsor for Housing projects would now be the new Corporate Head of Housing. The Committee noted that, regarding the Runnymede Pleasure Ground Automatic Number Plate Recognition project, the system had been tested

and was scheduled to go live at the end of February 2021. It was agreed that an update on the Barbara Clark House project would be provided to a Member and to all Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED that –

- i) project updates for the thirteen grade A and seven grade B projects, ranging through the initiation to execution stages, be noted;**
- ii) key project achievements over the third quarter of 2020 be noted; and**
- iii) the project execution delays highlighted and the corrective actions in place to address them be noted.**

454 GROUND'S MAINTENANCE OPTIONS APPRAISAL

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee noted work undertaken by officers working collectively across a number of services who had looked at a wide range of options for the future provision of grounds maintenance work for the Council. The Committee considered two recommendations which had been supported by the Environment and Sustainability Committee at its meeting on 14 January 2021.

It was also agreed that officers should explore further the possibility of entering into a profit sharing partnership with a company as reported, prior to any final recommendation on an option being made. The aim would be to select an environmentally friendly and cost effective option, gain economies of scale and deliver savings by consolidating services currently being delivered by various contractors and in-house staff.

In order to allow sufficient time to explore opportunities identified and/or deliver the procurement or legal process required it was agreed that the current arrangements with Spelthorne Borough Council for highways verge maintenance and the present arrangements for weed control be extended for a further period until 31 March 2022.

RESOLVED that -

- i) officers be authorised to enter into due diligence discussion in relation to the potential option of a profit – sharing partnership with the company as reported to deliver Grounds Maintenance Plus activity and be authorised to engage further with that company in pursuance of that objective prior to any decision being recommended for Member approval; and**
- ii) current arrangements with Spelthorne Borough Council for highways verge maintenance and the present arrangements for weed control be extended for a further period until 31 March 2022.**

455 ADDLESTONE ONE - LETTINGS

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee noted that officers had been negotiating with two businesses with a view to them becoming tenants of two commercial units in the Addlestone One development. One of these units was in Market Street and the other unit was in The Lane. Agreement had been reached on proposed Heads of Terms for both of the units. The financial due diligence undertaken and details of the proposed tenants were noted. The Committee approved the Heads of Terms for both lettings and commended officers for bringing forward these lettings in the difficult market conditions caused by Covid.

It was clarified that the white boxed unit in the Addlestone One development was Unit 10. It was agreed that it would be appropriate to delegate authority to officers to approve agreements for the white boxed unit in accordance with resolution iii) below. Officers had sought delegated authority to let the remaining other unlet commercial units in the Addlestone One development. The Committee agreed that it would approve the lettings for all of the other unlet commercial Units in the Addlestone One development, apart from the white boxed unit.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the agreed Heads of Terms for a letting of the Unit as reported in The Lane, Addlestone Town Centre, be approved;**
- ii) the agreed Heads of Terms for a letting of the Unit as reported in Market Street, Addlestone Town Centre, be approved; and**
- iii) delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive, in consultation with the Corporate Head of Assets and Regeneration, in respect of Unit 10, the white boxed Unit, to approve market style agreements to individual occupiers or to an operator of the Unit as a whole.**

456 PROPOSED PROCUREMENT OF WATER AND WASTEWATER PROVIDER

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee considered a report proposing to instigate a tender process to deliver water and wastewater services to premises and sites owned and operated by the Council and approved this course of action.

In April 2017 the Government had begun the deregulation of the water industry, giving businesses the right to choose their own water provider rather than being restricted to buying water services from their regional company. Initial market uncertainty had now been resolved and the market had settled enough for the Council to establish new contractual arrangements for its water and wastewater service. In tendering for the contract, the Council would be seeking a number of benefits which would include value for money and a contribution towards the Council's carbon emissions target. Award criteria would be established which would place a priority on the efficiency of customer service.

RESOLVED that -

the commencement of a competitive tender process for the procurement of a water and wastewater provider across the Council's operational estate, be approved.

457 LEGAL SERVICES BUDGET ADJUSTMENT FOR 2020/21 AND 2021/22

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee considered a report recommending the approval of the release of the budgetary provision identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy for legal services staffing costs.

As a result of the Council's programme of regeneration across Runnymede, there had been a growth in the Council commercial property portfolio which in turn had increased the demand for commercial property and contractual legal advice and assistance. The Committee had concluded that the most cost effective way in which to meet this demand was to fund the existing interim locum cover within the Legal Services Team until the end of the financial year 2020/21.

Authority was now sought to retain the current Legal Services locums until March 2022 as the pandemic had not yet concluded and in view of the workload anticipated for the next financial year and the difficulty in obtaining support of the required quality. The locums had been employed to fill existing but vacant posts in the Team following unsuccessful attempts to recruit to vacant posts. Provision had been made in the budget approved by Council on 9 February 2021 to cover increased legal services costs up to the end of March 2022 but formal Committee approval was required to extend the current Legal Services locum arrangements until the end of the next financial year.

The Committee commended the excellent service provided by Legal Services and approved the increased legal services costs for 2021/22. It was noted that a complete review of the Legal Services Team would be undertaken to establish what Legal service was required by the Council going forward in order to meet its corporate priorities.

RESOLVED that -

the release of the budgetary provision identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy for legal services staffing costs be approved.

458 ACHIEVE LIFESTYLE GRANT FACILITY – FURTHER RELEASE OF FUNDS

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee considered the proposed release of the final tranche of grant to Achieve Lifestyle from the previously approved provision, following further enforced closedown of their facilities.

At its Extraordinary Meeting on 28 September 2020, Full Council had been informed that due to the coronavirus lockdown, Achieve Lifestyle had not been able to open for four months which had adversely affected their income. Full Council had agreed to provide a grant facility to Achieve Lifestyle to ensure that they could continue in business. Full Council had agreed to release an initial £150,000 from this grant facility and had also agreed that the release of any further tranches of the grant facility would be subject to the approval of the Corporate Management Committee. At its meeting on 17 December 2020, the Committee had agreed to release a further tranche of funding of £150,000 following the second national lockdown and subsequent tiering restrictions in November and December.

Since then, a further national lockdown meant that Achieve Lifestyle's operations had closed for a further two months crucially at their most profitable time of the year.

The Committee noted the updated financial position of Achieve Lifestyle following the November 2020 to February 2021 coronavirus restrictions. The Committee noted that Achieve Lifestyle's membership income had plummeted during the Covid crisis and that even during the limited periods when Achieve Lifestyle had been able to operate, they could only cater for a small number of users and therefore received reduced income because of Covid restrictions. At a time when income levels had fallen, necessary full operating maintenance costs were still being incurred to keep the facilities functioning and although staff had been furloughed during lockdown periods, Achieve Lifestyle still had to pay a percentage of staffing costs.

Officers were currently working with Achieve Lifestyle to ascertain what their financial position would be coming out of the pandemic and after the pandemic. A number of Members were concerned that the financial information currently available was limited. It was noted that Council officers were assisting Achieve Lifestyle in providing more financial information and would be considering whether further assistance could be provided. The Partnership Board which consisted of Members and officers would be having a meeting with Achieve Lifestyle in the near future to discuss details of Achieve Lifestyle's evolving business plan going forward. However, it was noted that the Council could not direct Achieve Lifestyle in the way that Achieve Lifestyle operated.

The Government had given the Council a general grant to offset additional Covid expenses. As the grant facility to Achieve Lifestyle had been set up to assist Achieve Lifestyle through the Covid crisis this was a legitimate expense against the Government's grant. The Government had also instigated a specific National Leisure Recovery Fund for leisure facilities covering the period between 1 December 2020 and 31 March 2021. The Government had not as yet provided details of any further funding beyond 31 March 2021. The Council had submitted an application for a sum of money from this National Leisure Recovery Fund. Therefore, if this application was partly or wholly successful, the grant facility would be funded from money received from this Fund plus the Covid general grant. If this application was unsuccessful, the grant facility would be funded wholly from the Covid general grant.

It was noted that officers were working to attempt to establish the social value provided by Achieve Lifestyle, as agreed at the Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council on 28 September 2020, and that it was anticipated that this would be made available to Members in the near future.

The Committee noted that the Council had the legal power to provide a grant facility to Achieve Lifestyle and that the financial support was in accordance with the Government and Local Government Association advice on support measures from Councils to leisure providers to mitigate the impact of Covid. The grant facility was purely to offset the losses incurred by Achieve Lifestyle during the pandemic. It was not a loan facility, nor was it intended to offset any losses or debts incurred by Achieve Lifestyle before the pandemic.

The Committee agreed to release the remaining tranche of £200,000 from the grant facility in view of Achieve Lifestyle's financial position and so that Achieve Lifestyle could remain in business, essential operating maintenance costs could be met and the Council's investment in Egham Orbit Centre could be protected.

The Committee also noted the immediate need for grant funding by Achieve Lifestyle and agreed to resolve that the decision to release the final tranche of funding be not called-in. This course of action had been agreed by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee.

The Committee indicated that further information on the correlation between income and membership and forecasts of income linked to membership would be helpful in considering what further financial assistance might be required going forward. It was agreed that a report be submitted to the Committee on the various options open to the Council for the future provision of leisure facilities in Runnymede.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the release of the remaining sum of £200,000 from the previously approved grant facility to Achieve Lifestyle be approved, in order to ensure that the staff are paid and the facilities remain in an operational state coming out of the coronavirus pandemic; and**
- ii) in accordance with Standing Order 27.8 b) and with the agreement of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee, no call-in of this decision will be effective, as the interests of the Council and the Borough would be prejudiced by delay in implementing the decision at i) above, in view of the immediate need for grant funding by Achieve Lifestyle.**

459 RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR APPOINTMENT OF NEW ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (RESOURCES)

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee noted the notice of resignation received from one of the Council's Chief Officers, the current Assistant Chief Executive (Resources), Mr Peter McKenzie, which would take effect on 31 May 2021, and considered arrangements for the appointment of a successor. Members of the Committee expressed their appreciation of the work undertaken for the Council by Mr McKenzie. The post of Assistant Chief Executive (Resources) administered Runnymede's financial affairs under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Council's current Personnel Policies and Standing Orders required, in the case of a Chief Officer appointment, that the Committee appoint an Appointments Sub-Committee. The Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to appoint an appropriate Appointments Sub-Committee with the authorisations set out in resolution ii) below. The Committee agreed that the Sub-Committee should consist of seven Members drawn from the membership of the Committee, consisting of 4 Conservative Group Members and one Member from each of the Runnymede Independent Residents', the Labour and Co-operative and the Liberal Democrat Group Members of the Council. This satisfied the political balance requirements.

It was agreed that the Sub-Committee would make a recommendation as to the candidate to be offered the position which would be reported to the Corporate Management Committee. Following the assessment process and interviews, a meeting of the Council would consider the recommendation for appointment to the post of Assistant Chief Executive (Resources). A specialist recruitment agency had been instructed to carry out an executive search for a replacement Assistant Chief Executive (Resources). Details of the appointment process to be followed were noted.

RESOLVED that –

- i) an Appointments Sub-Committee be constituted comprising seven Members;**
- ii) the Appointments Sub-Committee conduct interviews of suitable candidates after a shortlist has been prepared by appropriate senior staff, specialist recruitment and selection consultancy services and/or other appropriate persons who shall act as advisers to the Sub-Committee;**
- iii) the Appointments Sub-Committee make a recommendation as to the candidate to be offered the position;**
- iv) the Sub-Committee’s decision be reported to the Corporate Management Committee; and**
- v) following the assessment process and interviews, a meeting of the Council considers the recommendations for appointment to the post of Assistant Chief Executive (Resources).**

460 CIVIC CENTRE PAYMENT KIOSK

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Chairman had agreed that this item be admitted to the Agenda as an item of urgent business for the special circumstances and urgency as set out below:-

Special Circumstances

It had been intended that this item would be submitted to the 25 March 2021 meeting of the Committee. However, as the suppliers were seeking to install and implement the kiosk in early March 2021, a decision needed to be made urgently.

Urgency

To enable a decision to be taken without delay to prevent the Council incurring unnecessary future costs by installing a new payment kiosk facility in the Civic Centre as alternative payment methods were available to the Council’s customers and there was evidence that customers were now using those alternative methods.

The Committee considered a report recommending that the Civic Centre payment kiosk facility be removed on a permanent basis.

At its meeting on 19 September 2019, the Committee had agreed to purchase a new replacement payment kiosk for the Civic Centre reception. At that time the Committee had decided that, as demand for this type of payment facility had reduced, one kiosk should be retained as an alternative payment mechanism for customers rather than two kiosks that had been available previously. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic and technical issues, it had not yet been possible to install the new payment kiosk. As the Civic Centre had been closed to the public for most of the last year and as there had been a general national shift to payment by means other than cash and cheque, officers had undertaken a further review of the need for the kiosk.

The Committee noted the various ways in which payments for Council services could be made. Officers had undertaken an analysis of identifiable accounts that had regularly used the kiosks to see how those customers had been paying their accounts during the pandemic. All identifiable users had found alternative methods of payment. Other customers had used the kiosks to pay sundry debts or to reduce the excess cash that they had. There had been no significant increase in sundry debt levels and customers would have found alternative means of reducing their excess cash. The Council's new Income Management System had negated the need for the kiosk by Council staff. Moving customers away from payment for Council Services by cash or cheque had financial benefits as collecting payments by these methods had become increasingly more expensive. Not installing the kiosk would mean that the Council would save one-off implementation costs and various other ongoing ancillary costs.

Although the numbers of people paying cash had reduced, the Committee was concerned that those customers should not be disadvantaged and discriminated against through the kiosk not being installed. The Committee noted that those customers would not be disadvantaged as there were numerous Post Offices and Pay Points in the borough where customers could pay in cash. It was agreed that officers would add details of the Post Offices and Pay Points in the borough where the public could pay in cash to the webpage on the Council's website which advised the public of the various ways in which they could pay for Council services. No other equality issues arose out of the removal of the kiosk. All payment types being removed by not installing the kiosk could be accessed via different means in different formats. Accordingly the Committee agreed that the kiosk be removed on a permanent basis.

(The meeting ended at 10.22 p.m.)

Chairman