

# STRATEGIC OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## MINUTES

THURSDAY 3 JANUARY 2019  
GIPPING ROOM - GRAFTON HOUSE  
6.00 PM

**Present:** Councillors C Allen, G Chisholm, S Gage, S Handley, A Leeder, C Shaw, E Harsant (Chair), S Ion, R Pope, O Holmes and S Connelly (Substitute)

**45. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors M Goonan, C Smart and J Parry.

**46. Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 November 2018**

46.1 The Chief Executive confirmed that he had received a response from Suffolk County Council about the concerns of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's Task & Finish Group – Road Repairs which would be circulated to the Task and Finish Group.

**Resolved:**

**that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2018, be signed as a true record.**

**47. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

**48. To Confirm or Vary the Order of Business**

**Resolved:**

**that the Order of Business be as printed on the agenda.**

## **49. Highways England - Orwell Bridge Update**

- 49.1 James Jackson, Emergency Planning Manager of Highways England presented an update on the Orwell Bridge to the Committee. Also in attendance were Councillor P Smart as the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Transport, Sandy Martin MP for Ipswich and Michael Newsham, Integrated Transport Officer.
- 49.2 Mr Jackson confirmed that an unprecedented detailed aerodynamics study using computer modelling was being undertaken by the University College of London to determine how wind thresholds affected vehicle types at different speeds and directions of travel. The detailed 9 month study would be completed over the summer and would indicate whether the segregation of high sided vehicles off the A14 would be possible while allowing cars to continue during high winds or whether current closure thresholds could be decreased. The study would also indicate whether wind barriers could be installed on the bridge and how high sided traffic could rejoin the diversion route should it fail to adhere to any request to divert off of the main carriageway.
- 49.3 Work continued with Suffolk Highways to look at signage and alternative diversion routes and a proposal was being put forward to upgrade all the signs. Councillors raised concerns about the impact of air quality when vehicles were diverted through urban areas and the closures of the laybys before and after the bridge for the use of vehicles which had broken down. Mr Jackson said that since the laybys had been coned off, the Police had received a decrease in calls about people intending to harm themselves. Removable barriers at these locations would not be advantageous as vehicles would need to stop on the carriageway in order to open a barrier. Councillor Allen suggested that there be safety advice for members of the public should they break down when crossing the bridge and Mr Jackson said that there were huge areas of carriageway with no refuge bays on the road network but a message could be put on the website to advise what to do in an emergency.
- 49.4 Councillor Leeder asked when any information or criteria to be taken into consideration would be available from the work with Suffolk County Council on diversion routes or a general update on how improved publicity had helped. Mr Jackson said that the number of closures had increased but positive feedback had been received from the Police and social media. Many channels of information were now being used to publicise potential closures due to weather warnings and any further ideas of channels for communication would be appreciated.
- 49.5 Councillor Holmes made reference to the considerable noise and pollution disturbances both in and around Ipswich as HGV's travel the diversion routes through the town and villages especially at night time. Mr Jackson said that the guidelines suggest that where possible dual carriageways were used as alternative routes, away from schools and hospitals but there were not many options although future work could include looking at upgrading the standard of the diversion routes e.g. repairing potholes or loose drains. As the condition of

the diversion route roads were the responsibility of SCC Highways any noise issues should be reported through the Highways reporting tool.

- 49.6 Mr Jackson said that Highways England's own study about segregating high-sided vehicles, which already happened on the Severn Crossing (between Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire), would require a lot of investment in terms of signs, should it be proposed. Once the results of the UCL study were released it would be known if this would be feasible. Also, the road contractor Kier had undertaken a draft study into whether the bridge was strong enough to be retrofitted with structural add-ons such as wind reflectors and suicide avoidance measures, in respect of additional weight loading.
- 49.7 Councillor P Smart, in his capacity as Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport asked what the percentage of traffic using the bridge daily was and Mr Jackson said that around 60,000 vehicles used the bridge daily with around 20% of that being freight, HGV's or vans, either for or from the Port of Felixstowe or local or regional deliveries. Whether any restriction on bridge use in high winds would be by height or weight restriction was unknown and Mr Jackson offered to come back to the Committee when the results of the UCL study were known. The Chair thanked Mr Jackson for his attendance at the meeting and also to Councillor P Smart, Sandy Martin MP and Mr Newsham for their attendance.

## **50. Budget Proposals Presentation**

- 50.1 John Chance, Head of Finance and Revenues presented the budget update and also present were Councillor M Cook, as Portfolio Holder for Resources and Councillor D Ellesmere, the Leader of IBC.
- 50.2 The Budget Working Group had been considering the budget on a regular basis since October 2018, the Local Government Finance Settlement had been published on 13 December 2018 and the budget would be set in line with the 'Building a Better Ipswich' corporate objectives. Another year had been added to the Medium Term Financial Position (MTFP) set in February 2018 and the base gap after four years was now set at £0.997m, after £5.450m of savings had been delivered and the amount of usable reserves as at February 2018 had been £5.259m of which most would be used. It was confirmed that this would be the final year of the 4 year settlement, the Negative Revenue Support Grant (RSG) had been removed, the Council Tax cap had been maintained at 3% and Ipswich had not been successful in gaining another year of the Business Rate pilot. The New Homes Bonus income had been reduced by a ¼, from 6 to 4 years only.
- 50.3 The year 2022/23 had been added to the General Fund 'Gap' position and the reserves to achieve a balance were now at £4.160m. The assumptions used to identify the gap for 2018/19 had remained and the same assumptions would be used to project the 2022/23 gap position. Since February 2018 further costs had arisen and the total budget gap position before action was £10.453m. The return from financing the arms-length companies, in particular IB Assets, had been £468k this year, the Big Ticket savings programme had been on target

and would continue in future years to underpin the additional financial pressures, which left the current reserves figure at £9.103m. With a minimum working balance of £2m, the useable reserve would reduce to £7.103m and the timetable culminating in the 27 February 2019 Council meeting was considered.

- 50.4 Councillor Ellesmere commented on the overall background in relation to the future renewal of waste contracts, the ongoing reduction to the New Homes Bonus, and key investments made in the Town Centre. During the next year there would be the possibility of using the funding reserved for a Heritage Lottery Funding bid for the Museum and for Broomhill Pool and the Public Realm consultation would commence shortly. The overall message was that the budget position remained challenging; but IBC were in a reasonable position to make significant investments in the town while protecting frontline services.
- 50.5 Councillor M Cook said how long term planning was important, some reserves would be used but this enabled IBC to see how things evolved and the use of reserves would had enable more long term stability.
- 50.6 Councillor Pope asked how much of the reserves would be used and Councillor Ellesmere said that the plan was to use the reserves allowed over a 5 year period while keeping the minimum balance of £2m allowed within the reserves and that every year since 2011 it had been predicted that no reserves would remain but without cutting services there was a current reserves balance. Mr Chance said that it was an assumption that there would be an underspend of £1.4m in Quarter 2 so the starting figure would be lower. In response to a question from Councillor Pope about the Council Tax increase for 2019/20, Councillor Ellesmere said that no final decision had been made yet, the maximum possible increase would be 3%, the same as last year, even though last year's increase had only been 2%. He pointed out that even if the increase for 2019/20 were to be the maximum of 3% this would still be less than any increase expected by the Police & Crime Commissioner's Office or Suffolk County Council.
- 50.7 Councillor Holmes asked about whether the Business Rate pilot allowance had been used for the Public Realm Strategy and Councillor Ellesmere said that the contributions had been used to fund several projects and the Chief Executive said that the £2m had supported last year's budget, a bid had been submitted for this year but unfortunately IBC had not been successful.
- 50.8 Councillor Gage asked whether any cuts would be made to grants for the voluntary sector and the Chief Executive said that there was no intent to reduce grants to the voluntary sector, many bids were now made for 3 year funding deals to allow the voluntary sector a greater degree of sustainability. Councillor M Cook said that any ideas on how to make future savings and maintain growth would be welcomed. The Chair thanked Mr Chance and Councillors M Cook and D Ellesmere for their attendance.

## 51. OS/18/20 Annual Portfolio Holder Update - Resources

- 51.1 Councillor M Cook presented the Portfolio Holder update for Resources and the Chief Executive explained that a document had been tabled which gave more information about LI 266 - *% of contracts on the corporate contract register that had exceeded their contract term*, which had been requested at the last meeting.
- 51.2 Councillor M Cook explained that the Resources Portfolio comprised of the following areas; Finance, Human Resources, Legal, Audit, IT and Corporate Services.
- 51.3 A review of Senior Officers pay had now been completed and there was now a full complement of Officers at Heads of Service and Operations Managers levels. The introduction of a new HR system was ongoing, the People Strategy had been approved by Council and a 'Time to Change' employee pledge, committed to break down the stigma around mental health in the workplace, had been initiated. Over 400 employees had taken up the offer to be vaccinated against flu in an effort to reduce the number of days lost to sickness absence.
- 51.4 Following the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) in May, 98% of the Council's staff had now undertaken the mandatory training and the Constitution was in the process of being updated in March 2019. A number of Council properties had been recovered and Audit had uncovered a number of tenancy fraud cases. Due to the requirement of tighter timescales, Officers and the External Auditors had produced the Statement of Accounts earlier than usual, also budget monitoring reporting had been improved and there continued to be a small underspend on all budgets.
- 51.5 The Agresso system was in the process of being updated with the use of additional modules to ensure that final reporting was based on the system. Contactless payments were becoming more widely available and the use of agile technology had taken the place of desktops or larger laptops with the resulting reduction of the floor space used.
- 51.6 A more unified communications phone system was being considered which would be more efficient and resilient. IT server upgrades had taken place and changes to the provision of the Regent website would result in more resilience during busy booking times. E-mails which had previously be forwarded on to personal e-mail addresses would all now be hosted on the Council servers.
- 51.7 In relation to the document tabled, Councillor M Cook said that following a restructure to the procurement section, work had been undertaken to develop a more comprehensive corporate contract register and a large number of small contracts had been added to the register. Following this, a new framework had been developed which was now being managed better. Mr Chance said that the register had been neglected, many new contracts had now been registered and it was hoped that a specific officer would be designated to the contracts register. It would be updated monthly and a plan was being put in place to

build more robust on-going management. In response to a question from Councillor Pope, Councillor M Cook confirmed that the target of 7.5 would not differ next year and the small contracts which had not been on the contract register had been being managed, they had just not been entered on the corporate contract register.

51.8 In relation to the 'Time to Change' pledge, Councillor Pope asked whether a room had been made available should staff need to talk privately to someone and the Chief Executive said that a room had been made available on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and there had been a huge response to attend the 'Employees Working Well' training.

51.9 Councillor Chisholm asked if there had been an increase in muscular skeletal problems since agile working had been introduced and Councillor M Cook said that this had been raised at the Joint Consultative Group and it had been agreed to bear this in mind. In respect of the adoption of new technology, the Council were always working towards more powerful communications and process automation. The Chair thanked Councillor M Cook for his Portfolio Holder update and Mr Chance for his input.

## **52. Task & Finish Group Update - G.P. Hubs**

52.1 Councillor Gage, the appointed Chair of the Task & Finish Group, gave an update about the scoping meeting of the Task & Finish Group – GP Hubs, held to research the subject. It had been agreed that further information needed to be sought from outside organisations, patients and residents, prior to any full debate being held which had previously been programmed for the 31 January 2019, Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

52.2 Focussing on the outcomes of the Proposal Form it was agreed that a number of questions needed to be asked of the Clinical Commissioning Group, the GP Federation, Suffolk County Council, NHS Estates, Suffolk Primary Care, residents and patients.

52.3 Given the complexity of the subject it had been agreed to put together a directory of the existing GP Services available and to hold an additional meeting with invited representatives to provide detailed information on where and when the 5 hubs would happen, how they would be funded, how they would provide the same range of care and what would happen to the existing GP practises which were currently run as independent businesses. What existing social care hubs delivered would also be considered to better inform the Committee of the GP hub model options available. A full debate on the subject would therefore be delayed until the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 4 July 2019 and updates on progress given at meetings prior to this.

## **53. OS/18/21 Work Programme 2019/20 - No Proposal Forms Received**

53.1 As the consideration of the GP Hubs had been delayed until the 4 July 2019 meeting, to allow for further information to be sought, it was agreed that if no call-in was received from Executive held on 8 January 2019, the next meeting

would be cancelled. Therefore the next meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would be held on the 28 February 2019.

**Resolved:**

**that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, with the above amendment, attached at Appendix 1 to report Ref No: OS/18/21, be agreed.**

The meeting closed at 7.40 pm

**Chair**