

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

THURSDAY 9 JULY 2020
VIRTUAL MEETING
6.00 PM

Present: Councillors C Allen, S Gage, J Gibbs, T Grant, S Handley, D Heaps, C Shaw, C Smart, J Smith, E Harsant, R Pope, T Lockington and K Cracknell (Substitute)

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maguire and Councillor Cracknell attended as substitute.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Councillor Grant raised a query with regards to the discussion held on Outside Bodies at the previous meeting and it was agreed that this would be considered further outside of the meeting.

It was RESOLVED:

that the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2020 be signed as a true record.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

It was RESOLVED:

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

5. Highways England Update on the Orwell Bridge

- 5.1. Mr Simon Amor, Head of Planning and Development at Highways England, provided an update to the committee regarding the progress made since the presentation of the Wind Survey at the meeting held on 30 January 2020. The design of the scheme to install speed limits for high winds had progressed with support from both the Police and Local MP's and a stakeholder event had been held in Ipswich on 5 March 2020.
- 5.2. With regards to the current situation around Covid-19, fortunately this had not impacted the progress made on the design of the scheme and it was anticipated that a statutory order would be published within the upcoming weeks setting out the plans for the lower speed limit. Although it was unlikely that any would be received, there would be opportunity for objections at this stage.
- 5.3. As the University of London had been closed during this time the wind tunnel work was slightly delayed however, it was expected that this would resume shortly with approximately four weeks work required. The intention to install the scheme before the end of the year remained and overall, there had been good progress since January.
- 5.4. In response to a question, it was confirmed that both the freight industry and port of Felixstowe had been supportive of the proposals however, it was noted that further discussion would need to take place with the freight industry regarding the pedestrianisation of the town centre and what effect this could have.
- 5.5. It was anticipated that with regards to congestion on the bridge, following the evidence gathered from smart motorways, lowering the speed limit would have a positive impact and help aid traffic flow. Regular discussion continued to take place with Suffolk County Council with regards to diversion routes within the town should the bridge be closed however, options were limited and the traditional routes remained in place. Alternative routes could always be suggested by Councillors for further consideration.
- 5.6. Mr Amor confirmed that electronic signs had been implemented on the motorway network as far back as the M6/M1 to provide advanced warning of bridge closures (or potential closures). It was noted that more signs within Suffolk could be considered further in the future.
- 5.7. Mr Amor confirmed that new speed cameras would be implemented as part of the enforcement of the lower speed limit and Police had been supportive of this.
- 5.8. The Chair thanked Mr Amor for his update and it was agreed that Mr Amor be invited to attend a future meeting later in the year to provide a further update.

6. OS/20/01 Annual Portfolio Holder Update - Town Centre

- 6.1. Councillor Barber, Portfolio Holder for the Town Centre, provided her annual update and confirmed that the Town Centre portfolio held responsibility for the following areas:
- Customer Services
 - Carparks Operations
 - Parking Enforcement
 - Tourist Information Centre
 - Regent Theatre / Town Hall / Corn Exchange
 - Events Team
 - Markets
 - Shopmobility
- 6.2. Combining the service areas into one portfolio had enabled an improved focus on the way the areas worked together and how they positively impacted Ipswich residents and improved the experience of the town centre and services provided.
- 6.3. Councillor Barber thanked IBC Officers for their work throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and highlighted the work of the Customer Service Centre for their co-ordination of the “Home but not Alone” service, where 2201 calls and 1625 forms from residents had been received between 26 March and 30 June 2020.
- 6.4. It was confirmed that as a result of Covid-19, it would be difficult to predict how areas of the portfolio would perform in the short and long term future. Where working practices had changed, these would be reviewed so that what had been successful could be used to improve the portfolio’s performance as the year progressed.
- 6.5. Councillor Pope asked if there had been any investigation into the impact which the potential closure of the Tourist Information Centre could have on tourism in Ipswich. Councillor Barber reminded the meeting that any decision on the Tourist Information Centre would be made by Executive at the meeting on 14 July but advised that the income generated by the Tourist Information Centre had been declining for a number of years.
- 6.6. Councillor Pope advised that several residents had noted their concerns about the closure of the Tourist Information Centre as this was viewed as a community hub within Ipswich. It was confirmed that there were a number of venues which could be booked through IBC including rooms available at the Town Hall.
- 6.7. Councillor Pope asked what other initiatives were in place which could encourage visitors into Ipswich. Councillor Barber advised that Ipswich Central, and Visit Suffolk worked to promote Ipswich as a destination. Once in Ipswich, Tourists could find information at Christchurch Mansion and Ipswich Museum.

- 6.8. Councillor C Smart asked if a review would be held on the effectiveness of parking for blue badge holders after complaints had been received following the traffic measures implemented around Upper Brook Street. Councillor Barber advised that this would be Suffolk County Councils' responsibility and that they had been made aware of the issues. Councillor Barber confirmed that any issues regarding disabled parking in IBC Carparks would be investigated.
- 6.9. Councillor Lockington asked what the vision for the market was post Covid-19. Councillor Barber reported that investigation into other local markets had taken place to consider what changes could be made in Ipswich and how the utilisation of the market space available could be improved. Discussion had also taken place with Ipswich Central around how first-time market holders could be encouraged to use spaces available and regular discussions continued to take place with stall holders/food traders with regards to when trading would be resumed.
- 6.10. Councillor Lockington asked how much modelling and signposting for alternatives to the Tourist Information Centre had been undertaken. Councillor Barber reiterated that a decision had not been made but explained that this area would be examined further and noted that other forms of tourist information were provided by Ipswich Borough Council and that work would continue to consider how visitors could be encouraged to Ipswich.
- 6.11. Councillor Gage noted the excellent event attendance figures detailed in the report and asked if work would be undertaken to consider how information could be enhanced online with regards to what was available in the town. Councillor Barber reported that improvements to the information provided through the events programme was always under consideration.
- 6.12. The Chair thanked Councillor Barber and Officers for their attendance.

7. Medium Term Financial Plan Update

- 7.1. Councillor Martin Cook, Portfolio Holder for Revenues, provided an update regarding the proposed Medium-Term Financial Plan and confirmed that prior to COVID-19, the Council had predicted an underspend on the general fund for 19/20. However, following the outbreak in March, the financial position had moved adversely by £307,000, with the final position on the general fund showing an overspend of £108,000.
- 7.2. Councillor Cook advised that taking into account both the overspend and planned reserves, approximately £6.8m remained in the general fund for the four year plan period. As the Council relied on the income it generated itself, it had been one of the most negatively affected with regards to loss of income from areas such as Leisure and Theatres, as well as likely losing Council Tax and Business Rates revenue. This was anticipated to continue beyond the current financial year and after any hardship relief had been withdrawn. The financial impact to the Council each month was currently running at £1.5m, which was an unprecedented situation for all.

- 7.3. Councillor Cook detailed some of the main pressures on the Council which included costs to tackle rough sleeping and support provided to people who had been “shielding”. There had also been additional costs with regards to ICT and network upgrades to help support home working and PPE provided to staff in front line roles. With regards to lost income, this had predominately been from the sports & leisure services and car parks.
- 7.4. The Government had provided £1.4m in support to the Council so far and it was anticipated that a further £2.4m would be provided before the end of the financial year. It was noted that action had to be considered now to ensure that the council reserves would not be exhausted before the next MTFP was set in February 2021.
- 7.5. Councillor Cook concluded that the emergency budget plan would accelerate the use of reserves for the remainder of the year, allow reductions to the capital programme and reschedule works into later years, enlarge the Big Ticket Savings programme with larger targets, and undertake some service cuts. It was noted that due to a number of uncertainties, it was possible that further revisions to the MTFP would be required before February 2021.
- 7.6. Councillor Pope asked if the MTFP had been based on the assumption that lost income would not be covered by the Government and if all decisions had been based on these financial assumptions. Councillor Cook advised that the final decision would be made at Council later this month and explained that assumptions had to be made as the severity of the financial impact meant that savings needed to be made as soon as possible. With regards to Government support and the letter attached as appendix 6 to the report, the Council had still received no details on how much it would receive or how the allocations would be calculated. Should more support be received from the Government than expected, the Council would consider reducing the unidentified savings.
- 7.7. Councillor Harsant asked whether, if more support was provided by the Government, the suggested closures (such as the TIC) would still go ahead. Councillor Cook confirmed that the situation would be kept under review and advised that services continued to be considered to ensure they delivered what was needed for the town and in a cost-effective way.
- 7.8. Councillor Gage asked whether it was anticipated that the Government would revise the way funding was allocated for the next tranche of funding. Mr Williams, Chief Executive, noted that it was unlikely that the formula for funding would be changed and advised that there were still various unknowns with regards to further financial support and the timescales for this. Councillor Cook advised that Local Authorities completed a DELTA report each month which advised the Government of the impact on each Council in terms of loss of income and expenditure, and it was hoped that this may be used when allocating further funding.
- 7.9. Councillor Lockington asked if the towns fund money could be used to help the current economic problems. Mr Williams advised that this was capital funding which could only be spent following certain criteria. The Local Enterprise

Partnership had received an allocation of £32.1m to be spent by March 2022 where there was potential to bid for capital money however, the majority of this predated COVID-19.

7.10. The Chair thanked Councillor Cook and Officers for their attendance at the meeting.

8. OS/20/02 Work Programme 2020/21

8.1. Councillor Harsant reported that a discussion had taken place with Councillors Gage and Lockington to discuss the work of the committee during this time and it was suggested that a review of the Council's performance in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic be held, which was fully supported by the Chief Executive.

8.2. It was also suggested that the two outstanding Task and Finish Groups be closed however, should Commercial Waste in the Town Centre and Household Waste Collection become priorities again, a new proposal form could be submitted.

8.3. It was proposed that representatives from the CCG and ESNEFT be invited to the September meeting to discuss the proposed withdrawal of some orthopaedic services at Ipswich Hospital.

RESOLVED:

that the Work Programme 2020/21 be agreed.

The meeting closed at 7.16 pm

Chair