

SOUTH EAST AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES

WEDNESDAY 3RD JUNE 2020

VIRTUAL MEETING

7.00 PM

Present: Gainsborough Ward Councillors: S Connelly, M Cook and S Handley
Holywells Ward Councillors: E Harsant and J Parry
Priory Heath Ward Councillors: S Barber, D Maguire and L Richardson
SCC Councillors: K Clements and B Quinton

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Studd and County Councillor Gaylard.

2. Unconfirmed Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved:

that the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2020 be signed as a true record.

3. To Confirm or Vary the Order of Business

Resolved:

that the Order of Business be confirmed as printed on the Agenda.

4. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Barber, being the spouse of a Suffolk County Council (SCC) employee, declared an interest in the SCC update within Agenda Item 6.

5. Residents Question and Answer Session

5.1. The Chair reported that 2 questions had been received from local residents.

- 5.2. Question 1: Vehicles have been parking on the green at Clapgate Lane and I have previously raised this with Suffolk County Council, but they were not able to prevent it because there wasn't a relevant byelaw. Is there anything that can be done to stop vehicles parking on the green?

This area was highways land and a traffic regulation order would be the most appropriate way to restrict parking on this land as it would allow for the simplest enforcement through the issue of Penalty Charge Notices by Civil Enforcement Officers. There was also an option to make the area subject to a byelaw, but this could only be enforced by prosecution at the Magistrates' Court. Ipswich Borough Council Officers would discuss with Suffolk Highways whether a traffic regulation order could be applied to the land.

- 5.3. Question 2: What steps are being taken to ensure that local residents have easy access to up-to-date information presented in a readily digestible form during the current Coronavirus crisis and in the period of recovery from the crisis?

The Government has issued lots of advice and guidance that has been available from a variety of sources, such as daily briefings, the Government website, news and in adverts. Suffolk County Council has also provided information, often via the Director of Public Health.

Ipswich Borough Council has been issuing a weekly statement every Friday morning, setting out its response to the crisis and, over the last few weeks, its plans for recovery. This information has been available from a link prominently displayed at the top of the Council's website. The media has been highlighting different elements of the weekly statements and the Leader of the Council has been interviewed about a number of aspects of these statements.

Initial plans have been launched, in partnership with the Police, Suffolk County Council and Ipswich Central, for the reopening of the Town Centre as and when more shops were able to open, most likely from 15 June. The main elements of those plans were profiled in the local media, for instance, the temporary closure of Upper Brook Street to vehicles between 10:30 and 16:30. Additionally, the 'Home but not Alone' phonenumber was set up in early April and a leaflet about this service was delivered to every household in Suffolk to let all residents know who to call if support was needed, and there have been over 100 calls per week to this service over the last couple of months.

6. Updates from Ipswich Borough Council and Other Public Sector Organisations

- 6.1 The Chair invited Inspector Soraya Francis of the Ipswich East Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) to provide an update on policing priorities.
- 6.2 Inspector Francis reported that there had been an increase in burglaries from outbuildings and commercial properties. There had also been an increase in drug dealing intelligence, often as a result of the public reporting Coronavirus related offences. Additional resource was consequently allocated to target 'cuckoo' addresses, where the premises of vulnerable people have been taken over by drug dealers, resulting in a conviction being secured, which was now waiting to go to court. Three burglars had also been prosecuted for theft from

- commercial buildings earlier in the year.
- 6.3 There had been some changes to shift patterns for the SNT due to some Officers shielding due to the Coronavirus. Priorities were being considered for Ipswich East, Felixstowe and Woodbridge for when the pandemic restrictions start to be lifted.
 - 6.4 The Chair invited County Councillor Paul West, Cabinet member for Ipswich, to provide an update on behalf of Suffolk County Council (SCC).
 - 6.5 Councillor West reported that Family Support Practitioners were still working with young people, with those at high risk being seen on a face-to-face basis whilst observing social distancing, and those at a lesser risk being contacted through a variety of means, such as WhatsApp, text messaging and other social media platforms. Despite the current restrictions, work was continuing in partnership with the Police, Social Care and the Probation Service, and the Diversion Programme was still accepting referrals from parents and organisations working with young people.
 - 6.6 Suffolk Libraries have announced that branches would be reopening from 6 July 2020 in accordance with social distancing guidelines and plans on how to achieve this would be announced over the next few weeks. The SCC facility at Murrayside would remain closed for now, but SCC were planning how to safely reopen this facility in the future.
 - 6.7 Temporary road closures had been announced in the Press, for example Upper Brook Street, which had been implemented at short notice under emergency powers in order to make it easier for cyclists and pedestrians to get about whilst observing social distancing. The relevant SCC Councillors were consulted in relation the 3 temporary road closures and were in support of the proposals.
 - 6.8 Changes to SCC services as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic were listed on the SCC website: www.suffolk.gov.uk.
 - 6.9 Councillor Parry commented on the high mortality rate for Ipswich in comparison to other towns in the region, such as Norwich and Cambridge, and asked whether this had been analysed. Councillor West reported that he had highlighted this issue, but it was too early to draw any conclusion. However, he had asked whether deaths at Ipswich Hospital were being attributed to Ipswich or to wherever the person normally resided, and he confirmed that it was the latter.
 - 6.10 Councillor Barber asked when SCC's main office would be re-opened to allow face-to-face meetings with Officers. Councillor West reported that plans were being progressed for the re-opening of Endeavour House bearing in mind the 2 metres social distancing requirement. Capacity was currently reduced by over half for those Officers needing to work in the office; Officers who were able to work from home would continue to do so. There was no date set for re-opening the building and any future plans would need to follow Government guidance; regular face-to-face

- meetings would only take place once the guidance was to encourage people to return to their regular workplace.
- 6.11 Councillor Barber asked about the SCC Pension Fund forecast that had been mentioned in the news.
Councillor West commented that in his view, bearing in mind how the financial markets had dropped over the past few months, the SCC Pension Fund forecast was not as bad as it could have been, and added that he would request further information from the Pension Fund Officer.
- 6.12 Councillor Connelly asked whether there were a lot of vulnerable young people no longer being seen since the school closures and asked if social care practitioners were still engaging with them and the schools.
Councillor West reported that, despite the restrictions in place, a dialogue was being maintained with vulnerable young people and school teachers were working hard to provide education via different methods.
Councillor Connelly added that whilst teachers were engaging with the majority of schoolchildren, through media such as Google Classroom, he was concerned about the smaller number of individuals that were not being engaged.
- 6.13 The Chair invited Russell Williams, Chief Executive, to provide an update on behalf of Ipswich Borough Council (IBC).
- 6.14 Mr Williams commented that it had been a challenging time for many, with some services busier than usual providing support to vulnerable people and businesses with the help of redeployed resource, and other services, such as Gainsborough Sports Centre, being closed for the past few months.
- 6.15 Some services were now being restored, such as brown bin collections, which were now in their fourth week and after initial collections that were nearly triple in volume, were now back to normal levels. Some of the Council-operated public toilets had re-opened, including those located by the kiosk in Holywells Park, with the Cleansing Team on site to clean facilities during the day.
Grafton House occupancy had been reduced from approximately 500 people down to 30 people to enable social distancing. There were no current plans to increase occupancy, but some external development works had recommenced, such as refitting Council housing voids.
- 6.16 Throughout the pandemic, the Council had been providing support to Families in Need (FIND), based in Gainsborough, with the distribution of food parcels.
- 6.17 Councillor Barber acknowledged the hard work done by Council Officers and requested that her thanks be passed on; within her Portfolio, many Officers had been redeployed to support the Customer Service Centre and the 'Home but not Alone' phonenumber. Councillor Barber asked how services would be managed moving forward.
Mr Williams commented that he was proud of the amount of good work done by hundreds of people across the organisation. The closing of services was relatively easy in terms of decision making as it was in accordance with

Government guidelines; the challenge over the next few months would be how to restart services safely and manage expectations. Parks Officers had been advising the public on what was permitted, but this was becoming more difficult. Sports centres would remain closed, but there could be other ways of providing a service moving forward. There were financial implications for both the Council and the country as a whole in light of increased spending and loss of income; to date, the Government had provided £1.4million to IBC, but that only covered the financial shortfall in April. Councillor Martin Cook would be taking the lead on addressing the financial challenges for the Council so that it would be in a sustainable position moving forward, and both IBC and SCC would continue to lobby the Government for support.

- 6.18 Councillor Harsant also thanked Officers of the Council for all their hard work in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Mr Williams reported that Officers had appreciated the letter of support from the Mayor and the 3 Group Leaders thanking them for their contribution and added that he would reiterate this message in his next update to Officers.

- 6.19 Councillor Harsant asked what action would be taken in relation to the Tolly Cobbold brewery building, which despite being secured, was now falling into disrepair.

Mr Williams reported that the brewery was not owned by the Council and had always been in private ownership. Discussions had been held with the current owner, both before and after the recent fire, and the security of the site had been improved. Planning Officers had been working with the owner to advise on the works required to secure the site and make the building weathertight. However, with large holes in the roof of a 5-floor building that was in close proximity to a working port, it would not be easy or cheap to carry out these remedial works. Unfortunately, the Council had very limited powers in what it could request to be done to the building.

Inspector Francis commented that a large derelict building could attract anti-social behaviour and added that she would provide some additional early evening patrols in this area.

7. SEAC/20/01 Area Committee Grants and Financial Update

- 7.1. Ian Blofield, Head of Housing and Community Services, reported that at the start of the meeting the total available budget was £6,341.70, which was £500 lower than set out in the report as £500 had been allocated from the 2019/20 Making a Difference budget, with the agreement of ward Councillors in Priory Heath and Gainsborough, for the Gainsborough Voices Fruit and Veg Boxes project.

- 7.2. Mr Blofield highlighted that the Committee was asked to allow Officers to vary the funding guidelines to allow Area Committee funds to be made available to help deal with the Coronavirus pandemic, but all spending would continue to be approved by the Area Committee.

Resolved:

- i) that the financial statement in Appendix 1 of the report and its subsequent update be noted;**
- ii) that authority be delegated to the Head of Housing and Community Services, in consultation with the Head of Governance, to take all necessary steps to:**
 - advertise the availability of Area Committee Grants to support communities in recovering from the Coronavirus outbreak;**
 - enable the consideration of applications in relation to this scheme at the September meeting of this Area Committee;**
- iii) to allocate £500 per ward, a total of £1,500, from the South East Area Committee budget to establish a Making a Difference (MAD) budget for 2020/21;**
- iv) to allocate £300 from the South East Area Committee budget for costs associated with advertising and potential future venue hire for 2020/21.**

Reasons:

- i) To provide clear and transparent details of the amount of funds available to the Area Committee;
- ii) To enable Area Committee funding to be used to support communities in recovering from the Coronavirus pandemic;
- iii) To allow the Area Committee to devolve up to 10% of its annual budget to support small scale community initiatives;
- iv) To facilitate the good running of the Area Committee.

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm

Chair