

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

THURSDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2018
GIPPING ROOM - GRAFTON HOUSE
6.00 PM

Present: Councillors C Allen, G Chisholm, A Leeder, J Parry, C Shaw, C Smart, E Harsant, R Pope, O Holmes, S Connelly (Substitute) and I Fisher (Substitute)

20. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Gage, M Goonan, S Handley and S Ion.

21. Unconfirmed Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 August 2018

Resolved:

that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2018, be signed as a true record.

22. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

23. To Confirm or Vary the Order of Business

Resolved:

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

24. OS/18/09 Write-Offs of Bad Debts 1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018

24.1 John Chance, Head of Finance and Revenues presented this item and Councillor M Cook attended in his capacity of Portfolio Holder for Resources. In response to the question as to why this report was considered by the

Committee annually, the Chief Executive explained that it was good practice for the Committee to note the delegation of write-offs by the Head of Finance and Revenues and the Portfolio Holder for Resources prior to the report being submitted to Executive.

- 24.2 Councillor Holmes expressed concern about problems encountered with any business rate avoidance scheme and asked whether enough was being done to identify and deal with the problem as soon as it occurred. Councillor M Cook said that this was a problem experienced by all Councils and new legislation would be the only way to ensure the problem did not occur. The Chief Executive said that bankruptcy and liquidation cases presented a number of challenges to the Council, Executive reports had upheld transparency in recording cases and although he had written letters to those responsible, changes at a National level were required.
- 24.3 Councillor Leeder asked whether the Shared Revenues Partnership could make any changes to procedures to make people pay business rates on time. The Head of Finance and Revenues said he was confident that the Partnership rigorously chased every case and the top 20 debtors of each of the 3 Authorities (IBC and Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils) were considered by the Shared Revenues Partnership Joint Committee at every meeting. The write-offs remained consistent at below 1% of the total collected. Suffolk County Council had funded a scheme to look at those receiving a single person discount for Council Tax and this had proved effective.
- 24.4 Councillor Fisher asked whether the 5,210 cases represented an increase in cases of Council Tax write-offs and the Officer said that in terms of demographic, Ipswich had a very transient population and the implementation of Universal Credit could see numbers increase further. All would be done to chase debt through the procedures available and Councillor M Cook said that the write-off cases for Council Tax represented a low amount for each debt considering the total value. The Chair thanked Councillor M Cook and the Head of Finance and Revenues for their attendance.

25. OS/18/10 Task & Finish Group - Taxi Services - Notes

- 25.1 Councillor Pope presented the notes of the Task & Finish Group for Taxi Services and thanked the Officers for their attendance at the Task & Finish Group. Clare Lovell, Operations Manager for Public Protection was in attendance.
- 25.2 Councillor Pope explained that a Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy was in the process of being implemented by 1 April 2019 and this would address many of the concerns in the proposal form which had been written by a former Councillor.
- 25.3 Councillor Fisher explained that the proposal form had been submitted as a result of a taxi supplier taking a booking then transferring it to a different

company. This had concerned the user however, both Councillor Pope and the Officer confirmed that this practice often happened in an effort to ensure customer needs were met, but usually the customer had advance warning of this occurring.

- 25.4 Councillor C Smart asked what provision would be made for a vision impaired customer with a dog and the Officer said that in the case of a refusal to travel by a Hackney Carriage or Private Hire driver, enforcement through the Licensing Committee could ensue.
- 25.5 The Chief Executive said that he would raise the matter, in support of a Suffolk Standard for taxi drivers, with the Leader of the Council, the Chair of the Licensing & Regulatory Committee and Councillor Pope.

26. OS/18/11 Annual Portfolio Holder Update - Culture, Leisure and Corporate Support

- 26.1 Councillor Rudkin, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Corporate Support presented her annual update and James Fairclough, Head of Culture & Environment was in attendance.
- 26.2 Councillor Pope commended the Portfolio Holder that the social media presence numbers had increased and the Portfolio Holder said that it was useful to know the successful channels which were now being used to promote engagement and that booklets were being picked up less and less.
- 26.3 Councillor Pope asked how the target for *LI074 - Event Programme Attendances (number)* had been incorrectly set and the Officer said that there had been no reduction in the number of visitors it had been the way of recording the numbers which needed to be improved. Visitors to the Tourist Information Centre, and the Corn Exchange were included in the recording as were the Town Hall (including the café) but due to the Corn Hill refurbishment it was expected that the Town Hall numbers would be reduced.
- 26.4 Councillor Holmes asked whether the Culture & Leisure Working Group still met and the Portfolio Holder said that a future date would be set for a Working Group meeting at the Regent Theatre. She expressed concern about there being no consistent commitment to attend the Group which would enable a better understanding, especially around budget setting. Councillor Holmes asked if there was a set pattern of regular meetings and the Portfolio Holder said that there was but there was no consistency of attendance of members. The meetings tended to be themed and to take place at different venues in Ipswich e.g. the Tourist Information Centre.
- 26.5 Councillor Fisher asked whether more shows would be programmed to be booked during the coming year? The Portfolio Holder said that future attendance figures would be extrapolated, after the Cornhill had reopened. Councillor Harsant said that the chairs in the Grand Hall were very uncomfortable and the Chief Executive said that he had not realised that the figures included non-payers. A graduation ceremony had not taken place this

year due to the refurbishments but he was sure numbers would increase next year due to certain events programmed to take place.

- 26.6 Discussion took place about the possible overprovision of gym providers in Ipswich and the Officer gave comparative statistics quoting the number of gym providers against the town inhabitant figures in both Norwich and Ipswich. The sustainability of facilities and whether membership payments were a disadvantage as opposed to a pay and go system. The Portfolio Holder suggested that this could be the subject of a future Task & Finish Group.
- 26.7 Councillor Pope asked whether personal trainers using the parks and recreation spaces in Ipswich would require insurance? The Officer said that a group activity would require insurance however, if the person being trained was an individual this would be more difficult in a public open space.
- 26.8 Councillor Holmes asked about the lease of St Stephens Church in which the Tourist Information Centre was held and the Chief Executive said that IBC were the freehold owner and the lease would be up for renewal within the next couple of years. The Portfolio Holder said that a meeting of the Working Group had been held at the Tourist Information Centre in St Stevens Church although it was no longer being used as a church at the moment. Discussion took place about whether the Tourist Information Centre would be better placed elsewhere in the town. The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and the Officer for their attendance.

27. OS/18/12 Work Programme 2018/19

Resolved:

that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, attached at Appendix 1 to report Ref No: OS/18/12, be agreed.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm

Chair