

## THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL

**At a meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held virtually remotely on Monday, 25 January 2021 from 7.30 - 8.36 pm**

**Present:** Councillors Sarah Nelmes, Councillor Matthew Bedford,

Stephen Cox, Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Paula Hiscocks, Chris Lloyd, Reena Ranger, Andrew Scarth, Roger Seabourne, Phil Williams, Steve Drury, Alex Hayward and Alison Wall

**Also in Attendance:**

No other Councillors were in attendance

**Officers in Attendance:**

Joanne Wagstaffe  
Ray Figg  
Phil King  
Claire May  
Geof Muggeridge  
Alison Scott  
Rebecca Young  
Josh Sills  
Sarah Haythorpe

**PR78/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received. Councillor Steve Drury was slightly late joining the meeting

**PR79/20 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 7 December 2020 were confirmed as a correct record by general assent and would be signed by the Chair when it was possible to do so subject to one amendment at the top of Page 8.

Minute PR77/20 - The Chair of the meeting agreed to forward to the Committee a copy of the letter that had been sent to the Secretary of State for Housing.

**PR80/20 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair ruled that the following items had not been available 5 clear working days before the meeting but were of sufficient urgency to take at the meeting:

Item 14a – an e-petition had not been included on the Agenda when published but was of sufficient urgency to be taken so that the petition can be received by the Council. The Chair of the meeting had agreed to take the item of business of item 4.

Item 8 - Appendix 1 had not been available although the report had been published. The reason for urgency was to ensure that the risk register could be agreed.

**PR81/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest

**PR82/20 RECEIPT OF AN E-PETITION ON RICKMANSWORTH BOWLS CLUB**

The Committee received a petition from Rickmansworth Bowls Club signed by 113 residents which stated:

*‘That the Council continues to provide financial support to Rickmansworth Bowls Club We the undersigned, support Rickmansworth Bowls Club at Basing Gardens in providing a service for young and old in the community, as it has done for over 100 years, where all have benefitted from physical exercise and enjoyment of fresh air and social interaction. Bowls is a healthy form of outdoor exercise and especially suited for older residents and those who are relatively less mobile.*

*The Council’s Three Rivers Local Strategic Partnership Community Strategy 2018-2023 has the key priority of ensuring that “residents have opportunities to be physically and mentally healthy.” The Council is therefore committed to “working in partnership to promote access to physical activity opportunities.”*

*The Council has for many years helped the Club by subsidising the cost of using the facilities. However, the Council is now withdrawing all financial support for the Club, which is likely to force the Club to close. This is therefore directly contrary to the Council’s stated aim and will be especially disadvantageous to the older residents of the area.*

*We therefore urge the Council to reconsider and support the Club by providing some ongoing financial support, enabling the Club to exist and thrive and be a source of enjoyment for the whole community for many years to come.’*

In accordance with Rule 18(5) of the Council’s Constitution, the Lead Petitioner presented the petition to the Committee.

The Vice Chair thanked the Lead Petitioner and the Bowls Club for presenting the petition and added that the Council did recognise the value of the club and were committed to helping the club to transition to the new arrangements. The Council were not looking to withdraw all financial support. The lease that had been offered was for a longer term lease which should benefit the club and would provide significantly below market rent. In addition the club had been offered the use of some equipment and additional grant funding to help with the transition to the new arrangements. The Council would welcome the clubs involvement in the process.

The Chair thanked the Lead Petitioner and advised the Council would be in contact to seek a mutually agreed plan for going forward.

RESOLVED:

Noted receipt of the petition and that a letter would be sent to the Lead Petitioner confirming receipt.

**PR83/20 TO RECEIVE THE RECOMMENDATION FROM THE LOCAL PLAN SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2021**

The report set out changes to the Statement of Community Involvement which provided the Council with an up-to-date commitment to how it will consult on planning policy documents and individual planning applications in line with current legislation and guidance relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The proposed amendments in the addendum would be temporary and would apply up until such time when legislation and guidance allows the Council to safely revert back to the original Statement of Community Involvement which was adopted in June 2020.

Members raised the following issues:

Q: How far reaching does a consultation have to be as far as an end user is concerned?

A: The Council consult District wide and further afield outside the District. It was noted that there are a number of businesses in the District. Anyone with an interest in the District could be consulted.

Q: Where it states written and email communication would continue did that include posted communication?

A: Initially it would be email. There was a consultation database specifically for the Local Plan. Anyone who wanted to could register on the consultation database, details were provided on the website. The Council would write to statutory consultees where they did not have email addresses, e.g. electricity companies, the Water Board, Environment Agency.

Q: Paragraph 3.4 in Appendix 2 stated 'the circulation of information in hard copy format should be avoided by developers undertaking community consultation'. Who was determining this?

A: These were rules under the current legislation and looked to try to prevent flyers or hard copy documents being posted to lessen contact with members of the public and to lessen the transmission of Covid 19.

Q Paragraph 2.6 of the report stated that the Regulations had been extended to apply until 31 December 2021. Specific dates were required as to when these would be reviewed.

A: Legislation stated that the changes would remain in place until 31 December 2021. The Council could not review this until the Government changes the legislations. Officers would keep a check on any changes and report back to the Local Plan sub-committee and Policy and Resources Committee accordingly. The Member asked for this point to be included for clarity.

Q: Could instructions on how to look at the Local Plan consultation details online be put on all the notice boards across the District and not just in Rickmansworth?

A: The Chair agreed that this was reasonable request.

Q: Paragraph 2.13 of the report stated that the applicant would be responsible for displaying notices on behalf of the Council for planning applications. Why would Officers not do this and who would checks be made to ensure the notices were put up in the correct location.

A: This procedure was changed in March 2020 as part of the Covid 19 restrictions. The notices were posted to the applicant who was responsible for put them up in the correct location. The applicant had to take a photograph to confirm they had posted the notice in the right place. The Director of Community and Environmental Services advised that most Planning Officers were working from home so it would involve a visit to the office and then out to the site to undertake this. The new system was quicker and had been working well for the last year. Applicants were made aware that the notices had to be put up and had to stay in place for a required period. The Director would feedback to the Development Management team for Ward Councillors to be made aware so they could check the notices were in place.

Q: A Member advised that they were already advised of Planning Application details weekly so did not see the need for an additional arrangement.

Paragraph 2.13 made reference to the Statutory Local Plan Consultation, the Member said details should be displayed on all District noticeboards.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation set out in the report was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being by general assent.

RECOMMEND:

Agreed to recommend the adoption of the Addendum to the Statement of Community Involvement as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

#### **PR84/20 DECISIONS OF THE COVID 19 RESPONSE SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Committee received the decisions from the Covid 19 Response sub-committee meeting held on 16 November 2020 as set out in the minutes (details below).

1. CRSC 25/20 - SERVICE RESTORATION GENERAL UPDATE REPORT
2. CRSC 26/20 - WATERSMEET REOPENING REPORT

On being put to the Committee the recommendations in the Minutes were declared CARRIED by the Chair of the meeting the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

1. Agreed the General Update report for adoption.
2. Agreed the Watersmeet Reopening report for adoption.

#### **PR85/20 COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS IMPACT ON SERVICES UPDATE REPORT**

The Watersmeet Venue Manager gave the following report to the Committee:

The Covid-19 Impact on services report follows on from the Service Restoration General Update report presented to the Covid-19 Response Sub-committee on 16 November 2020, and provided an update on the current situation regarding the Council's services and Covid-19 response.

The report set out the impact on services and highlighted the additional work and measures put in place to support residents and the Covid-19 response. Appendix 1 itemised each of the Council's services and the impact each Tier and the current National Lockdown has had. Where it stated BAU (business as usual) the delivery of the service continued, however it was important to highlight that the majority of staff that would normally be based at Three Rivers House continued to work from home. Naturally, due to the ever changing situation there have been further developments since this report was published and these were highlighted to the Committee.

Since the last update in November, Three Rivers has come out of the second national lockdown on 3 December and entered into Tier 2. The District was then moved to Tier 3 on 16 December and to Tier 4 on 20 December and then on the 5 January 2021 the country entered a third National Lockdown.

Moving through the Tier system had generated significant workload for Officers as aspects of services had started and stopped in response to the restrictions and the required support for residents had changed.

In response to the second National Lockdown in November a Covid-19 Action Group was established consisting of Officers from Community Partnerships, Leisure, Watersmeet, Regulatory Services Communications and the Customer Services Centre to coordinate tasks across different services utilising the skillset of specific staff.

Four Covid Marshals, funded from Central Government Resources, have been employed to engage with the public and encourage general compliance of Covid restrictions focusing on our parks, open spaces and supermarkets. Funding had also been provided for Covid Response officers to support enhanced contact tracing across the county. The recruitment

process mentioned for the 3 Officers for Three Rivers had progressed and offers have been made and verbally accepted.

Work with Herts County Council, Herts Help and Watford and Three Rivers Trust had continued throughout the tier system and during the National Lockdown for people who are isolating and who are clinically and extremely vulnerable, helping them with getting access to food deliveries, prescriptions and providing wellbeing support.

There had been significant disruption to some services and the current status of services was as follows:

#### Leisure/Watersmeet

- In Leisure, currently parks, open spaces, play areas, car parks and the public toilets within our parks remained open.
- Skate parks, tennis courts, multi-use games areas and outdoor gyms are all closed as per the Government guidance.
- Since the report was published, Parkguard have been engaged temporarily to patrol Croxley skate-park in response to Police and Covid Marshal feedback on the continued use of the skate park despite it being closed. 3 hand sanitiser stations have been ordered to be installed at the three of the busiest play areas (Ebury, Leavesden Country Park and Barton Way).
- Arts on Prescription, a support group, would continue with the next programme starting in March.
- Volunteering programmes and 'friends of' working groups are currently suspended.
- Leisure centres and Rickmansworth Golf Course are currently closed and we intend to reopen these when restrictions allow. The Council continues to work closely with SLM the Leisure operator.
- Watersmeet is currently closed following a brief reopening during Tier 2 in December. Today we submitted an application for £87,500 of support from the Culture Recovery Fund for Watersmeet to be used from April-June 2021. This was our second funding application. Successful applicants would be informed by the end of March.

#### Environmental Protection

- Environmental Protection waste collections had continued and had provided a full service with the exception of a short delay in trade waste collection that was caught up within a few days.
- Due to staff self-isolation and Covid 19 cases within the workforce, depot sorting of litter bins had been suspended and an operative had been moved to waste loading. A street cleanser driver had been transferred to drive for the waste collection team. The number of agency waste loaders had also been increased from 4 to 6.
- The report set out a stepped approach and provided a contingency plan should further staff shortages occur if the number of Covid 19 cases increase. The 3 main potential issues were, number of HGV drivers available, the number of loaders available and the number of fitters available for vehicle maintenance – which was provided by the maintenance contractor Plantec.

#### Community Partnerships

- Community Partnerships Anti-social behaviour doorstep visits continued to take place as required during Tiers 2-4 but are currently on hold since the start of the National Lockdown on 5 January.
- Since the report was published a number of Family Intervention doorstep visits had taken place to ensure support continued for families.
- Throughout Tiers 2-4 the Community Support Service and Domestic Abuse Support was provided online where appropriate and face to face if necessary. Since the 5 January all indoor visits in centres and homes had stopped with essential face to face contact taking place outside. Since this report was published Herts Mind Network had stated they do not intend to recommence home visits until staff have been vaccinated.

### Regulatory Services

- The majority of the services had continued as business as usual with the exception of non-essential site visits which are currently on hold. Since the start of the National Lockdown on 5 January only urgent and essential site visits (including priority enforcement visits) were taking place.
- Knowledge tests for new taxi drivers continue to be on hold with an ongoing review of the online provision.
- Parking enforcement is currently suspended during the National Lockdown.
- Environmental Health Officers provided by Watford Borough Council on behalf of Three Rivers continue to engage with businesses across the District with current focus on supermarkets. These are being assisted by the Covid Marshals mentioned earlier.

### Other Services

- Housing services had mainly continued business as usual including rough sleeper visits. Home visits had currently stopped with doorstep visit taking place only when essential.
- The majority of Electoral Services continued as business as usual and at present the 6 May elections are due to take place, although it was currently unknown what impact the National Lockdown would have on logistics.
- Revenue & Benefits was experiencing considerable additional work with the processing of grants, although the rest of the service continued as business as usual.
- Legal and Democratic Services had needed to interpret increased legislation and the courts continue to remain open.
- The majority of the Finance Service had continued business as usual throughout, with the exception of the Fraud team who were unable to conduct face to face interviews impacting on the recovery of fraudulent payments.
- A number of tenants had sought rent payment holidays which were being monitored by Property Services.
- The Customer Services Centre, Economic & Sustainable Development, Corporate Services, Human Resources, Facilities and ICT had continued business as usual with their service delivery.
- Three Rivers House remains closed for staff with the exception of essential visits. The building remains open for use by the Police, Enforcement officers and Covid Marshals.
- CAB staff continue to access the building and are carrying out remote support, but are currently not providing any face to face services to the public.
- Basing House remains open for Rivertech, however the Museum is closed.
- Staff resources are being monitored regularly with several secondments and redeployments in place to support priority services, as well as specific tasks being allocated via the Covid-19 Action group mentioned earlier. The NHS have approached the Council asking for up to 10 staff to provide support for the vaccination programme. A number of staff have volunteered and the NHS are particularly interested in one person who had offered to help at the Lister Hospital.

Tier restrictions and the latest National Lockdown are likely to have adverse effects on the local community including those suffering with mental health issues, domestic abuse and those on low incomes. The Covid-19 Action Group, and designated safeguarding leads will continue to work with partners to support those in most need.

Finally the Council's website and social media channels would continue to provide updates and messaging to the local community to help support the Covid-19 response.

The following points were raised by Members:

Q: Taxi driver tests were on hold, did this mean they were not driving?

A: This referred to the testing of new drivers. Currently demand was low so this was not having any impact. The Director of Community and Environmental Services advised they were only aware of two tests on hold. The taxi drivers would not be driving in the District without having taken the test.

Q: Many emails had been received complaining about people from outside the District driving to and parking in the Aquadrome Car Park.

A: Car parks were being monitored but they remained open to stop visitors parking in the surrounding streets. The Director of Community and Environmental Services confirmed that when the car parks were closed people parked immediately outside and inconvenienced local residents. There were extra patrols of Covid Marshals but they were unable to monitor where every vehicle had come from. There was more social media messaging and signage being put in place to request that people exercise locally.

Q: What testing protocol is in place within the Council?

A: The Council do not undertake repeat tests. All office based staff are homeworking and only allowed into the office by exception. There are procedures in place to protect the working environment. Depot staff are subject to the Government guidelines. Staff showing symptoms have access to the rapid testing. Potentially this may be considered for all staff going forwards but was not a requirement at present. Government guidelines are being followed for testing, isolating and returning to work.

Q: Would the Council manage to spend the grant received to Watersmeet of £175,000 before the end of March?

A: The Council were on track to have spent the first round of the Culture Recovery Fund by end March.

Q: The accounts state the years' income for Watersmeet was £190,000 so to get £175,000 was very good?

A: Turnover/total income pre-Covid 19 was just over £937,000, so was significantly down even with the grant.

On being put to the Committee the recommendations were declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

Agreed the approach set out in the Covid-19 Restrictions Impact on Services Update Report for adoption.

## **PR86/20 REVIEW OF STRATEGIC RISKS**

This report proposed revised strategic risks, based on the priorities and objectives in the Corporate Framework 2020-2023.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

Noted the updated Strategic Risk Register.

## **PR87/20 FINANCIAL PLANNING 2021-2024**

This report was an introduction to the three agenda items that followed.

The Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services moved agenda items 9, 10, 11 and 12 and advised that on item 12, they would be moving option 9.2 that the Administration would

publish its final recommendations on Financial Planning 2021-2024 five working days prior to the Council meeting on 23 February 2021 and present them at this meeting.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report.

#### **PR88/20 FINANCIAL PLANNING - REVENUES SERVICES**

The purpose of this report was to enable the Policy and Resources Committee to recommend to the Council the medium term revenue budgets.

Members raised the following questions:

Q: Paragraph 2.7 - Herts County Council commenced the removal of £1.5m from a total distributional pot. Why was the pot being reduced?

A: The County provide some money to improve recycling rates amongst the Districts. They decided to reduce the model in a phased approach over a number of years. The Council had also experienced a loss due to the way the money was calculated.

Q: How much have the Council lost in total?

A: There was an expected loss of £279,000 next year.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report.

#### **PR89/20 FINANCIAL PLANNING - CAPITAL STRATEGY AND THE TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY**

The purpose of this report was to enable the Policy and Resources Committee to recommend to the Council its capital strategy and treasury management policy over the medium term (2021-24)

Members raised the following questions:

Q: Paragraph 3.14 the increase in borrowing from £26m to £29m, what was the reason for this?

A: The estimate for 2021/22 was set out in Paragraph 3.13 and showed the operational boundary which was £26m for both 2020/21 and 2021/22. The authorised limit was the maximum for borrowing without going back to Council. For this year and the next financial year it was £29m.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report.

#### **PR90/20 FINANCIAL PLANNING - RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report enabled the Committee to make its recommendations on the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets and Treasury Management Policy for the period 2021-24 (medium term) to Council on 23 February 2021

The Vice-Chair moved the recommendation at Paragraph 9.2 in the report.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being by general assent.



RECOMMENDED:

That the Policy and Resources Committee notes that the Administration will publish its final recommendations on Financial Planning 2021-2024 five working days prior to the Council meeting on 23 February 2021 and present them at this meeting.

**PR91/20 WORK PROGRAMME**

To receive the Committee's work programme.

A Member asked for the Emergency Climate Change Strategy to be added to the work programme. This was confirmed by the Acting Head of Community Partnerships

A Member asked for dates to be added for when the Trees and Landscape Strategy (item 13) would be presented to the Committee. The Chair would discuss suitable dates with the Principal Committee Manager.

RESOLVED:

Noted the work programme.

The Chair thanked Officers for the work they were doing in very trying times.

**CHAIRMAN**