
INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth on Tuesday 21 March 2023 from 7.30pm to 8.15pm.

Councillors present:

Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Lead Member Infrastructure & Planning Policy) (Co-Chair)
Paul Rainbow (Lead Member Transport and Economic Development) (Co-Chair)
Andrew Scarth (Lead Member Housing) (Co-Chair)
Joan King
Khalid Hussain
Philip Hearn
Kevin Raeburn
Reena Ranger OBE
Kate Turner (Substitute for Dominic Sokalski)
Andrea Fraser (Substitute for Lisa Hudson)
Shanti Maru (Substitute for Abbas Merali)

Officers Present:

Sally Riley, Finance Business Partner
Mike Simpson, Committee & Web Officer

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst in the Chair

IHED 33/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dominic Sokalski (substitute Kate Turner), Lisa Hudson (substitute Andrea Fraser) and Abbas Merali (substitute Shanti Maru)

IHED 34/22 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Infrastructure, Housing and Economic Development Committee held on 17 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

IHED 35/22 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

IHED 36/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

IHED 37/22 BUDGET MONITORING (PERIOD 10)

The report, which had been before the Policy and Resources Committee on 13 March, was introduced by the Finance Business Partner and questions were invited.

A Member referred to staff vacancy monitoring, and asked why two positions were not currently advertised. The Finance Business Partner replied that the LA1 Contract Management Support Officer was referred to P&R under Part 2 and details would be available in due course, and the Housing Apprentice vacancy is required to tie in with the new intake at West Herts college in September and will be advertised then.

In response to a question about the Rent Deposit Guarantee scheme, the Finance Business Partner said it is a recovery process and a figure will only show if nothing was recovered. Similarly, no budget was shown under Environmental Health for Dirty Premises as nothing was paid out.

The Finance Business Partner explained that a salary realignment was carried out every year in consideration of those services with unfilled posts. The biggest area affected was the Customer Service Centre (CSC) which, due to the academy system in operation, meant that staff on secondment to other areas could not be replaced until the new role was made permanent.

The Member asked about the figure of £13,277 against the South Oxhey Initiative as it was understood that the management company took care of everything now. A response to the question would be provided post meeting.

Action Point: The Finance Business Partner to revert with a full response. The £13,277 was for Legal time and expenses to Deloitte for South Oxhey

The Chair said it was probably due to invoices being submitted late and not yet paid.

A Member referred to parking revenues and observed that as use of car parks was not yet back to pre-pandemic levels, at what point would it be decided that those levels no longer constituted a realistic benchmark. The Chair replied that no authority was yet back to pre-pandemic levels, but the report indicated that revenues this year would exceed the previous one. The Finance Business Partner added that data needed to be compared over two years before an adjustment of the benchmark could be made. Parking was on the work programme and would be reviewed at a future date.

A Member said there was a case for upgrading the parking machines to enable automatic topping up in order to stimulate footfall in Rickmansworth, to which it was replied that machines have been updated with solar-powered ones that do not print tickets.

A Member referred to the impact of unfilled posts within the Council, and said that the absence of a Senior Transport Planner must be having a negative effect. The Finance Business Partner said the team will pick up the work of the Senior Transport Planner where possible, but there will be an impact the longer the post is unfilled but so far it has not been possible to recruit anyone of the required calibre.

A Member asked if it would be possible to see a more detailed breakdown of car park usage, to which the Finance Business Partner said such data was available but would not form part of the table presented in the report. The Member then asked if the Council could communicate that the parking app could be used, to which the Chair responded that a press release was circulated a while ago.

A Member asked if it would be possible to see how the £900k housing grant would be spent. The Finance Business Partner replied that most of the grant money was historical and for use in addressing homelessness. From now on it cannot be carried over so will be placed in a reserve, for use primarily for temporary accommodation.

A Member cited Rickmansworth Hub on the report, and asked if that was Basing House. The Finance Business Partner would establish exactly what the Rickmansworth Hub was in the context of the report and would let the Member know.

Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development Action Point

The Finance Business Partner to revert with a response. The Rickmansworth Hub is indeed Basing House. The works are due to commence 6 April 2023 and include repairs to Sash Window, external and internal; repairs, fire doors and woodwork.

The Lead Member for Housing was very pleased with the grants received for homelessness which would be channelled via Watford Community Housing. The use of temporary accommodation was saving the Council a lot of money due to not having to go outside the district. The Finance Business Partner added that there had been no nightly lets since January 2023 as the Council was using its own temporary accommodation. The Chair said that remaining in the district was also beneficial to the clients too.

A Member returned to the matter of parking, and said the new ticket machines do not allow auto top-up, and questioned whether the Council was thereby deterring extended shopping. The Chair replied that intrinsic costs had to be considered.

The Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development said in the Bournemouth area there are car parks that use two tariffs, a higher one for those using an App, with a lower rate applied to those using the Council machines.

The Chair asked that the report, along with the comments by Members of the Committee, be noted. This was agreed by the Committee by general assent??

RESOLVED:

That the Budget Monitoring report, along with the comments of members of the Committee, be noted.

IHED 38/22 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair asked that item one, which referred to the Rickmansworth High Street closure, be changed to read "Experimental Pedestrian and Cycle Order from County Council."

In response to a question from a Member, the Chair said Planning Policy was probably being confused with Parking Management, and further questions should be taken up with the Local Plan sub-committee.

A Member asked whether the parking schemes currently out for consultation will be added to the work programme for reporting back to Committee. The Chair replied they are not reported back to Committee but are delegated matters, and would be decided upon by Lead Members, Ward Councillors and lead officers. Having them returned to Committee would delay the process by months, and the idea was to speed things up.

A Member asked if the Three Rivers Cycling and Walking strategy will have started by the time the Committee meets in October. The Chair said the Committee would look at the report for signing off after which it would go to Hertfordshire Highways & Transport panel for agreement. The Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development said October was a realistic date in view of purdah and the number of Council meetings scheduled over the next few months.

The Committee observed that in the absence of a Senior Transport Planner the Head of Regulatory Services was doing a great job and asked that it be noted.

A Member referenced the occasional closure of Rickmansworth High Street and asked whether the Council could do more to persuade residents to engage with the consultation. The Chair replied that details of the consultation had been published on the website and on social media, but it was not possible to make people take part.

The Chair repeated that the relevant item be referred in the work programme as the Rickmansworth High Street Experimental Traffic Order review.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee's work programme be noted.

IHED 39/22 A PETITION ON PARKING PERMITS IN ST MARY'S COURT, SKIDMORE WAY, RICKMANSWORTH

In the absence of the petitioner, who had been present at the start of the meeting, the Chair allowed the petition, comprising 28 signatures, to be accepted and responded to.

"There is an urgent need for allocated parking spaces at the above address. The general public has learnt there is no requirement for a parking permit at this location leaving none or very little "on site" parking for the residents, visiting relations, friends, care workers, doctors, ambulances, and maintenance staff and cleaning personnel. The situation leads, on occasions to heated arguments, hostility and frustration to all residents and support personnel."

The Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development responded that although progression will be delayed due to purdah, this issue was on the work programme and was acknowledged as being an area in need of attention, and some groundwork had been done. The Chair was optimistic that it should be possible to get something out to consultation during the summer.

RESOLVED:

That the petition be received and a letter of acknowledgement be sent to the Lead Petitioner.

CHAIR