

## **POLICY PANEL**

### **3 March 2021**

**Attendees:** Councillors Arnold, Coleman, Loveland, McCarthy, Scordis and Warnes.

**Substitutes:** Cllr Davidson for Councillor Jowers.

**Also Present:** Councillor King, Councillor J. Young

#### **12. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

*RESOLVED* that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

#### **13. Review of the future delivery of Grounds Maintenance**

Rosa Tanfield, Group Manager - Neighbourhood Services, presented the item and outlined the review process which had been carried out by the Policy Panel and which was laid out in the report provided. The Group Manager also detailed the current Grounds Maintenance contract and the possible future options which had been considered, and the consultation exercises carried out with volunteers, parish councils, sports and community groups to gain a wide range of views on what stakeholders wanted.

Different possible service models had been considered and members of the Policy Panel had expressed a preference for an in-house delivery model, including community engagement and involvement and contracting certain specialist works out to companies, with a preference for local firms. The work with communities would be expected to use a strategy based on community assets, and to be both environmentally and financially sustainable.

The report outlined the main financial considerations and viability had been checked before this matter would be taken to Cabinet for a final decision.

A member of the Panel noted that there was a stated aim to save around £100k on this contract, and asked whether this was a flexible aim or if it was 'set in stone.' The Group Manager explained that this had been built in to the medium-term financial forecast and that to ensure that this would be viable, it would be necessary to look at asset investments and TUPE [Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)] implications.

The Panel noted that the service had, in the past, been delivered and run in-house, and that, in general, the current contractor had performed well. The Group Manager

was asked whether all potential costs had been considered, whether people with the necessary skillsets could be attracted to work in-house and how performance could be incentivised. The Group Manager drew attention to the overview of the different options considered and it was noted that the 'back-office charge' could have an effect of increasing costs when handled in-house. The Panel requested that such expected costs were included in the business case put forward.

A Panel member asked for more consideration to be given to the use of open spaces for health and fitness purposes, as not much information had been provided on this in the report. Councillor David King, Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources, explained that much had been done to address the health and wellbeing deficit within the Borough, including improvements to cycleways, the Colchester Orbital Route, and with new signage and greening planned for the future. The Panel discussed the need to encourage and facilitate greater physical activity to improve physical and mental health, including the need to ensure that public areas are maintained for safe use. The Northern Gateway perimeter walks were praised, and a view was given that routes elsewhere should be improved to encourage greater use by the public, especially those which habitually became unusable in poor weather. A member of the Panel posited that health and wellbeing should be embedded in all strategies of the Council, and it was noted that this was included in the draft report for Cabinet. The Essex Local Delivery Pilot was outlined, overarching encouragement of projects to improve and increase health and wellbeing activities and options.

The Panel gave the view that it was important to ensure that all projected costs were included in the business case, with a key issue being noted by John Marsh, APSE Associate, that government maintenance was expected to totally change in coming years, affecting work on health and wellbeing, biodiversity and other areas. It was argued that using an in-house delivery model could help the Council to be flexible in its adjustment to changing circumstances. Certain skills were already present within the Council, and work would be needed to identify skills which would need to be added, via TUPE or other means.

*RECOMMENDED* to CABINET that: -

- (a) At this pre-business case stage, a report to Cabinet be taken forward with the recommendation of a new in-house operating model to deliver grounds maintenance as described in the report received by the Policy Panel at this meeting [3 March 2021].

*RESOLVED* that: -

- (a) A detailed business case to be brought back to Policy Panel for review before final recommendations go to Cabinet for a formal decision on the operating model to be delivered at the end of the current Grounds Maintenance contract.

#### **14. Presentation of Heritage Signage**

[NB At the request of the Chairman, this item was taken prior to the above item on the future delivery of Grounds Maintenance.]

Councillor Julie Young, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Performance and Deputy Leader of the Council provided a presentation on the Council's ongoing work to improve heritage signage around the Borough. Useful discussions had been held with blue badge guides, the Policy Panel and its precursor, the Policy and Public Initiatives Panel, with the Heritage and Tourism task and finish group and with other stakeholders.

Examples of improvements included a new interpretation board to be erected for the Roman Church [next to the Maldon Road Roundabout], work done on St Botolphs, with funding efforts led by the Civic Society, and including a memorial plaque for Captain Jesse Jones, a Waterloo veteran buried in the churchyard.

An application had been made to the Myland Community Council for an interpretation panel to be provided at St Michael's and All Angels' [Myland].

A site meeting had been held at the Berechurch Dyke, with the Defence Estates as the landowner, followed by an application for funding for a new interpretation panel. The outcome of the application was expected to be received soon.

The Portfolio Holder noted members' wishes that something be done to commemorate the legacy and contributions of the Paxman's firm and factory to Colchester. A working group was looking at how this can best be done within the area's built environment.

It was noted that the interpretation boards for the Town-to-Port trail were in poor condition and this was being addressed.

An interpretation board for Grymes Dyke was now in place on Dugard Avenue, and an English Heritage board was in place for Lexden Dyke. There was currently no ongoing activity to look at signage for Lexden Park, however this would be revisited in the future.

Funds for boards at the Roman Circus were included in the Council's budget. The Council was working with the Archaeological Trust and two new boards were planned for the coming year.

The Hilly Fields boards were in need of replacing and external funding sources were being sought for this purpose.

The Panel thanked the Portfolio Holder for her briefing.

## **15. Work Programme 2020-21**

The Panel considered a report on its work programme for 2020-21.

The Panel discussed the possibility of a Borough memorial for victims of Covid-19, those affected and potentially the keyworkers who engaged in vital duties over the pandemic. Support was expressed for such a project, especially if it could be designed as a place for reflection and remembrance. Councillor Davidson, as the current Mayor of Colchester, explained that he was working with the High Steward

and the Council's Cabinet to organise a memorial and an occasion of remembrance, potentially to take place before the Autumn.

*RESOLVED* that the work programme for the Policy Panel be noted.

*RECOMMENDED* to CABINET that Cabinet provide an update for the Policy Panel to consider regarding any potential plans, once laid down, for a Colchester memorial to those who have lost their lives to, or been affected by, Covid-19, and/or to those key workers who have carried out vital work during the pandemic.