

ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY, CULTURE AND SPORTS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 1 November 2022.

PRESENT: Councillor Julia Neden-Watts (Chair), Councillor Martin Elengorn (Vice-Chair), Councillor John Coombs, Councillor Elizabeth Gant, Councillor Alan Juriansz, Councillor Zoe McLeod, Councillor Fiona Sacks, Councillor Chris Varley and Councillor Chas Warlow

32. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

34. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to an amendment to Minute item 17 to correct the job title of the Assistant Director (Contracts and Leisure). The Chair was then authorised to sign the minutes.

35. WARD CONCERNS

In accordance with procedure rule 33.2, the Committee received a ward concern from Councillor Brown concerning the state of the land at 81 High Street, Hampton Wick. The rear of the property neighbouring this site was excavated in 2009 leaving a hole with a wastewater pipe suspended across the gap. This excavation followed planning permission being granted in 2004. There are concerns around the safety impacts on surrounding homes, businesses and passers-by as since the excavation the wastewater pipe has broken resulting in pooled water and an unbearable smell. Whilst some steps have been taken to address the issues the problem remains unresolved. Councillor Brown asked that Council officers work with Thames Water to ensure rectification works take place as quickly as possible and that powers are used to bring the site up to an acceptable state.

The Committee were then able to ask questions of clarification to Councillor Brown.

Matthew Gawn, a local resident, then addressed the Committee, giving background to the case, outlining how the state of the neighbouring property has impacted on him and his family and the steps he has taken in attempting to resolve the issue.

Mark Merrington, a representative of the Hampton Wick Association, addressed the Committee and referred to the impact the situation continues to have on businesses, neighbours and other members of the community. He requested the Council explore and use all tools at its disposal, such as the issuing of further Section 215 notices and closer working with Thames Water.

The Chair thanked Mr Gawn and Mr Merrington for their contributions and advised that she had visited the site and could confirm the descriptions given.

Officers replied to Members' questions, provided the Committee with background to the case, detailed the actions taken to date, advised on the limits of council powers and set out possible next steps to resolve the issues. These next steps included contact with the Director of Public Health, writing to Thames Water setting out the Council's concerns in advance of meeting with them; exploring fully the potential for further Section 215 notices; the Environmental Health team carrying out further inspections; Building Control inspections to explore if the neighbouring buildings have been subject to movement; exploration of the legal obligations on Thames Water to take action.

Legal Services would also explore if there were other legal avenues which can be pursued. Additionally, it was suggested that a letter be sent to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, raising the need for local authorities to have more powers to address these issues.

36. PETITIONS

None.

37. ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

Introductions were made by the new Interim Assistant Directors for Waste and Contracts and Leisure. Mark Allen, who will be covering the waste remit, explained that he has previously worked as an Assistant Director at Norfolk County Council and has since covered waste and recycling at a number of local authorities. His key priority will be to improve the Serco service standards.

Lesli Good, Assistant Director (Leisure), advised that she has a great deal of experience in local government including in London local authorities. Key areas of work for her would be around the climate change agenda, the take up of leisure services and the delivery of the Library Strategy. Reports on an events policy and a tree policy would be brought forward to Committee in January.

In reply to questions from Members about utilising their previous experience, the Assistant Director (Waste) indicated that he would like to see an improvement in food recycling rates, whilst the Assistant Director (Leisure) advised that she would use her experience of delivering Library Strategies and also to address the space at Richmond Library. The Chair highlighted some recent discussions around providing a Library of Things and whether this could be accommodated within library buildings.

Both Assistant Directors recognised the importance of working across services and with key stakeholders on shared policy agendas to ensure joined up working. The Chair gave an example of the Chair of the Adult Social Services Health and Housing Committee wanting to input into the Leisure Strategy from a health perspective. The importance of engaging the voluntary sector in a range of initiatives across the sports, arts and recycling and reuse was discussed.

38. Q2 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Finance for Environment and Community Services introduced the report, noting the challenging financial climate which is expected to lead to the revenue overspend for the Committee reaching £420,000. Attendances in the leisure sector have been particularly impacted by financial pressures, with block bookings of facilities by schools and clubs reducing significantly. Members provided anecdotal examples of the challenges pool users have faced and the availability of cheaper facilities outside the borough. Committee noted that capital budgets have also been impacted, with the Finance, Policy and Resources Committee setting aside a pot of money to provide additional uplifts to capital budgets where required as a result of inflationary pressures.

The Committee asked questions about the allocation of climate change funding and were advised that this would be captured in the refresh of the Climate Emergency Strategy. On the health suite and Pools in the Park, £187,000 has been allocated for its refurbishment.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted:

- a) that the current Revenue budget projected overspend for the services within this committee is £420,000.
- b) the position on the capital programme.

39. FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was noted.

The issue of resilience was raised, with a briefing session on emergency planning and out of hours services to be planned.

Committee noted that the community toilet scheme, graffiti, street weeds and weed killing have been included in the Policy and Performance Review Board's programme of work. The issue of dropped kerbs and the impact of paving front gardens has also previously been raised as an area for possible inclusion in the PPRB's work programme from April. It was suggested that if this is taken up as a topic this should include the issue of home electric vehicle charging.

CHAIR

The meeting, which started at 7.00 pm ended at 8.39 pm.