

High Wycombe Town Committee Minutes

Date: 22 November 2016

Time: 7.00 - 8.47 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A R Green
(in the Chair)

Councillors K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M Asif, Ms A Baughan, H Bull, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, M Clarke, R Farmer, S Graham, M Hanif, A E Hill, M Hussain JP, A Hussain, M Hussain, M E Knight, R Raja, S K Raja and N J B Teesdale,

ALSO PRESENT:

Gill Quinton	Business Manager, Bucks County Council
Councillor Mike Appleyard	Bucks County Council
Councillor Zahir Mohammed	Bucks County Council
Gary Saunders	Market Operator

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M A Hashmi and Councillor Ms J D Wassell.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Raja declared an interest in Item 6 High Wycombe Cemetery Fees and Charges 2017/18 as the Secretary of a bereavement society. Councillor Raja remained in the chamber throughout the discussions.

17 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 13 September 2016 be agreed as a correct record.

18 MODERNISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT - BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL UNITARY BUSINESS CASE

The Committee welcomed Gill Quinton, Managing Director, Business Enterprise and Business Services, Councillor Mike Appleyard and Councillor Zahir Mohammed from Buckinghamshire County Council to the meeting who addressed the Committee on the County Council's proposal for Modernising Local Government in Buckinghamshire.

Information was provided on the Options Appraisal and Business Case for Modernising Local Government in Buckinghamshire. It was reported that due to future issues such as increased population, plans for new homes, and an ageing population, there was a significant expected increase in demands on local services. In addition, local government funding had been significantly reduced and this was expected to be at 0% by 2019. These issues had created a need for change and sustainable improved services.

The Committee were informed that four options had been considered; one unitary, two unitary, three unitary and a three unitary with combined authority council models. The Options Appraisal identified that a single county-wide unitary model for Buckinghamshire would offer the greatest likelihood of meeting the needs of Buckinghamshire in the future. Members noted that this option would deliver a £45m net saving over a five year period, and that this would provide the greatest saving over the other options considered.

The Committee were also informed that the single unitary option would provide clearer accountability and would enable communities' voices to be heard. A challenge in this approach would be to develop the model to balance with local needs.

It was reported that the single unitary proposal would consist of 19 local community boards with executive decision making powers, 19 community hubs, 5 planning committees, and more support for town and parish councils. The transition costs were expected to be £16m, and it was noted that this had been built into the business case. It was reported that together the five councils hold up to £1bn in assets with a potential net capital of up to £48m. It was also proposed to equalise the council tax rate to the lowest level across the county, and that this would bring council tax rates for the Chilterns, South Bucks and Aylesbury Vale reduced to the level paid in Wycombe.

The proposal for a single unitary had been agreed by Buckinghamshire County Council members and the business case had been submitted to the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) for a decision within the next few months.

Members made a number of points and received clarification of various queries from the County Council representatives as follows:

- Savings were set out as per the DCLG requirements in the business case. These were significantly less in the Bucks County Council proposal in comparison to the proposal from the District councils. The actual figure of savings was expected to be much higher than proposed.
- It was suggested that agreement on the issue between elected members had been different at County and District level due to the different priorities. It was also suggested by the County Council representatives that a large number of councillors would retain their posts within the new regime.

- Population growth was expected to be a serious problem in the future and plans would need to be considered as soon as possible with close working required between the councils. Also if infrastructure planning was undertaken at a county wide basis then there would be opportunity to succeed.
- Buckinghamshire County Council had currently no plans regarding the arrangements of the unparished areas under their proposed single unitary council. It was suggested that the details could be discussed and built into an agreement.
- Members were concerned about the poor performance of Transport for Bucks and Children and Young People's Services in Buckinghamshire, and asked for assurances from the County Council that this could be improved and managed successfully under the proposed new model. In response, the County Council representatives stated that the Ofsted regime was considered challenging across the country and the County had accepted their judgement. Work was being carried out to change the rating within the next few months. Funding for roads in the past had been moved to social care and in 2010 funding for road maintenance had been drastically reduced. However improvements had been made and complaints were 50% less than previous years.
- Members noted that High Wycombe was the only unparished area in the County and the Committee were concerned that their views had not been considered. In response to this, the County Council representatives explained that a decision had been made by the County to not consult the High Wycombe Town Committee on the unitary proposal as they had considered the Committee as part of Wycombe District Council. However it was noted that this had been an error on the part of the County and the views of the Committee were now being sought on the options.
- Benefit to residents on a single unity option would be a single point of contact for local services.
- Details regarding control of Special Expenses for the unparished area had not been finalised and the County Council representatives suggested this would need to be considered further under the proposed new model.
- The County Council representatives did not agree that a reduction in Council tax was being used as a bribe to other district councils to bring their levels down to Wycombe DC levels. It was reported that the additional cost to Aylesbury Vale District Council resident would be £1.88 a year.
- Details regarding governance for the 19 community boards would be determined by the elected members of the proposed new Unitary Authority. Boundaries for the boards had not yet been decided.

- The number of the amount of pensioners in the County was not available, however it was noted that there was expected to be a significant increase in over 60 and 80 year olds in the future.
- A member of the Committee referred to the Government's statements about the need for consensus and asked why the County Council had proceeded with submitting their business case to Government without consulting or working with the District Councils. In response, the County Council representatives stated that there had been a conflict with Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) and it had also been very difficult to arrange meetings between the County, AVDC, and the other District Councils. Due to this difficult relationship, and the need for the County Council to address the financial difficulties it was facing urgently, the County Council had decided to advance with their single unitary proposal and felt that action needed to be taken quickly. It was reported that work had been undertaken with Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire County Councils. There was regret that the County and District Councils were unable to work together but it was reported that savings were required and funds could be utilised by working with other local authorities.
- Staffing was not expected to be significantly affected, however most savings would be made at Senior Officer Level.
- The County had considered similar models undertaken by Wiltshire, Durham, Shropshire and Cornwall. It was reported that these had been considered by their Members as successful.

The Chairman thanked Gill, Councillor Appleyard and Councillor Mohammed for the information.

19 TOWN MARKET UPDATE

The Committee welcomed Gary Saunders, Market Operator to the meeting, who gave an update on the High Wycombe Market.

In advance of the meeting questions from Members had been received and responses were as follows:

- The market currently had an occupancy rate of 80% however some traders did not always turn up on the day. The income rate was similar to the previous year however the issue regarding attendance would be considered.
- There had previously been issues with traders using the drains to dispose of fat, however this situation had improved. One trader had been provided with a written warning and if the offence happened a second time then the trader would be dismissed from the market. It was noted that Kebab vans also used the same area in the evenings and these were unregulated.
- Warnings had been given to traders who play loud music and work was continuing to deal with this issue.

- Formal consultations and various training events had been offered to traders over the past few years however there had been no uptake by traders for these events, therefore no views could be provided.
- There was no remit for funfairs on the High Street. It was suggested the HWBIDCo should take the lead in promoting the vibrancy of the market however it was reported that this was not one of their priorities. The relationship between the market operator and HWBIDCo required improvement and this would be addressed.
- Cars were not allowed on the High Street between 9am and 5pm. It was noted that the bollards had been removed and the market operator had no enforcement rights regarding this issue.
- New signage was required in the town for the market in particular from the bus station. The cost of a finger post sign was estimated at £250 plus VAT.
- There was no budget available for rent concessions for traders whilst on holiday. It had been a difficult time for markets over the past year and the town market was maintaining levels of occupancy.
- The new gazebos would be in place after Christmas and would be available for traders if requested.
- There had been an issue with street drinkers intimidating stall holders however action has been taken regarding this issue.

Regarding the road surface of the High Street it was reported that meetings were being carried out with Transport for Bucks regarding this issue and other work required in the town centre. Officers from Transport for Bucks would be invited to the Committee meeting in March to provide an update and this would be added to the HWTC work programme.

The Chairman thanked Gary Saunders for attending the meeting and answering questions.

20 HIGH WYCOMBE CEMETERY FEES AND CHARGES 2017/18

The Committee considered a report which proposed prices for burials, interments and other cemetery related charges, applicable from 1 April 2017.

It was noted that the price Consumer Price Index for September 2016 was at 1% which was proposed as an increase in relation to Burial Rights, Memorial Permits, Saturday fees and interment fees.

However, during debate, some Members considered that as the increase was so low, the fees should remain unchanged. An amendment was proposed and seconded to not to increase the fees and leave them unchanged.

Upon being put to a vote, this was agreed.

RESOLVED: That the proposed charges for burial rights, memorial charges, Saturday fees, and internment fees should NOT be increased and remain unchanged.

21 INFORMATION SHEETS

RESOLVED: That Information Sheets 04/2016 Budgetary Control Report for Q2 and 05/2016 Police Update be noted

22 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE - FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's draft work programme looking ahead to June 2017 was presented for review.

It was noted that a report regarding the recent recommendation from Cabinet regarding a petition on the proposed provision of CCTV in the Cemetery would be added to the January 2017 meeting.

Also added was the update from Transport for Bucks regarding the High Street to the March 2017 meeting.

It was noted that this would be Sarah Randall's last meeting as she would be leaving the Council at the end of the year. The Chairman and the Committee thanked Sarah for all her hard work and support over the past few years, and wished her well for the future.

RESOLVED: That the forward work programme be noted and updated as above.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Mrs J Durkan	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Mrs S Randall	Community Services Manager
Mr I Hunt	Democratic Services Manager
Ms C Whitehead	Head of Democratic, Legal & Policy