

COMMUNITIES CABINET ADVISORY BOARD

Wednesday, 22 August 2018

Present: Councillor Jane March (Chairman)
Councillors Weatherly (Vice-Chairman), Dr Basu, Elliott, Ellis, Hill, Huggett, Nuttall, Scholes and Thomson

Officers in Attendance: David Candlin (Head of Economic Development and Property), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)), Gary Stevenson (Head of Housing, Health and Environment), Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities) and Mark O'Callaghan (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Chapelard, Hamilton, Moore and Podbury

APOLOGIES

COM19/18 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ms Palmer.

The Chairman noted that Karen Pengelly, Town Centre Manager of Royal Tunbridge Wells Together, had been expected but was unable to attend due to illness.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

COM20/18 Councillor Ellis advised that, whilst not a pecuniary interest, he was a representative of the Federation of Small Businesses whose members may be affected by the proposals at COM24/18. The Chairman confirmed this did not exclude him from the meeting.

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests or significant other interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK

COM21/18 Councillor Moore was registered to speak at COM24/18.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 11 JULY 2018

COM22/18 Members reviewed the minutes. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting dated 11 July 2018 be approved as a correct record.

WORK PROGRAMME AS AT 14 AUGUST 2018

COM23/18 Members reviewed the work programme. No queries were raised.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme as at 14 August 2018 be noted.

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN CENTRE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

COM24/18 David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Property, introduced the report which included the following comments:

- Royal Tunbridge Wells Together (RTWT) had been formed in 2016 as a business led organisation supported by the Council to promote commercial activity in the town.

- Appendix A to the report set out some of the achievements of RTWT.
- It had always been the intention to work towards creating a Business Improvement District (BID) in order to build a long-term sustainable organisation.
- There were over 300 successful BIDs nationwide and most recently in Maidstone.
- RTWT would complete its business plan for the BID in September 2018 and a ballot would be held before the end of the year. The ballot would have to pass by both a majority of individual votes and a majority by the rateable value of those that vote.
- The Council had a key role in implementing the ballot, collecting the levy and supporting the organisation as a levy-paying member.

Councillor Moore, member for Park ward and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communication, had registered to speak and encouraged members to support the recommendations. There were several threats and opportunities for town centres and the rise of online retailing could be countered by more experiential opportunities including leisure and culture in the town. Tunbridge Wells was competing with Maidstone and Canterbury which both had BIDs. The objectives of the BID would be business led and enhance the trading environment for all businesses. Important to note that the BID's activities were in addition to the core services provided by the Council. BIDs were becoming increasingly popular in the UK and were already widely used internationally.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- A recent article in the Telegraph had raised concerns about the loss of town centre premises to warehouse type operations for online retailers. Whilst employment was welcome traffic generated by such businesses would be detrimental.
- The nature of retail premises was likely to change but the challenge for the BID would be in making the town centre a desirable place for these businesses to operate. Larger retail premises would be liable for Business Rates and the BID Levy.
- The Council's own liability for the BID Levy was set out in the Exempt Appendix. The Council had agreed to confidentiality as the BID was a commercial operation which would set out its own business plan.
- An online business' activities to reduce its Corporation Tax burdens were not replicable on a local level and Business Rates were unavoidable. The Council was successful in collecting 99 per cent of due Business Rates.
- The BID was expected to commence in early 2019. Whilst there were ongoing discussions on Business Rates, no significant changes were expected in the immediate future. No impacts on the Business Rate retention pilot were anticipated.
- The BID in Canterbury had been proven to be very successful but it was for a much smaller area than in Tunbridge Wells which lead to concerns that efforts may be spread too thinly or unequally.
- The BID area had been determined by RTWT. Tunbridge Wells was by nature an elongated town and therefore familiar with the issues associated with being spread out. Whilst it was not expected that all areas would receive an equal share of funding, the allocation would be determined by the BID and the returns would benefit the town as a whole.

- RTWT had previously talked about ensuring events and activities were spread out in different areas of the town.
- A number of small businesses were already struggling with high Business Rates and there needed to be flexibility to offer relief.
- The BID would be free to consider any proposals to offer its own Business Rates reimbursement scheme to its members. There would be a threshold below which small business would not be liable to pay the BID Levy.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations set out in the report be supported.

HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING, WASTE COLLECTION AND STREET CLEANSING CONTRACT PROCUREMENT

COM25/18 Gary Stevenson, Head of Housing, Health and Environment, introduced the report which included the following comments:

- The process of procuring the new contract started with a report by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in November 2017 had agreed the outline for a new service.
- The new service included doorstep glass collection, weekly food waste collection and an opt-in chargeable garden waste collection.
- The report referred to the proposed services as the Nominal Optimum Method (NOM) which meant a balance of services which was the most cost effective possible.
- Tunbridge Wells was responsible for collection and Kent County Council (KCC) paid for disposal. Both were working together to recycle more and there was an agreement with KCC to share the savings from reduced waste disposal.
- A comprehensive procurement process had been undertaken, cost and quality had been weighted 50/50 in recognition of the contract being a high-profile front line service.
- The overall tender scoring was set out in the report which detailed figures included in Exempt Appendix A. Five tenders had been received with four being progressed to stage 2.
- Bidder A had scored highest for quality and second for cost.
- The contract would be joint with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, this was popular with contractors as it allowed sharing of services, consistency and a single management structure. These efficiencies reduced costs and were accounted for in the tenders.
- The initial cost for the opt-in garden waste services was £52 and included the cost of the new bin. Colours of bins was to be determined.
- A majority of Councils now charged for garden waste collection and the average cost in East Sussex was in the mid-£50 range.
- A summary of the client costs was set out in the report with more details in Exempt Appendix A.
- The changes expected as part of such a large project would require significant public communication and it was proposed to set aside a £100k budget for this purpose.
- The Civic Amenity Vehicle was included as a discretionary service. The precise nature of the service may need to be reconfigured to avoid it being used for trade or garden waste. This would be subject of ongoing discussion with Parish Councils and would continue in its current form until the replacement was agreed.

- The contract was expected to commence on 1 March 2019 with the new operator taking over collections from 30 March 2019 and all routes switched to the new service no later than 30 November 2019.
- The proposals would be a significant change to the service and some disruption was inevitable. There would be a reconfiguring of some collection routes and bin collection days were likely to change to generate efficiencies and savings. Officers were working hard to minimise disruption and this would be supported by a strong communications campaign.

The discussion included consideration of the following additional matters:

- The number of glass deposit banks would be reduced as demand was expected to fall. However, some would remain as not all residents would have doorstep collections, particularly in town centres where space for bins was limited.
- The garden waste charge had significantly increased from original estimates of £30.
- There was concern that the charge was too high and would lead to increased fly-tipping or garden bonfires.
- A lower charge may increase take-up.
- Research had been undertaken and national statistics reviewed and there was no apparent evidence of correlation between fly-tipping and charging for garden waste collections. National statistics showed a continual decline in fly-tipping of green waste between 2007-2017 despite the widespread introduction of charging.
- The cost of £52 was per bin, households who opted for multiple bins would pay multiple charges.
- Increased garden bonfires was a concern, particularly in areas such as St John's where air pollution was already high.
- Given the significance of the service and size of the contract, the decision should go to Full Council.
- Cabinet had authority to make the decision which was within the framework and budget set by Full Council.
- Residents concerned about the cost could share bins.
- The service was optional and those in small houses or apartments without gardens would have no need to pay.
- Green waste that was collected by the Council would go to North Farm site where it was transferred to KCC then to Blaise Farm for composting and used throughout Kent and surrounds. Tax payers got the indirect financial benefit through KCC not having to pay a reduced disposal fee that reflected the income generated from sales by the treatment company.
- The initial charge of £52 was subject to review via the normal annual Fees and Charges setting process by Cabinet in November. The cost of the contract was index linked so could rise.
- The garden waste collection service was priced for the year acknowledging that there would be more in the summer and less in the winter.

A vote on the recommendations was taken. Parts 1, 2 and 4 of the recommendations set out in the report were supported unanimously. Part 3 relating to the charge for the opt-in garden waste services was supported by 6 votes for, 2 votes against and 2 abstentions.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations set out in the report be supported.

URGENT BUSINESS

COM26/18 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING AND SCHEDULED ITEMS

COM27/18 It was noted that the date of the next scheduled meeting was Wednesday 3 October 2018 at 6.30pm in Committee Room A, Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells.

The following items were scheduled on the Forward Plan (which was subject to change) to be discussed:

- Cultural Hub – Update and Fundraising
- CCTV Tender
- Civil Penalties as an Alternative to Prosecution

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 7.25 pm.

An audio recording of this meeting is available on the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council website.