

Meeting Notes

Community Enhancement Group

Notes of the Meeting held on 23 July 2018 from 19:30 to 20:50

Present: **Parish Councillors Joan Buller, Tom Burnham, Sue Forward, Sam Lain-Rose (Chair), Barrett Manning, Paddy Riordan, Gill Smith and Elaine Symes.**

Excluded: **Parish Councillor Paul Kelly** was not invited to the meeting due to his pecuniary interest(s) in the primary items on the agenda.

1. Apologies for Absence

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Parish Councillors John Reardon and Adele Sharp.

2. Agreement of the Previous Group Meeting Notes

Meeting notes of 09 June 2018 were AGREED by Members.

3. Public Convenience Maintenance Contract – Bell Lane

The Members broadly discussed the public convenience maintenance contract and possible future options, including opening the disabled toilet at the Parade. There was discussion about reducing the contract by only cleaning the toilets every other day or further reducing it. However, there was an agreement that should the Council continue to maintain the public toilets, that they should be maintained to a high standard and not reduce quality to compensate for cost, as this does not show value for money.

Members **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** to extend the existing contract with Paxman Services (UK) Ltd. for a further year, expiring on 31 March 2020, to enable an in-depth review of public conveniences across the Parish. The extension of the contract would be applying Financial Regulation 11.1(a)(iv). The rationale for applying this Financial Regulation, was that a tending process for the exact contract had been completed under a year ago, and there should not be any material changes to the contractor's submissions from the last time the tending process was completed and that due to the current Group's review on public conveniences that it would be unfair for the Council to potentially award the contract to another contractor for a year, before possibly changing the entire contract and the service which is being received by the current contractor is satisfactory and no cause for concern.

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In addition, Members **AGREED to RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** to explore and install an entry/exit counter (similar to the Library) that would assist the Council in understanding the approximate usage of the facilities.

4. Street Cleansing Contract Review

Parish Councillor Lain-Rose introduced the report circulated to Members ahead of the Group meeting. There was extensive discussion by Members regarding the review of the street cleansing contract. The main points that were discussed were:

- This is a specific and specialist contract and some Members believed those other companies that do undertake street cleansing (for example for developers), don't complete the work very efficiently and that our current contractor is undertaking the street cleansing as efficiently as it can.
- Members were surprised at the frequency that Market Street was being swept during the financial year 2017-18, especially due to the number of cars continuously parked in this area, making it extremely difficult to clean effectively.
- Members questioned the method of street cleaning, as Chestnut Avenue was cleaned in August and September, but the rest of the year was untouched, which surprised Members as the chestnut trees there drop debris across the A229 and Chestnut Avenue and during Autumn this road was not cleaned. In addition, Gybbon Rise was hardly touched during the year, however, there is a lot of traffic around that area due to the school.
- Members discussed the value for money for residents, as there is a number of roads being swept 3 times or less per year, whereas others are above 15 times or more per year. Therefore, some residents are receiving value for money and some are not receiving value for money. Parish Councillor Burnham highlighted that residents also utilise other areas of the village and it would not be appropriate to base value for money solely on the number of times each road is cleaned.
- Members discussed the cost of the contract and the other utilisation of the funds to impact the village on tangible outcomes which can be seen by residents.
- Members discussed the impact of withdrawing the contract, and some Members felt that residents would not see a noticeable difference if the contract was not renewed and speculated that there probably wouldn't be an influx of complaints in the office for the Council not contracting this service.
- Members discussed that no other parish council contracts a street cleaner on top of Maidstone Borough Council's statutory duty for street cleansing and that there was not a noticeable impact that Staplehurst's streets were cleaner than Marden or Headcorn where only the Borough Council provides the service.
- Members discussed that Maidstone Borough Council inspects the rural streets and then sends their sweepers out approximately every forty-days and if our contractor had recently cleaned the streets, they would not clean them again. However, residents are paying Maidstone Borough Council for the service through their Council Tax and they may not get the same value as neighbouring parishes from the Borough Council because the Parish Council has contracted this service out also. This could be perceived as double-taxation and a waste of public money.
- Members discussed the lack of control on the contract, where the Council does not dictate the service that we pay for, however, the contract decides the service and charges the Council. There is no other Council contract where this practice takes place. The Council should dictate the level of service and distribute the resources, rather than being directed by the contractor.

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- Members discussed the possibility of the introduction of an Agency Agreement where the Council took on the responsibility of maintaining the streets of Staplehurst on behalf of the Borough Council and suitable funding from Maidstone Borough Council would be devolved to the Parish Council to undertake this (similar to the public toilets grant of £2,500 the Council receives from Maidstone Borough Council). However, this avenue has been explored and due to Maidstone Borough Council being in partnership with other Local Authorities sharing the service, they were unlikely to devolve this and certainly would not devolve funding, as the shared services scheme is saving the Borough Council financially and removing Staplehurst from their route(s) would not provide a meaningful saving to allow this. Therefore, Members felt that this would not be worth pursuing, as without the funding being granted, it would not provide value for money to residents.
- Members discussed the additional work that is listed in the tender submitted in November 2015, other than street cleaning. It was discussed that during the previous financial year 2017-18 there were minimal occasions where bus shelters were recorded as being cleaned and street signage being washed.
- Members discussed the comparisons that could be made between the streets cleaned more often and those left often. It was noted that Bathurst Road (South) was cleaned once during 2017-18 and Surrenden Road was cleaned seven times during the same period and there is not a difference in the cleanliness of the two streets that are adjacent to each other.
- Members generally felt that the cost of the contract could be better spent by the Council on services or improvements that make a greater impact to the Parish and provide greater value for money.
- Members felt that the contract has been running since 2011 and a fair trial of the impact of the service has been provided to the Council, the contractor and the residents.

Members **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** to provide the current contractor (Paxman Services (UK) Ltd.) with notice that the street cleansing contract will not be renewed and will expire on 31 March 2019.

5. Any Other Business

Parish Councillor Paddy Riordan suggested whether the Chairman and the Parish Clerk could agree expenditure relating to the Wimpey Fields for a hose pipe for the water supply fitted on the site. Members **AGREED** that subject to the Chairman and Parish Clerk agreeing that the Wimpey Field Warden should be allowed to purchase the appropriate hose pipe and associated fixtures for the water supply. The Chairman agreed with this.

Parish Councillor Lain-Rose asked Members to consider whether to donate the Trail Cameras to the Kenward Trust, based on the comments raised by Parish Councillor Paddy Riordan at the last Council meeting. Members **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** the donation of the two Trail Cameras to the Kenward Trust for their utilisation.

Parish Councillor Lain-Rose explained that a request for funding from the TN1 Music Festival should be granted. It was explained that Finance & Strategy had discussed and agreed to recommend to Council. However, it is within the Terms of Reference of this Group to consider and make recommendations to Council. Members **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** that £500 should be donated to the TN1 Music Festival for their first year as a one-off donation, similar to the Fireworks donation made the previous year.

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Parish Councillor Lain-Rose explained the donation and grants budget, if agreed by Council, will be almost committed.

6. **Confirmation of the Date of Next Meeting**

Members **CONFIRMED** the next meeting of the Group would be 20 August 2018 at 19:00. The meeting will be held at Parish Office, Village Centre.