

CENTRAL SWINDON NORTH PARISH COUNCIL

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held on 17th March 2020 at 7.00pm

Present Cllr J Ballman (Vice-Chair)
Cllr R Ballman
Cllr S Henderson
Cllr M Lucas
Cllr D Patey
Cllr K Small
Cllr J Yeowell
Cllr S Thompson

Officers Andy Reeves (Parish Clerk)

Virtual Cllr Steph Exell NV
Cllr Paul Exell NV
Allyson King Smith

Public None

465 Apologies

Cllr K Toward-Parker
Cllr J Rodrigues
Cllr P Baker
Cllr D Montaut

466 Declarations of Interest & Applications for Dispensation

Cllr J Ballman declared a non-pecuniary interest in Hreod Burna Urban Forest (HBUF).

Cllr S Thompson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Hreod Burna Urban Forest (HBUF).

Cllr K Small declared an interest in the Moredon Sports Hub as an employee of the FA.

467 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting which took place on Wednesday February 19th 2020 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

468 Covid19 Emergency Measures – Delegated Authority to the Parish Clerk

The Parish Clerk distributed a report; outlining a request for delegated authority to the Parish Clerk and a suite of financial measures Councillors may consider over the coming weeks to mitigate the impact of the Covid19 lockdown.

Cllr Small advised that he agreed with the majority of the report, the Clerk must ensure any decisions should be made on the basis of the agreed budget laid out to Council in January 2020. There has been no changes since that budget although Cllr Small urged Councillors to err on the side of caution as we are unsure how the impending Coronavirus outbreak may affect our finances overall.

Cllr Dave Patey suggested that reserves should be used in an emergency and he had no concerns over aligning reserves to mitigate any impact of Covid19.

Cllr J Ballman asked whether the precept would still be paid by SBC in April & October. The Clerk responded that the Chancellor is today considering further NNDR

relief for businesses; and it is not inconvincible that by April 2020 the same measures could not be in place for Domestic Council Tax.

If not or in tandem with, there may be local arrangements with local Councils to defer or suspend Council tax payments. As of March 16th, we have had no update from SBC as to whether this will be the case.

The Clerk raised the issue over the need for government intervention if the populous cannot work. The Government will either need to underwrite the incomes of those whose businesses will be closed or to suspend debt payments. This could include Domestic Council tax. As a non-essential service Parish and Town Councils may have to rely on a reduced precept. The Clerk advised he will keep Councillors abreast with up to date information as and when Government announce interventions over the coming weeks.

Cllr R Ballman asked if there is a 'buy out' clause if Covid19 changes the Councils finances to such an extent that big projects such as the Moredon Sports Hub for example becomes impossible to continue and the Council can then step back and retract from the project.

The Clerk advised that yes, further time would be needed to assess the impact and that we should expect several months of disruption as the pandemic peaks and falls and potential impact as we then come out the other end of it. The Clerk advised it is highly probable that social distancing measures could be in place for up to a year, this could affect all income generating opportunities.

Cllr Steve Thompson & Cllr Ray Ballman vehemently rejected the suggestion that staff should take a salary cut being proposed.

The Clerk advised Councillors that it is the financial mitigation measures which Council are being asked to consider. If the Chancellor does not implement a salary support scheme, over one third of the Councils precept will be spent servicing salaries of staff whom will be unable to deliver any services. The Clerk also outlined that Parish Council staff could help a coordinated effort to deliver food packages to those residents asked to stay at home.

Cllr Steve Henderson advised the phased drop down of salaries is something that occurs in the NHS although this is often linked to sickness.

Cllr James Yeowell advised that he felt some projects, such as Moredon Sports Hub, could be delayed by a number of years. The Parish Clerk advised it was too early to say.

The Clerk reiterated that the report outlines how the Council will continue to operate in light of the fact that we cannot meet again. Delegated authority, with caveated consultation safeguards with Councillors is the best method. The Clerk also advised this will remain in place until Central Government update legislation to allow virtual decision making meetings to take place.

Cllr Mick Lucas confirmed he is happy for the Clerk to hold delegated authority.

RESOLVED: To implement the content of the Parish Clerks report: With the following changes:

- Reject the 50% reduction of Officer Salaries to a 10% reduction unless the Government devises a salary support scheme. That the Parish Clerk asks contracted staff to temporarily forego their incremental salary increase until the end of the lockdown period.
- Councillors must be asked first whether they accept a first quarter forfeit of their quarterly allowance. Payments to Councillors must be paid if the Councillors request it to be done.
- If Staff incur travelling expenses they should be paid.

469 Moredon Sports Hub

The Clerk presented the report and recommendations of the Finance & Staffing Committee in relation to commencing as operator of the Moredon Sports Hub.

Cllr Small advised as Chair of F&S he felt comfortable that the financial information provided on the revenue impact over the past 6 months is informed and detailed. Cllr Small advised however that the FA would not provide a grant until it was sure the operator support was robust.

In response, Cllr J Ballman raised concerns on the current high level of cancellations to Community Centre and Football bookings; and how long the impact of Coronavirus may last.

Cllr J Ballman wanted this acknowledged as when the Moredon Sports Hub budget was completed in January; there was no sign of the pandemic and Councillors must consider the potential impact with the information we now have. Cllr Ballman suggested that the circumstances of Covid19 meant that many of the decisions taken in January may not be so relevant.

Cllr Small advised that these issues were separate to the Moredon Sports Hub and in the cases Cllr Ballman makes examples of, we must include the savings made from not opening as well as the loss of income. This includes utility savings and casual staff for example.

Cllr Steve Thompson raised concerns over the cost of the project and the environmental impact of the proposed works.

Cllr Steve Henderson sought assurance that we could have confidence in sufficient reserves for such circumstances.

RESOLVED: To accept the recommendations of the Finance & Staffing Committee and proceed with becoming the operator of the Moredon Sports Hub.

Cllr Steve Thompson abstained.

470 Future of Parish Grounds & Street Cleansing Contract 2020-2023/5

Allyson King Smith was bought into the meeting virtually from her home in Kent.

Allyson King Smith presented the pro's and con's of the two proposals of in-house

and idVerde.

Overall it was the general view of Allyson that due to the poor information provided by SBC and the amount of work required in tendering for fleet and stock, leasing a depot and enabling training and health/safety it would be beneficial both financially and

operationally to pursue the outsourced option to the bidder, rather than inherit the service from SBC in its current state. Allyson felt that a later in-house transfer, in year 3, would be more seamless.

Cllr J Ballman asked Allyson about the staffing totals, on the proposal provided by the Clerk it showed 16 members of staff. Cllr Ballman asked about the Contract Manager. Allyson confirmed that everyone on the staffing chart from CM and below is dedicated ENTIRELY to the Parish Council. Staffing above this line is 'shared' including the regional director team, mechanics and support staff.

Cllr Small asked whether the Contract Supervisor is dedicated to the Parish Council, it was confirmed this is the case. Allyson confirmed the total number of staff to be employed by idVerde is 16 FTE.

Cllr Steve Henderson asked about whether staff would be paid the Living Wage. Allyson advised that staff are paid a real living wage. Cllr Dave Patey advised that he felt this was not the case and only where new contracts are taken on.

Allyson advised that new staff would be paid at least £9.30 per hour and that TUPE staff would be paid at their inherent NJC rate or equivalent thereof.

Cllr Dave Patey commented on the vast difference in cost between in-house and idVerde and he could see little justification for the additional cost to bring the service in-house.

Cllr J Ballman asked about a Community Fund. It was confirmed that idVerde do have a community fund and an annual voluntary day where all staff work for free on a local 'Splash'. One example was in Northwich Council idVerde worked with a SEND school and helped children plant a sensory garden.

Cllr J Ballman asked whether an allotment team could be created separately to idVerde. Allyson advised this would be permissible.

The Parish Clerk advised that procurement for vehicles could be negotiated through idVerde for a better rate.

Cllr Small raised a query on page 9 of the report, option 2 for in-house includes Capital expenditure. Cllr Small advised that by removing the capital and capital servicing expenditure costs from the in-house budget means that the cost is broadly less than that of the contractor. Allyson confirmed this was correct.

Cllr Small advised that if the Parish Council borrowed the Capital from the PWLB separately, the ongoing revenue would be broadly less than £500,000 per annum. Allyson advised this was correct however you would still need to service the borrowing and include some mobilisation costs. This was also based on the existing service inherited from SBC which in terms of staffing is around 8FTE.

Cllr Ray Ballman advised that 16 FTE are being offered by IDV, the risks associated with the unknowns of TUPE pensions and training is too vast for the Parish Council to assume this risk and that we could not guarantee a good level of service. It would be

beneficial for this risk to sit with experts.

Cllr J Ballman outlined the need for accurate data and that SBC has poor data which idVerde can resolve for the Council. Allyson and the Clerk advised that there is provision within the arrangement for data to be held by the Parish Council at the conclusion of any contractual arrangement. All intellectual data, except some HR details, remains the property of Central Swindon North Parish Council.

Cllr Small asked about evidence and how we can hold an external contractor to account. Cllr Ballman replied that KPIs would be provided on a Neighbourhood breakdown and the same breakdown of cost could also be achieved.

The Clerk confirmed that any KPI metric can be agreed within reason and if Councillors decide the idVerde option then suggested KPIs would be forwarded.

Allyson King Smith dialled out of the meeting at this point.

Cllr J Ballman advised that all Councillors present had had an opportunity to meet and challenge IDVerde with the exception of Cllr Small and that Councillors should have sufficient information to make an informed decision.

Cllr J Ballman proposed to Council that they accept the option of novating the Grounds & Street Cleansing services to idVerde as outlined in the report for a period of 3+2 years.

Cllr Mick Lucas seconded the proposal.

Cllr Patey advised that he had read of poor reviews from employees working for idVerde on employee satisfaction aggregate websites. Cllr Patey acknowledged that it is more likely these could be employees with a particular issue.

Cllr Small advised he felt the proposition by Councillor J Ballman is the wrong decision. Cllr Small felt the flexibility and service level of an inhouse option cannot be matched by a private sector commissioned agreement. Cllr Small confirmed he was vehemently against a commissioned model.

Cllr Small advised he felt it was unacceptable given political allegiances of some Councillors to vote in favour of a private sector provider.

Cllr Small felt it was unfair for those unable to attend due to Covid19 to not have the ability to vote.

Cllr Henderson felt that he had no challenge on working with a private organisation on a point of philosophy, given the difficulty the Parish has in making clear assessment about the service under consideration. Cllr Henderson felt a justification to support the proposal due to the lack of robust data from the present provider of the Streetsmart service and that the Parish could review its options within a 3-5 year period from commencement. He also sought assurance that the Parish Council are not short changed and a robust agreement is required.

Cllr Mick Lucas advised that Exceeding will support the Clerk in ensuring the contract is legally robust.

RESOLVED: To proceed with idVerde as Grounds Maintenance & Street Cleansing provider from July 2020 for a period of 3 plus 2 years. (2023-2025)

Cllr Kevin Small wished for it to be noted he voted against.

Cllr James Yeowell abstained. James Yeowell abstained on the basis he felt those who were self-isolating should have been given the opportunity to vote and they were denied this through ill-health.

Cllr Small advised that after the Covid19 pandemic he will step down as Chair of the Finance & Staffing Committee. Cllr J Ballman advised his regret but accepted Cllr Smalls views.

Cllr J Ballman asked Council to review the SBC recommended Public Question Time agenda heading and advised this statement provides the public with a clear steer of how they can conduct their questioning in a fair way the future.

The meeting closed at 8.44pm

Signed.....

Date.....

Vice-chair of the Council