

Minutes of the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Held at 7pm on Monday 25th March, 2024 at the Council Chamber Corby Cube,
Corby, NN17 1QG

Present: -

Members

Councillor Graham Lawman (Chair)

Councillor Valerie Anslow

Councillor Melanie Coleman

Councillor Emily Fedorowycz

Councillor Philip Irwin (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Macaulay Nichol

Councillor Mark Pengelly

Councillor Lee Wilkes

Officers

Kerry Purnell, Assistant Director Communities and Leisure;

Graeme Kane, Assistant Director Highways and Waste

Jonathan Waterworth, Assistant Director Assets and Environment

Jane Bethea, Director of Health

Lyn Gray, Strategic Corporate Property Manager,

Charlotte Tompkins, Waste Services Manager,

Kunwar Khan, Scrutiny Manager (Interim)

Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer (Committees/Members)

Emma Robinson, Democratic Services Support Officer

Also, in attendance - Councillor Helen Howell, Executive member.

The chair welcomed all present and the viewing public to the meeting.

34 Apologies for absence

Resolved to note that an apology for absence was received from Councillor G Shacklock.

35 Election of Vice Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Wilkes and seconded by Councillor Coleman that Councillor P Irwin be elected as vice-chair for the remainder of the municipal year.

Resolved that Councillor Irwin be elected as vice-chair for the remainder of the municipal year.

36 Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2024

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37 Declarations of Interest

The Chairman invited Members to make any relevant declaration of interest in respect of any items on the agenda.

Resolved that the following declarations be noted:

- Cllrs Anslow, Irwin and G Lawman each made a personal declaration on agenda item 8 - Asset Rationalisation and Use - Scrutiny Panel Feedback, as a member of Wellingborough Town Council.
- Cllr Pengelly made a personal declaration on the same agenda item, as a member of Corby Town Council.

38 Notification of requests to attend the meeting

Seven requests to speak had been received on minute 39, The future of Kettering Leisure Village - Options Review; one person had withdrawn their request and two speakers were not present.

39 The Future of Kettering Leisure Village - Options Review

As requested and agreed, the Chairman invited Councillors Hakewill, Lee, Pandey and Watts to speak in relation to agenda item 6 – the Future of Kettering Leisure Village - Options Review. In summary, the following key points were made during their representation:

- Kettering Leisure Village (KLV) was a critical asset to North Northamptonshire Council (NNC)
- Disappointment that the company, which had drawn up the options appraisal, was not present for the committee to scrutinise them directly, however, the Executive Member and senior officer responsible were present to respond to any questions and to provide specific details.
- Members were concerned that the report needed to include more financial details and conveyed their preference for NNC to bring KLV back under the control of the council. They sought the re-introduction of the services that had closed. They gave their full support to staff and users of the facility and asked whether the Council's Leisure Strategy could be brought forward earlier to encompass the future of KLV.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their input on this item which provided further context and wider representation on this important item to be considered by the committee.

The Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee noted the circulated joint report of the Assistant Director Communities and Leisure and Assistant Director Assets and Environment, including the consultant's appraisal, in relation to the Options Review for Kettering Leisure Village. The Chairman invited the relevant officers to present the report, highlighting salient points.

Mrs Purnell presented the report to committee, explaining that Compass Contracts Services UK Ltd (CCS) had decided to close KLV in 2023. Action was taken by the council, executive and officers along with CCS and the leaseholder of the site, Phoenix Leisure Management (PLMS) to broker an interim solution to enable the site to remain open and to develop an options appraisal for the longer-term operation of the site.

The history of the site in relation to the legal ownership was explained, informing the committee that KLV had been built in 1991/92 and consisted of a sports hall, conferencing centre, meeting rooms, bars, concert venue, creche and theatre.

The former Kettering Borough Council had been granted a lease for the site by BQ Farms Limited for a term of 125 years at a peppercorn rent. Such lease expires in 2116. In 2000, KBC granted an underlease of KLV to PLMS via a co-terminus lease expiring in 2116 and ownership sits with PLMS until such time. The council does not have control of the site but must work proactively with PLMS to mitigate any repair obligations and other lease covenants to avoid a breach of the council's covenants.

The report detailed the current position in relation to KLV and introduced a business case, including associated options appraisal, setting out details of the agreements between North Northamptonshire Council and PLMS. The report also clarified the legal ownership of the site detailing how limited the council's options were in regard to exercising control. It also informed of the options that may be available, should the site come back into the control of the council at any point.

The report detailed the key findings of the options review by Max Associates.

It was reiterated that, due to the above legal position, there is little that the council can do at the current time other than to offer its support to PLMS with the work they are undertaking.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Purnell for her detailed report and informed the committee that Councillor Hakewill was filming the meeting, noting that it was expected that the meeting be informed to enable any member of the public not wishing to be filmed to avoid it.

He opened the item up for debate.

Members discussed the options review and expressed disappointment that Max Associates were not present to answer questions directly.

The committee wished to continue to support and retain KLV as a strategic and important asset for North Northamptonshire and the more local community of Kettering.

It was considered that PLMS needed to gain as much support and engage with as many people as possible to ensure that people used the facility fully. The Conference Centre and soft play needed to reopen and the business needed to grow to sustain itself for the future.

Members noted the legal position that the council was in and appreciated that there was little the council could do, other than give its support.

They commented on the grant funding that was given to KLV, which was substantial, and asked how financial risk was monitored. Officers clarified that they currently held monthly meetings with PLMS.

Members commended the hard work of officers in working with PLMS, to keep KLV open, which was very appreciated.

They considered that more knowledge of the financial position and sustainability of KLV remaining operational was required. They also asked if it would be a more viable option for leisure services to be brought 'in-house' in the future and asked how developments with the Leisure Strategy were progressing. Officers clarified that the strategy would be coming forward in 2025.

The committee's preference and priority was to ensure the long-term sustainability of KLV including the continued growth of theatre and other community activities. They were also keen to see the theatre continue to grow. Officers confirmed that production bookings were made 18-24 months in advance and there was work ongoing with PLMS to support them to develop a longer-term business plan for the Lighthouse Theatre.

It was accepted that the current position was not ideal; there were questions over the limited options available. Comments were also made that there had been little consultation with councillors and users of the site by Max Associates. It was also considered that there needed to be a more positive publicity campaign and that the public needed to add their support to the venue.

Members also commended and thanked PLMS for stepping in when CCS had closed the venue, they appreciated that PLMS had a desire for this to work and that they needed support to assist them in doing so.

Resolved:

Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Executive that:

- i. Officers be thanked for the considerable piece of work undertaken and for supporting the ongoing business growth and continuing work with PLMS;
- ii. The following key points be carefully considered and noted by the Executive when making the decision:
 - a. the position regarding the legal ownership of the KLV site arising from the nature of the council's and PLMS's leasehold interest;
 - b. the Options Review by Max Associates and that such options predicate the council having full control of the site, which is not currently the case;
 - c. the council is neither able to take control nor the day to day running of KLV under options identified in the Options Review due to the nature of the lease arrangements;
 - d. should the site return to the full control of the council, in the short term, an external contractor would be the most sustainable solution as recommended within the Options Review; there would also be considerable budgetary pressures whilst the wider management model for the council's entire leisure portfolio was considered;

e. KLV was of great importance to North Northamptonshire and the local community and that PLMS should be encouraged to engage with users, councillors, stakeholders and parish and town councils; and any business plan, financial projections and costings along with other data from PLMS be reviewed on a regular basis.

40 Waste Management Three Year Plan (Update)

The circulated joint report of the Assistant Director, Highways and Waste, Graeme Kane and the Waste Services Manager, Charlotte Tompkins, was received.

Mr. Kane presented the report and explained that in September 2022, the Executive approved the council's first Waste Management Three Year Plan (2022-2025) and that this report provided an update on the progress made.

Reference was made to the future delivery of waste collection and street cleaning services in the East Northamptonshire area with the committee being asked to consider what future delivery model they deemed would be most suitable.

The report detailed items included in the three-year plan and how this was currently operated, having progressed the harmonisation of services inherited from the former borough and district councils, along with the development of the service to reflect emerging Government regulations and guidance.

The Government's plans to reform waste through its Simpler Recycling Strategy would ensure that people across England would be able to recycle the same materials wherever they lived for the benefit of the environment. This had taken longer to implement than expected and some of the work on the three-year plan had been delayed because of this.

Details of the actions from the three-year plan that had been completed were contained within the report. Further actions yet to be implemented, originating from the three-year plan were also detailed within the report.

The committee was being asked to review the plan, including the progress made and the items to be completed, and to recommend the options for East Northamptonshire for the Executive to consider.

Such options included an extension to the contract with the current provider for up to a further seven years or to bring the service in-house. By bringing the service in-house, it would mean that all services are delivered directly by the council's in-house teams. This would enable the authority to continue the integration of collection rounds and utilise resources across the boundaries of the former borough and districts.

A financial analysis based on the cost of delivering the services could mean that whichever delivery model was more cost-effective would be the basis for the decision. Whilst this had not been carried out yet, potentially the external provider could be better value for money than an in-house service and the contract could be extended, resulting in a mixed approach to service delivery.

Should the contract be extended, the Executive could take time to consider its longer-term approach to delivering the services for the future and determine whether it

wanted to externalise all the waste collection services through a procurement exercise or whether it wished to integrate them into one directly delivered in-house model.

Consideration could also be given to the establishment of an arms-length organisation to deliver those services on behalf of the council.

The chairman thanked Mr Kane for his report and opened it up for debate.

The committee considered the report and thanked officers for the considerable progress made with the three-year plan.

They asked questions about the provider for East Northamptonshire and questioned if such provider could potentially take over the provision of service for the whole of Northamptonshire and whether it was unusual for there to be an in-house team and an outside provider. Officers clarified that it was not usual practice but if it worked well and was a good and efficient service then there was no need to not do so.

Some Members considered that it would be more streamlined to have everything in-house and noted that there had been some teething problems when the former Norse contract in the Wellingborough area had come back in-house, though these had been resolved. Officers clarified that the contract with Norse had come to an end, so it had been easier to bring the services back in-house.

Members considered that the best option may be to encourage a short extension to the current contract as it appeared to work well, this would enable more discussions to take place about the future service and how it should be provided.

Regarding the three-year plan members raised concerns about public waste bins and street bins, needing to be made more effective with separate recycling areas. This was noted.

The committee commended and thanked officers for the way in which the service had progressed and would continue to progress. Future food collection implementation was welcomed, and the need for more commercial recycling was raised. Officers clarified that over £1m was generated from commercial waste and that the service ran very successfully.

Accessibility to recycling centres was mentioned, along with the introduction of WEEE doorstep collections. Comments were made about the implementation of an intensive education programme for the public as mistakes were still made over what went in which bin. It was considered that often when children were highly educated on the subject they would go home and encourage their parents to recycle more efficiently.

Officers were asked about the number of electric vehicles in situ. It was confirmed that there were eight vehicles on the way, one refuse vehicle was already located in Wellingborough. Further consideration of provision would be made once the current contracts expired but it was noted that vehicles were extremely expensive whether it was to buy or via a lease.

The chairman thanked members for their input and comments made around the East Northamptonshire contract which concluded that a short extension to the current contract be considered, whilst deciding on the future delivery of the service.

Resolved:

Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee:

- i Appreciates the progress made against the Waste Management three-plan and it be noted;
- ii Asks the Executive to carefully consider the remaining actions to be delivered;
- iii Proposes to the Executive that a two-to-three-year extension to the current contract for the waste collection service in East Northamptonshire be considered whilst deciding on the options for the most sustainable and effective way in which future delivery of the service could be undertaken.

41 Asset Rationalisation and Use - Scrutiny Panel Feedback

The circulated report of the Assistant Director Assets and Environment, Jonathan Waterworth, was received to provide a summary of the Asset Rationalisation & Use Scrutiny Panel's findings and recommendations on the use of the council's office estate.

He presented the findings to the committee and the recommendations to either utilise, consolidate or exit some of the current buildings.

Members discussed the findings and raised some concern that both the council buildings in Wellingborough would no longer be used as office space, but would be retained for community use. It was considered imperative that there remained a presence in Wellingborough and that offices and parking be available for those staff who wished to work in that location and for the public to visit. The offices were used for many meetings, both internally by officers and by external organisations, the building having both a council chamber and a smaller room and these would need to be replicated elsewhere. Weddings were also held in the Council Chamber. There was also a query over what 'community use' the Swanspool House building, could be used for, if it was deemed unsuitable to be used for office space due to its design as a house, listed status and costs to remove the extension. Croyland Hall and Abbey were suggested as potential bases for community access to services.

Further questions over the retention of some of the less visually attractive buildings was also raised. The officer clarified that some that were being questioned were the subject of long leases that would be costly to exit, and the offices remained fit for purpose. Members suggested consideration be given to converting unused offices to residential accommodation.

It was clarified that before a final decision was made, there would be a consultation period with trade unions and staff.

The committee wished to continue to hold the Asset Rationalisation & Use Scrutiny Panel and asked that new membership thereof be considered with future discussion topics to include the Energy Efficiency Standards Regulations and the Council's Commercial Estate, along with consideration of any further policy development. Members need not be members of this scrutiny committee to sit on the panel.

Resolved:

Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee:

- i Applauds the work undertaken by the Asset Rationalisation & Use Scrutiny Panel;
- ii Recommends to Executive that the findings of the Panel and future consultation with users be taken on board when making any decisions; and
- iii Wish to continue to hold the panel meetings with updated membership to consider energy efficiency, future commercial portfolio and any relevant policy improvements.

42 Close of Meeting

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and closed the meeting at 9.45pm.