

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
19 January 2021**

Present:

Councillor V.J. Leighton (Chairman)
Councillor O. Rybinski (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

C.L. Barratt	T. Fidler	N. Islam
J.H.J. Doerfel	M. Gibson	T. Lagden
J.T.F. Doran	A.C. Harman	L. E. Nichols
R.D. Dunn	I.T.E. Harvey	D. Saliagopoulos

In attendance:

Councillors: M. Attewell, R.O. Barratt, C. Bateson, I.J. Beardsmore, S. Buttar, R. Chandler, S.A. Dunn, K.M. Grant, R.J. Noble, R.W. Sider.

Apologies: None.

6/21 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2020 were approved as a correct record.

7/21 Disclosures of Interest

There were none.

8/21 Call-in of Cabinet decisions

No Cabinet decisions have been called in.

9/21 Cabinet Forward Plan

The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.

10/21 The Lower Sunbury Lendy Memorial Lion

The (Joint) Group Head Community Wellbeing introduced the report and explained that the Committee needed to consider two issues; the report written about the Lendy memorial by Alan Doyle and to recommend to Cabinet a course of action based on the information currently available and whether to accept the offer of supporting an application to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for a grant to undertake further research on the Lendy statue.

The Committee scrutinised the officers report and discussed each issue in turn.

On the first issue Members noted the online petition to save the Lendy Memorial had over 2,100 signatures and that the local community had expressed their support for the Memorial in posts on the Council's social media accounts.

The Committee felt strongly that the Council should listen to the community and ensure the memorial remain in situ with the coverings removed.

Members noted that the police had contacted officers and advised them to protect the memorial as there were concerns for its safety but agreed they did not believe there was any evidence to suggest the memorial was in danger at present. Members discussed the possibility of installing CCTV at the site but concluded it was not necessary.

Members strongly agreed that they would like information to be provided about the memorial in an appropriate format at the site.

Members noted the academics proposal and their intention to carry out the research with or without the Council's support.

The Committee thanked Mr Doyle for his thorough, impartial, and considered report which informed the debate and concluded that the memorial was erected by the local community in remembrance of two local brothers who fought in wars and distinguished themselves on the continent of Africa in the 19th century.

On the second issue, members agreed that they would like information to be provided about the memorial in an appropriate format at the site. Some members queried the provenance of the academics, who were reported to specialise in the history of North East Africa and the Caribbean, whereas the Lendy brothers had been posted to South East Africa.

The Committee were divided on the matter. Some members considered that Mr Doyle's report covered the points listed for research in the academics' proposal whilst others thought the Council should consider information provided from all sources.

The Committee noted that legislation is proposed to ensure that decisions on statues are made locally after public consultation.

The Committee, whilst resolving to provide a letter of support for the academics, did so by a tight margin of 7 votes to 5 with two members choosing to abstain.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

Recommendation 1:

- i. The Council supports the views of residents, as expressed in the petition. The statue should immediately be uncovered and left in place.

- ii. The Council provides at the site a plaque containing historical information, with more detailed information available, for example through a QR code.
- iii. The Committee agrees that the Council works with local informed sources and their wealth of information so other suggestions for ensuring access to detailed background information can be pursued, such as a booklet in the Embroidery Gallery and the involvement of the well-respected local history society.

Recommendation 2:

- i. Spelthorne provides a letter of support for the proposed application to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for a grant for academics to undertake further research on the Lendy statue.
- ii. Should any new information come to light the Council will review it and come to its own decision.
- iii. That this resolution should not delay the actions proposed in recommendation 1.

11/21 Outline Budget 2021-2025

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report.

The Chairman explained that she had arranged for the report to come before the Committee to provide an opportunity for all political groups to have greater involvement in the budget process at scrutiny level and to give members the chance to comment put forward their views on the matters to be considered when setting the budget. Unfortunately, due to the pressures of COVID, the Council's central government funding being agreed just before Christmas meant/. officers could not provide the report any earlier.

The Committee raised a number of queries on specific items which officers responded to at the meeting or agreed to look into and provide a written answer.

Members expressed concern that a press release regarding a proposed Council Tax freeze proposed by the Administration was released prior to the report going through the full reporting process.

The Committee noted that they would have the opportunity to ask further questions at the extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny meeting taking place on 9 February 2021 at which the Administration's final draft Budget proposals would be available for scrutiny.

The Committee noted the report on the Outline Budget 2021-2025.

12/21 Reserves Policy

The Chief Accountant introduced the report and in response to members confirmed that the Council's reserves had increased significantly over the last ten years as part of its risk mitigation strategy

The Committee considered the Reserves Policy and agreed to note the report.

13/21 Treasury Management Strategy - half yearly report

The Deputy Chief Accountant introduced the report.

The Committee scrutinised the report and noted that it reflected the position as at the end of September 2020.

The Committee acknowledged that the report could have been timelier but had been delayed due to a number of challenges including those relating to COVID and staffing changes and timing of the November Committee meeting.

Members of the Committee agreed that they would like the Council to review their investments with a view that they seek to identify ethical investment opportunities. Officers advised that this had been noted and Arlingclose were aware and had made the point that they needed to balance the financial interests of the Council. Councillors Buttar and Noble also confirmed that Cabinet were mindful of the Committees wishes on this matter.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

14/21 Treasury Management Strategy Statement

The Deputy Chief Accountant introduced the report and advised the Committee that it was currently in draft form and would be considered by Cabinet on 24 February 2021.

Members agreed to note the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2021.

15/21 Work Programme

The Chairman introduced the item and explained that the Council had taken the difficult decision to postpone the extraordinary meeting on the review of the EcoPark that had been due to take place on 2 February 2021. The Chairman explained that the Councils Environmental Health officers had been put under enormous pressure as they work to ensure that businesses are COVID compliant. The Chairman acknowledged that the postponement would be disappointing for the boroughs residents and have assurance that the meeting would be re-arranged as soon as it was possible to do so.

The Committee agreed to note the work programme.

16/21 Updates from Task Groups

The Committee noted a written update from the Climate Change task group and a verbal update on the End of Life Celebration Centre both presented by Cllr Noble.

The Committee noted that the Climate Change task group had established a Financial Investments Review sub-group to look at the nature of the Council's investments and a longer-term strategy for moving towards greener investments.

Cllr Noble informed the Committee that the End of Life Celebration task group had not been able to meet due to the pandemic and officer availability.

The Committee noted that the Clean Streets task group were going to meet to discuss what they wanted to do going forward and thus did not feel it was appropriate to decide whether to appoint other members or to co-opt Cllr Gething at the meeting. Cllr Gibson praised the work of Spelthorne Litter Pickers which was echoed by the Committee.

The Committee noted the updates.

17/21 Exempt Business

The Chairman advised the Committee that item 14 (Corporate Project Management) contained an exempt appendix to the report and that should members wish to ask a question or discuss the content of the appendix the Committee would need to move into a closed session.

Resolved to move the exclusion of the Press and Public to allow the Committee to ask questions on the confidential information contained in appendix 4 in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 and by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006.

18/21 Corporate Project Management

The Committee noted that improvements to how the RAG ratings were presented had been made and thanked Cllr Noble and officers for their work on this.

The Committee expressed concern about the lack of confidential information on development schemes provided on this occasion and noted that as an Extraordinary Council meeting was to be held two days later to discuss development projects, Cabinet had considered that all councillors had had access to the information and an opportunity to comment on it at that meeting, and therefore it made sense to avoid having duplicate discussions.

Members raised a number of queries on the Sunbury leisure centre, which officers responded to or agreed to look into and provide a written answer.

The Committee agreed to note the update.