

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
29 November 2016**

Present:

Councillor C.A. Davis (Chairman)
Councillor S.C. Mooney (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

R.O. Barratt	M.P.C. Francis	R.A. Smith-Ainsley
S.M. Doran	A.L. Griffiths	
K. Flurry	J.G. Kavanagh	

Apologies: Councillors S.J. Burkmar, S. Capes, N. Islam, O. Rybinski and B.B. Spoor

259/16 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2016 were approved as a correct record.

260/16 Disclosures of Interest

There were none.

261/16 Call-in of Cabinet decisions

No Cabinet decisions had been called in for review.

262/16 Review of Taxi Licensing

The Licensing Manager highlighted the main points of her report and in particular addressed the issues raised by members of the taxi trade in the comments they had submitted for this review in relation to Gresham Road taxi rank and Staines Cars, the “marshalling scheme”, provision of other ranks and other operators licensed in neighbouring boroughs e.g Uber.

She confirmed that: the Council was willing to approach the railway companies again to explore the potential to negotiate the additional provision of ranks at Shepperton and Sunbury stations; there was potential to revisit the provision of a rank at Staines Bus station; and the rank outside Communications House, Staines-upon-Thames could be decommissioned.

Three taxi drivers attended the meeting and made the following comments:

- the situation at Gresham Road had not changed, with taxis still regularly over ranking

- an assessment of public safety in Gresham Road should be done on more than one occasion
- the rank at Communications House is adequate but would be used more if it had a shelter and signage to show where it is
- signage throughout the borough is not big enough.
- more ranks are needed for drivers to use during the day. The only ones they can use are Gresham Road and the other side of Staines station. Ranks at Shepperton and Ashford stations should be put on the side of the road not on station land.
- one driver was in favour of the “marshalling scheme” as he said that it made the area safer and reduced arguments between drivers
- if the Council charged higher fees then it would have more resources to undertake enforcement.

The Licensing Manager explained that with limited resources for enforcement the Council has to prioritise its time appropriately using a risk based approach; the priority being the safety of the travelling public. Although the Council had obligations to enforce regulations this was only a small part of what it did. Its primary purpose was to process applications not only for taxi and private hire licences but also those under the Licensing and Gambling Acts and for street trading.

The Committee asked whether there was scope to ease pressure on the Gresham Road rank by opening up ranks elsewhere in the Borough primarily at the stations, providing drivers with other opportunities of picking up a fare.

In response to councillors’ comments the Senior Environmental Health Manager agreed that the Council would research rank locations over the next few months. In doing so, we would look at what will work, what is practicable, what is safe, what Surrey County Council will permit us to do and what is best for the drivers.

Members asked why the Council did not take action against drivers using the “marshalling scheme” to wait for a space on the Gresham Road rank when bylaws require them to proceed to another stand. The Licensing Manager explained that marshalling schemes were not unlawful in themselves. Whether the Council agrees with “the scheme” or not, unless the drivers are breaking the law or conducting dangerous manoeuvres, for example, then we are powerless to act. Although the Council knows anecdotally that the drivers phone someone else in the “system” that a space is becoming free, unless officers see it happening (e.g. observing the same car circulating the area near the rank), they have no evidence on which to take action.

Members suggested setting up a Task Group to look at the provision of ranks and, taking on board the taxi drivers’ concerns, the Chairman suggested that the drivers present attend the Task Group to assist and feed in their comments.

The Chairman, Councillor Davis, asked Councillor Smith-Ainsley to lead on this Task Group with Councillors Griffiths and Flurry and bring recommendations back to this Committee at its next meeting.

Resolved to:

1. note the report on a review of taxi licensing and
2. set up a Task Group led by Councillor R. Smith-Ainsley, with Councillors K. Flurry and A. Griffiths, and assisted by taxi drivers, to review the provision of taxi ranks in the Borough and bring recommendations back to the next meeting of this Committee.

263/16 Capital Monitoring

The Committee received the Capital Monitoring report covering the period April to September 2016.

The Principal Accountant advised that for the period ending September 2016, capital expenditure including commitments was £383.527m (87.54%) of the revised budget (excluding the Knowle Green project and £1.1m of the Housing opportunity project).

The projected outturn showed that we were anticipating to spend £405.161m which represented (92.48%) of the revised budget. He explained that £8.1m of the £8.2m that had been allocated for the Housing, and Knowle Green relocation, projects may not be spent in the current financial year. This was due to the delay in the decision to move the Council offices away from Knowle Green and not having spent all the allocated funds for the Council to purchase property for housing opportunities. He confirmed that the under spends were being monitored and if not completed would be carried forward at year end.

Resolved to note the current capital spend position.

264/16 Revenue Monitoring

The Committee received the Revenue Monitoring Report providing the net revenue spend figures to the end of September 2016.

The Principal Accountant advised that the forecast outturn at net expenditure level was £7.250m against the revised budget of £14.890m; a projected favourable variance of £7.640m. The Committee noted that after taking into account the use of carry forwards, interest earnings and repayments the net position was approximately £3.968m favourable variance.

The Principal Accountant explained the reason for this dramatic change of position was a result of purchasing the BP site in Sunbury and receiving the net rental income from the end of September 2016 onward. The net surplus generated from this would be set aside to build the initial basis of a reserve to

fund potential refitting (not repairs – which are covered by the lease being full repairing) costs at the end of the initial 20 year lease period.

Resolved to note the current net revenue spend and forecast position.

265/16 Cabinet Forward Plan

The Committee considered the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Resolved to note the Cabinet Forward Plan.

266/16 Work Programme

The Committee considered its work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2016/17.

Resolved to note the Work Programme for 2016/17.

Season's Greetings

This being the last meeting before the end of the year, the Chairman wished all those present a very merry Christmas.