

Agenda item: FC 154/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 7th February 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the council on issues of rats and the proposed addressing of this by MKC.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the Council notes this report.**
- 2. That MKC Elected members follow up with MKC officers to see what the outcomes are.**
- 3. That if / when any further information is forthcoming, a further discussion takes place to decide if any WCC action is needed / any WCC influence could bring better outcomes.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Following significant pressure from many agencies, MKC commenced some work last year to try and address the issue of rats across the city, including within the parish of Woughton.

This was principally the provision of 'bait boxes' in key areas, which were identified as Coffee Hall and Netherfield, but we are aware of other works undertaken on Peartree Bridge. This was part of a £140,000 investment in late 2020, working with Luton Borough Council pest control service.

More recently, an annual £120,000 budget has been agreed for continuing works.

MMC do not provide an in-house pest control service, but do have preferential rates with external companies, including discounts for households on specific benefits. However, this is not suitable for any issues outside the house. There is some work that has been investigated where infestation is because of neighbouring properties, especially where a terrace is joined and therefore rats move freely between them.

Concerns have been expressed about the lack of consultation or involvement from WCC, Resident Groups, tenants or others in terms of how the programme was delivered but, despite several written requests for a update and information about the success or otherwise of the programme, at time of writing the Council Manager has not had any response, other than a message in October saying that a 'roundtable discussion' had taken place with councillors and that a further meeting was booked for November. This was then followed with a further email in January requesting an update, to which there has again been no response.

Over recent days (end January 2022), there have been local news stories regarding the situation, where MKC Councillors from different political parties, have been

exchanging press releases about the situation, with demands for dedicated teams, statements regarding extra funding and that street cleaning and wheelie bins will help improve the situation.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

The lack of reporting on this issue and apparent unwillingness of those providing to offer outcomes is a concern – the Council Manager would encourage the MKC ‘Dual Hatters’ to progress this within MKC to try and find what has / hasn’t happened.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR:

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 158/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 7th February 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the council on activities and delegated decisions made since the previous meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the council notes the report.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Since the last Full Council meeting, the following meetings, visits and activities have taken place which may (or may not) be of interest:

- Plan B restrictions have been removed, so some additional flexibility, despite relatively high levels of infections still being seen. Paper for discussion at this meeting.
- Useful meeting to start exploring the Youth Council, with a view to having elections in place to run alongside the WCC Elections in May2023, but potential for something in place prior to this, as a pilot scheme. Proposal is that we look to mirror the 'adult' council as closely as possible, with Chair and Vice, meetings, minutes, actions, etc. More as this is developed, in line with the service plan. This has also included some discussions with other local councils who are either considering or in the process of starting similar approaches.
- I have met with representatives from Willen Hospice to look at how we might work collaboratively to support Woughton residents who are being supported by Willen. Early stages but some potential for nice, joined up working.
- Following an introduction from Cllr Ferguson, I have spoken with MK Play Association about the potential for them to deliver services on parish. Whilst it would appear that they offer very similar activities to Play Rangers, there may be some joint approaches that would benefit all (they are looking at Craft Sheds in schools, use of the Scrap Store to benefit these, some 'how to play with your kids' sessions). I am waiting for further details from MKPA to see if they can enhance what is already in place.
- Samone (RFO) and I met with Cloudy IT to review the annual payment, following news that Microsoft are increasing prices. We are working with Cloudy to see if there are alternative options to minimize impact and looks like potential for some changes and savings. We have also continued discussions around the various 'apps' that Cloudy are developing for us (and others) and should see something during February.

- Discussions started regarding the proposed carnival over Jubilee weekend – there was a general feeling that this would be too much for resident associations, so a review will need to take place into what might happen instead, if carnival, in its traditional sense, cannot take place.
- I have had two separate sessions looking at standards in public life and Code of Conduct, which seem to be current issues across all sections of government. The MK Council session was well attended by both Councillors and clerks and included some excellent ‘scenario’
- questions which showed how difficult some of the decisions can be. The session with Scribe (our accounts system provider) was less stimulating and I was disappointed to see a social media post the following day with inaccurate information from this session.
- I had an online session with MKC Highways colleagues – some discussions around festive lights, hanging dog bins on lampposts and similar. Limited value in terms of the issues for Woughton – street light failures, pot holes and so on. However, some encouragement to follow up with the relevant officers to see what actions can be taken.
- Also met with Tom Malloy regarding a proposal to open a library in Netherfield Enterprise Centre sometime over the next couple of months. This is a positive step, but also has some potential downsides – the space is relatively small, it is at the back of the centre, so not directly accessible from the road and could be seen by some as something less than is deserved for a parish with limited access to so much. However, if seen as it is intended, a ‘stop gap’ whilst a bigger, better and more inclusive community resource is built, then this is something that has the potential to bring benefits to the local community.
- There was also a meeting with David from MKC who manages the ‘Love Exploring’ app – the scheme that encourages walking and exploring to bring health benefits, using technology to do so. They have previously offered the Halloween Dance Train and over winter, Fairly Trails. The next one will be dinosaurs, looking to link into Sara on Peartree Bridge. We will also be working with them to see if we can bring some art trail approaches to the parish.

You may have seen that the old Depot on Peartree Bridge is being auctioned off, with an expected sale price of £7,000. This has resulted in the moving of our notice board as this was, apparently, on the land associated with the depot. MKC have arranged this and have moved it down the road.

Due to the pushing back of last months meeting, this is a shortish report – with the restrictions easing and spring in the air, it feels more positive than it has for a while (although we have been here before!).

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 7th February 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To provide an initial report into accessibility issues at WCC buildings.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the Council notes this report.**
- 2. That improvements around accessibility are considered when the fuller improvement plans are developed, with costs considered and budget allocated / funding applied for.**
- 3. That regular checks are undertaken by officers to ensure accessibility is maintained where possible.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Following a request from a resident and as part of a wider assessment of WCC buildings, early consideration of issues around accessibility has been undertaken, with this paper as the first report into this.

Accessibility is more than simply a ramp to enable access – it includes suitable facilities within the centres, design that incorporates all users (current or potential) and aims to enable as many as possible to undertake as much as possible, bringing equality of opportunity to our services.

The initial question was specifically around pull cords in bathrooms and ease of access for wheelchair users. In this respect, things are relatively good – all bathrooms checked had working alarm systems, with pull cords that were suitably labelled and reset buttons that worked. All centres have a disabled toilet (although to differing levels of suitability) and internally, there are few spaces that are not fully accessible, with the following exceptions:

- The front door at TBMP has a step. Whilst there is access via the doors on Tesco side, this is NOT the usual entrance and therefore separates people at the first point of access.
- The rear of EAC is accessible via the rear doors in terms of the small meeting room, but the lower level is not accessible at all (the squash courts and changing rooms). These spaces are currently limited in their use, but this should be noted for future use.
- The front doors at NFMP and TBMP (and indeed, the Chambers) do not have automatic openers on them – this means that assistance would be needed to access any of these spaces. Both CHMP and TBMP would also require assistance due to the placement of locks, but once unlocked, do have push button opening systems.

- That ALL disabled toilets need work – none are fully accessible (automatic openers are not on any) and some are either badly located (TB) or in poor condition (CHMP) or both.

This assessment doesn't include other accessibility issues, such as a 'Changing Spaces' approach, where there is suitable space for adults who may need space to wash / change / etc or consider sensory disabilities, neuro-diversity, issues of sex / gender, etc. Whilst it is unlikely that the centres

will be able to be all things to all people, some changes would make a significant difference. These include:

- A refurbishment of toilets and, where possible, making all toilets suitable for all – gender neutral, disability accessible and with suitable space for 'Changing Places' compliance.
- Removal of the toilet from the main hall at TBMP, with the existing toilets being altered to enable disability access, as noted above.
- Provision of signage that include braille, in key areas

Regular assessment of accessibility should also be undertaken, with any issues reported accordingly. This includes, where appropriate, reporting of external problems to MKC (e.g. broken paving, uneven paths, poor lighting, etc.). The need for this work to be both addressed and resolved is clear and WCC will work with MKC in the immediate term to see what can be done with existing issues.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

An inspection regime will need to be developed and agreed with relevant staff – this will be managed by the Operations Manager, Caretaker Manager and caretakers.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

This is the first assessment of these issues and will, undoubtedly, lead to further works being needed. This has been made clear by these early visits. Complying with best practice and providing high quality provision for all members of the community, after what would seem to be many years of limited investment or focus, will mean significant investment in refurbishment and, in some cases, structural adjustment to centres. However, this will, once undertaken, mean an inclusive approach is embedded across the WCC estate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 160/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 7th February 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update council on Covid restrictions, easing and risk management.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the Council notes this report.**
- 2. That the Council continues to manage the ever-changing risks, responding accordingly in line with best practice and legislative demands.**
- 3. That this issue remains a 'standing item' on Full Council agenda.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Earlier this month, the Prime Minister announced the end of Plan B restrictions in England from 27th January, including compulsory mask-wearing on public transport and in shops, guidance to work from home, Covid passes and restrictions on care homes will be eased. This announcement also ended the request to 'work from home if you can' advice, as well as the wearing of masks in schools' advice.

At Woughton, we have taken an approach throughout the pandemic that accepts that as a parish, we have higher numbers of people with vulnerabilities, be that due to age, health, or disability. We have also seen high levels of infections within our communities and, especially as the parish that homes the hospital, seen the impact on the NHS and the staff working within it.

It is recommended that this approach does not change.

We will continue to support our residents, deliver services and encourage engagement and involvement, as well as providing the democratic governance necessary at the level of government closest to the people. But we cannot and should not simply say 'it's all finished' and return to normal. There remain significant risks and managing these appropriately will be key to a successful move into summer, and beyond.

To start this journey, we recommend the following steps:

- The offices reopen from 31st January, on a slightly reduced hours basis, with reception remaining in the screened office in the immediate term.
- The Community Café restarts from 1st February, opening on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays as they were last year.
- Volunteers will be invited to return, in smaller, manageable numbers, to help support the 'food' parts of our community services.

- Officers will be able to return to working from the offices where appropriate, whilst understanding that there can be benefits from some working from home for some. This will be agreed on an individual basis, in line with organisational needs.

There should also be further measures to help reduce any risks for officers, members, and the public. Hand sanitiser to remain in place across the councils' buildings, people will be encouraged to wear face coverings where risks remain higher (e.g. moving around in more crowded, indoor spaces), decent air circulation will continue and so on.

To reduce the potential impact on officers, we should continue to keep a level of separation between officers and others – this includes the screens in reception and at the community fridge, the doors between public and private areas being used (e.g. between the community centre and reception, reception and the main office, the Chamber and the fridge, etc.) and allowing, where suitable, attendance and presentation at meetings virtually, rather than needing additional people within the Chamber. This will provide a 'clean zone' within the main offices that reduces the risk of infection – this MUST be the priority at the moment, to help ensure ongoing delivery of services.

Meetings can continue as has been agreed, if this is the will of the council and / or committees, with a quorate number of councillors in chambers, with others attending virtually. However, if members would prefer to return to fully 'in person' meetings, then these can be managed by one officer (Council Manager) and a choice offered to attend virtually for other officers, external presenters, and others. All meetings will continue to be broadcast live and be accessible afterwards, on demand via Facebook and / or website.

The situation will be reviewed regularly, and changes made as and when appropriate. Woughton will continue to take an evidence-based approach to safety, utilising risk management and assessment to decide appropriate stages and promoting personal responsibility and accountability alongside organisational approaches.

Whilst we understand that not everyone shares the same views or approaches regarding the pandemic, we would ask that all support the steps taken to keep people safe and healthy, acknowledging that there are still people who are vulnerable to the virus and these steps help reduce risks.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

The issues around keeping staff safe are both a need to ensure safety under H+S legislation, but also from a practical viewpoint, a wish to keep service delivery happening – the risk of an outbreak within the team is serious in terms of isolation, reduced staffing, potential to close offices / services and therefore impact on residents. This approach is intended to strike the balance between ensuring a step towards 'normality' whilst ensuring a level of safety.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR:

Steve McNay – Council Manager

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 7th February 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To commence considerations around provision of a Landscape contract from April 2023.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the Council notes this report and associated papers.
2. That the Council starts to consider their view on continuing delivery of a Landscape contract at the end of current delivery in March 2023.
3. That the Council considers financial approaches to any decision with agreement on any 'top up' levels (if any) for future contracts.
4. That Council considers, *in principle*, whether they would wish to show commitment to future delivery, despite lack of clarity around finances and ongoing costs.
5. That this issue returns to Council for discussion as and when appropriate, with a decision on 'commitment' being agreed at the March 22 meeting.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

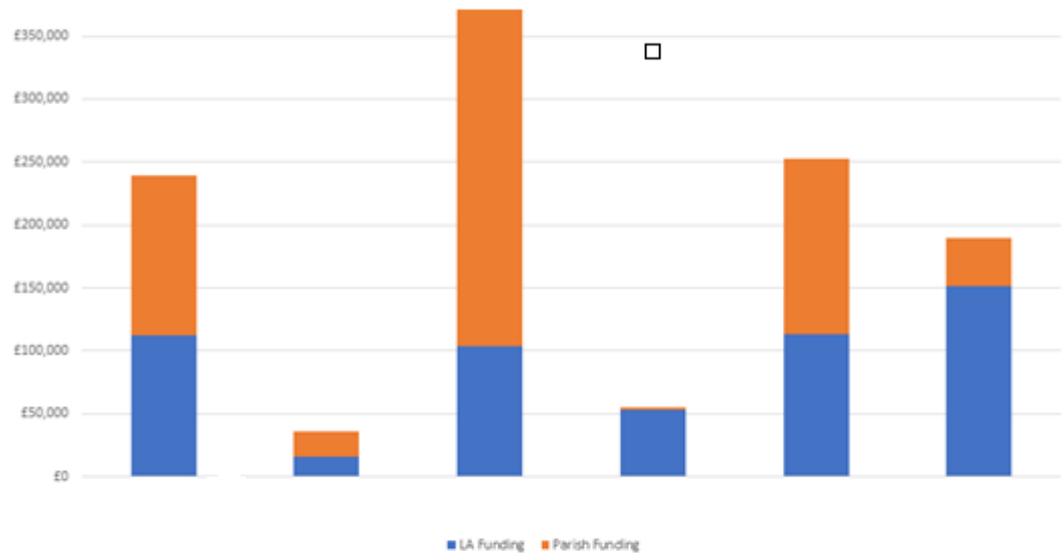
The Landscape contract delivered under a devolved agreement from MKC, has been in place since 2014, with WCC being one of the first local councils to take this on and one of the few to deliver 'in house'. The service has overall, been successful in complying with the contract, making improvements to the landscape of the parish, reducing the list of outstanding queries from hundreds to none (a 48-hour response time is now met) and is consistently voted as a top three issue for local residents – landscaping is valued and appreciated.

However, it has not been without difficulties; budgets have been pushed and perceived agreements not met (e.g. initial investment not repaid, ongoing 'top up' of contract amount), staffing issues over the past couple of years have been challenging and, due to the very public nature of the service, comments, queries and complaints from residents are considerable – the service is seen by all residents and as a result, the council hears more about landscape than many other services.

The current contract, the third one that WCC has delivered, ends in March 2023, with a new contract proposed from 1st April (see attached). This new contract is very similar to the existing contract but would be issued for a period of five (5) years, with an extension of a further five (5) if all acceptable – a ten (10) year contract enabling forward planning and commitment that has previously been lacking.

At the current time, there is a suggested 'indicative' budget for the new contract that is the same as the current funding – approximately £160,000 per year. This sits against a current budget of around £195,000 per year – between £30 – 40,000 per year 'topping up' via the precept. This is a relatively low level of top up in comparison to other, top tier councils (see Fig 1, below) but does represent an investment of close to half a million pounds over a 10-year contract, assuming no further additional investment is needed (this is unlikely to be the case, due to equipment costs, renewals, increased running costs, staff wage increases, etc.).

Finances spent by Parishes on devolved Service (higher tier spend)



Finances spent by Parishes on devolved Service (lower tier spend)



Whilst further exploration of the actual amount will be essential and agreed prior to any formal signing of a contract, a request has been made that we 'commit' to continuing with the contract in principle, by April this year. This is to enable a formal contracting process for the city as a whole which will then inform the actual amount allocated for Woughton (early signs suggest that this will be in September / October 2022).

The options at this stage are:

- WCC withdraws from all landscape delivery from 31st March 2023, with a view to transferring officers to the new supplier, selling all equipment and bringing to an end all responsibility for landscaping within the parish
- WCC provisionally agrees to continue with the new contract, *when assurances and agreements are reached regarding a suitable level of contract value* and works towards this being the likely outcome, whilst retaining the right of withdrawal*
- WCC agrees to the contract at current levels and works towards the ongoing delivery of the contract until 2033, with any relevant investment / ongoing supplementary costs being part of this agreement to a level to be decided

The recommendation of the Council Manager is that a decision is taken within the next couple of months (i.e. prior to April 2022) with regard to the overarching view about delivering landscaping in the future. If the council feels that this is something that is no longer wanted by local people or that WCC is no longer the best option for delivery, any further work is unnecessary.

Recommendation is that WCC agrees at March meeting whether to continue with the process around renewing the contract, or withdraws at this stage.

If the decision is that, in principle, WCC should continue to deliver the contract, assuming the finances are suitable, it is recommended that a decision be made as to what level of 'top up' is agreeable, if any. This will help inform both WCC and MKC in terms of funding for the next contract and provide a clear basis for any future deliberations. For example, if WCC agrees no more than £40k per year and this, plus MKC funding allocated would not be enough to deliver a quality service with this, then no further contract would be agreed.

Recommendation that Council agrees a financial limit on any 'top up', either in total over the course of a contract OR on an annual basis, which would then inform further deliberations.

There is significant work still to be done, prior to any formal signing of an agreement – working out new models, ways of working, cost savings, investment necessary, etc. will all take time and is currently being undertaken. This will continue and all avenues will be explored, including the potential for joint working, shared resources, the 'sub-contracting' of some elements to external organisations (e.g. specific work that may be more effectively managed through specialist equipment) and investment using the MKC 'capital works' programme to reduce ongoing demands in key areas (e.g. removal of bushes where sightline issues are prevalent).

This issue will return to council for discussion as and when relevant.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

The Landscape service currently employs three FTE operatives (one post currently vacant), one Senior Operative and part of the Landscape and Environment Manager.

In the event that WCC chooses not to continue with the contract, it is likely that these officers would be TUPE'd over to whoever takes over.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

This contract has been a success for both WCC and MKC in terms of showing that a devolved service can bring benefits to local people. Despite some challenges, the evidence of improvement in the overall landscape of the parish is acknowledged by most. Directly employing operatives brings a flexibility and local knowledge that is envied by others, as well as providing employment for people within the parish (and surrounds). Any decision by WCC to return the contract to MKC may have ramifications politically that should be considered, whilst not being crucial to any decision.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

FINAL Draft Specification-PARISH SERVICES - Jan 22 (002).

AUTHOR:

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 162/22



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Tuesday 8th February 2022

Iain Stewart MP & Ben Everitt MP
Suite 102
Milton Keynes Business Centre
Foxhunter Drive
Linford Wood
Milton Keynes
MK14 6GD

Dear Iain & Ben

Re: Legislation for Parish & Town Councils to have the option to hold online/hybrid meetings.

As the elected representatives on Woughton Community Council, we would like to request as the Milton Keynes Members of Parliament, that you would on our behalf, demand the option for Parish & Town Councils the use of online/hybrid meetings so that they can be legally held again. For our residents, Councillors, and our staff, we found these meetings were better attended and made people feel safer. Yes, they can attend virtually, as we have purchased the equipment from the first lockdown, but Councillors now lose the chance to vote on their resident's behalf on items that will affect them, losing the democratic voice of the people.

Democracy is all about, choice, empowerment and engaging. With the meetings being online, we had engagement like never before, exceeding 25,000 hits over lockdown, 300 people viewing a planning meeting, unheard of in "normal times". We have people that are interested in what happens in their local area, that have never been interested in politics before, people willing to stick their head above the parapet.

Attendance of online meetings has increased significantly, travelling time has been cut down and therefore has contributed to cutting emissions helping the green agenda, childcare issues/arrangements are easier to deal with, and even if people are unwell or clinically vulnerable, they can still attend and be involved in local discussions.

We find it, hypercritical, that these online/hybrid meeting arrangements are still legal for parliament but no longer for Parish & Town Council meetings. We feel that local politics needs to be dragged into the 21st century, kicking and screaming, if need be, but dragged all the same and with MP's fighting our corner, representing the people that put you in Parliament, then maybe the rest of us have a chance of doing our residents proud.

So, please would you represent Parish & Town Councils by requesting to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Mr Michael Gove MP for the return of legal online/hybrid meetings, to be put in statute, allowing Councillors to be able to attend and vote online to ensure in future that it will permanently be legal in which to do so.

I thank you in advance for your assistance in this matter, and look forward to receiving your earliest reply.

Yours Sincerely

Cllr Sue Smith
Chair of Woughton Community Council

Agenda item: FC 164/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 7th February 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the committee on Q3 VAT return.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee notes the report.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Our Q3 VAT claim has been successfully submitted. We have claimed a total of £5,829.72.

We have successfully received our Q2 VAT return of £8,917.94 on 02nd December 2021.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Received receipt of £8,917.94. (Q2).

Awaiting receipt of £5,829.72 (Q3).

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None Perceived.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Q2 VAT return.

AUTHOR:

Samone Winsborough
RFO