

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 7th March 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

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

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Council notes this report.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

It has been a patchy period, with significant absences due to annual leave, sickness, isolation and similar. I have also had a week of annual leave and have returned full of vim and vigour.

The SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks) annual Practitioners Conference took place online and included a variety of sessions including building communities, supporting councillors, respect and code of conduct, procurement, open space management, play, memorial management and IT, plus others. There was some value in attending but limited as interactions are prevented by the online system, so basically watching videos.

More excitingly, Samone, Paul and I were given an initial view of the proposed new website design and by heck, it's a whole heap better than the current one. There is a lovely 'parish scape' that sits on the bottom of the pages (similar to the design of the trailer), it's clean and smart and modern and, despite some editing that is needed, is a step up from our current site (in fact, several steps up).

A report was provided to the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network (CCiN) regarding the Social Return on Investment programme (see attached). This gives an overview into the initial work undertaken on this with the potential for further funding and work to develop a more robust approach and IT based evaluation tool.

Other activities include a walk following a proposed arts and heritage route with David from MKC and Love Exploring, to see if the app can assist with this, an online meeting with the director from Arts MK regarding a possible project later this year and a first meeting about the Remembrance Parade for November.

One concern that has been raised is an increase in discriminatory language and attitudes. This has been noted in general and the importance of us, as the local council, challenging this and taking an inclusive approach, especially within one of the most diverse parts of the city, cannot be understated. Whilst previously there were issues around colour and religion, we are increasingly hearing and seeing

attitudes around nationality too. This is fully unacceptable and we all, councillors and officers, should take the lead in ensuring that Woughton is a welcoming and positive place for all who live, work, play, or visit the parish.

A relatively quiet time, with 1:1 meetings, appraisal planning and document writing taking the fore.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

SROI report for CCiN.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 176/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 7th March 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the council on our approaches to Covid 19 and risk management, service provision and future planning.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the Council notes this report.**
- 2. That the Council continues with a cautious approach, despite the removal of restrictions.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Following the removal of restrictions at a national level and advice from government for people to take 'individual responsibility', we have once again considered the approach that we need to take as Woughton Community Council.

At time of writing, the infection rate locally has reduced still further, dropping below 400 per 100,000 for the first time since early October 2021 and from a high of over 2,000 in early January this year. This reflects the national picture too, with similar reductions happening.

Despite this optimism, there are still concerns – over 1000 people each day being admitted to hospital. Pressures remain high on the health systems and, whilst reducing, continue to be a cause for concern.

In terms of the council itself, we have had officers off work both due to testing positive and due to others in their household testing positive, with a need then to isolate. This has had some impact on delivery, but this is reduced by the continued ability to work from home.

Given this improving situation, it is felt that some relaxation can be welcomed, whilst keeping a firm eye on things. We will continue to support those who chose to wear face coverings, maintain the hand sanitiser stations throughout our buildings, monitor numbers and, where appropriate, reduce congestion within our spaces. Good levels of air flow will remain, and people will be able to work from home if necessary (e.g. if household member tests positive). Whilst government guidance states that people who test positive no longer need to isolate, our policy will remain that people with symptoms should test and if positive, stay away from work.

In terms of services, the following will be in place:

- Youth. Sanitiser on the way into services, but a move back into buildings where appropriate with open windows / doors, etc.
- Café. As currently – mask wearing supported, hand sanitiser in place, regular ventilation.
- Fridge and larder – remain the same.
- Landscape and Environment – remain the same.

Councillors can return to meeting in person, but we shall continue to enable ‘virtual’ attendance for those that wish to attend online. It is important to understand that this does mean that virtual attendees are unable to vote on any issues, but creative Chairing can enable all voices to be heard within the discussions.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

As with the previous paper, maintaining the safety of our officers is paramount – this ensures that we continue to be able to deliver services. Officers have been encouraged to test regularly and informed that we would rather they stayed away if unwell (working from home if appropriate).

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 177/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 7th March 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To make a decision regarding a 'commitment' to delivery of the Landscape contract from April 2023.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the Council notes this report.**
- 2. That the Council decides on whether to progress with planning for Landscape delivery post March 2023, with agreement to commit in principle, to continuation.**
- 3. That if the Council does agree to this, that the Council Manager informs MKC of this and continues to work towards a fully costed, 10-year plan for landscape delivery.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

At the Full Council meeting of February 2022, a paper was produced that explained the process for the landscape contracting between MKC and WCC for the proposed contract running from April 1st, 2023. This paper, alongside the specification provided, was intended to enable councillors to inspect, consider and prepare any questions or queries regarding this so that key decisions could be made, the first of which is a commitment to continue the contract that MKC need prior to contracting for the city-wide contract.

As mentioned last time, this new contract is planned as a 5 year, plus further 5-year contract (so potentially a 10-year contract). This means that there is potential for longer term planning and costing of the larger elements of the contract over this 10-year period ('capitalising' of equipment over this period).

The other major consideration was around the level of any 'top up' of funding that would be acceptable to the council. As detailed previously, the council currently provides an additional 25% funding (approx. £40k in addition to a contract value of around £155k), but some councillors have expressed unhappiness at this, suggesting that the service should be provided within the funding offered by MKC. Whilst this decision doesn't need to be made immediately, an idea of where the council considers a reasonable ceiling would be useful in planning for any future service delivery.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

Failure to continue with the contract would have significant impacts on staffing, as noted previously.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

FC 161.22 – Paper and Draft Specification.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

(Agenda item FC 161/22)

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:

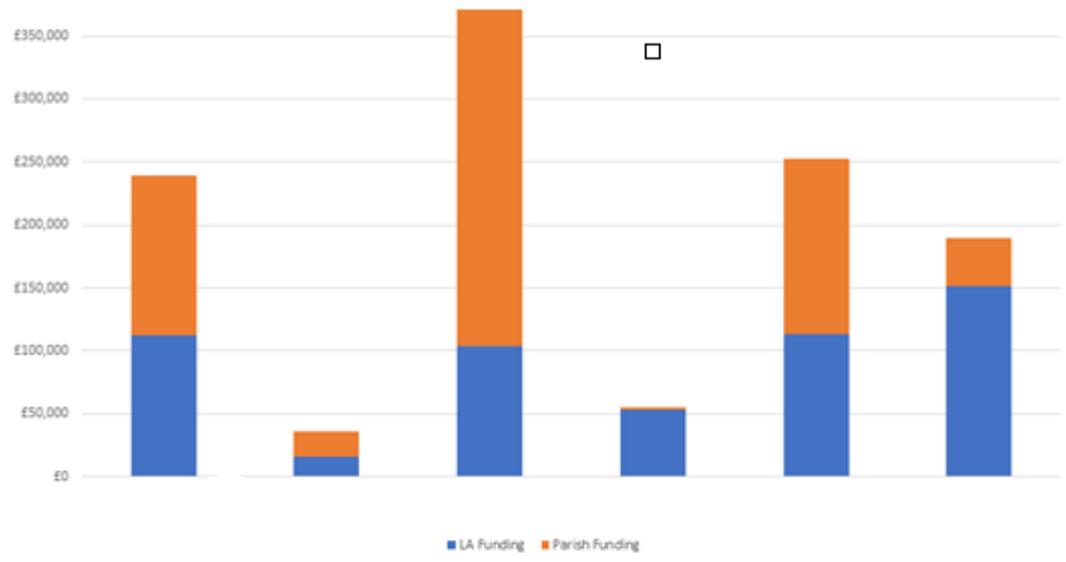
The Landscape contract delivered under a devolved agreement from MKC, has been in place since 2014, with WCC being one of the first local councils to take this on and one of the few to deliver 'in house'. The service has overall, been successful in complying with the contract, making improvements to 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.

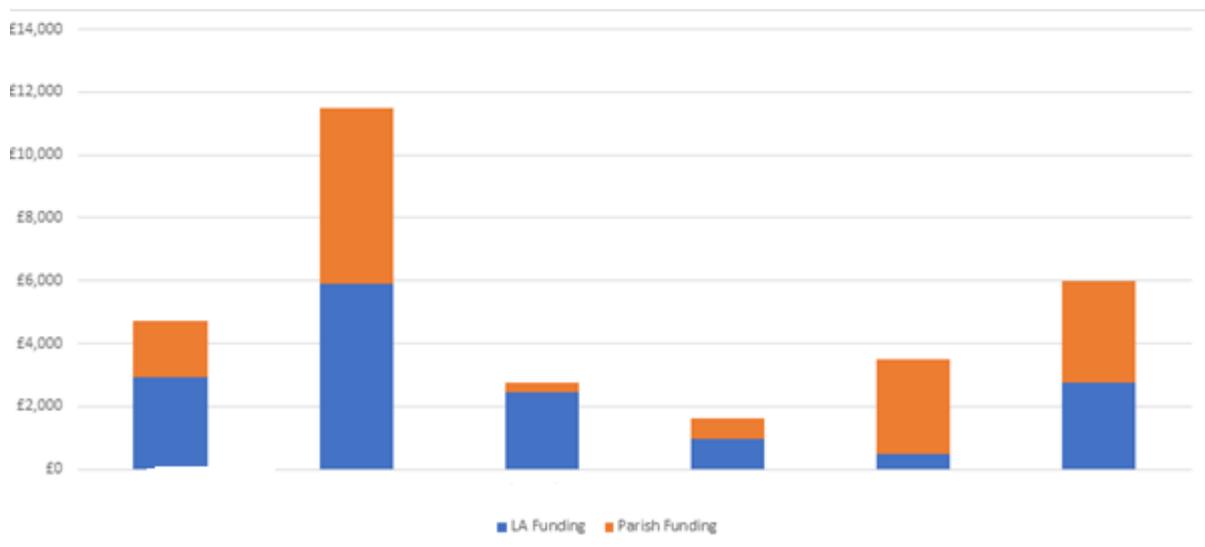
The current contract, the third one that WCC has delivered, ends in March 2023, with a new contract proposed from 1st April (see attached). This new contract is very similar to the existing contract but would be issued for a period of five (5) years, with an extension of a further five (5) if all acceptable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