

Agenda item: FC 164/23

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 16th January 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To begin preparations for the May 2023 local council elections.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That council considers this report.**
- 2. That council considers an approach to the elections, specifically:**
 - a. That officer and councillors are committed to engaging potential new candidates,**
 - b. That council considers this to be part of the role of key officers over the next few months and enables resources to be utilised towards this aim (i.e. that social media, website, community engagement, etc.**
 - c. That councillors can agree to be part of engagement and information events for potential new councillors, offering a councillor perspective, advice and support.**
- 3. That council agrees to promote any campaigns relating to voter ID, to ensure that as many residents as possible can be part of the democratic process.**
- 4. That council agrees to prioritise polling stations within community buildings on election day(4th May).**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Local elections are taking place in May 2023, with all WCC seats up for election, as well as one of the Woughton and Fishermead Ward Councillor seats.

This will be the first elections held following the implementation of the new voter ID laws, requiring people to have suitable ID prior to being able to vote. It is suggested that wards such as Woughton are more likely to have people without suitable ID, due to the financial costs of such ID. As noted in MKCC Councillor News:

'Voters who do not have suitable ID will be able to apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC). We understand that the national application portal will open from mid-January.'

It is suggested that WCC, as the council closest to the people of Woughton, should support any publicity around access to the Voter Authority Certificates, to help ensure all residents are able to be part of the democratic process.

In addition, we currently have a vacancy, and it is possible that other vacancies will arise between now and May. Engaging residents in standing as councillors is also something that helps promote the importance of the 'local council' sector and

democracy more widely, as well as ensuring that there is an 'election' – a choice being made by residents.

To this end, it is proposed that council agrees to both officers and any councillors who would like to, be supported to promote local elections, promote standing as a candidate, support the delivery of publicity and events to enable people to understand better and to offer advice / support to any potential candidates, whilst offering no preference (officers). This can include, but not be limited to:

- Website page(s) – NB there is already a 'become a councillor' page
- Social media postings, either with WCC resources, or sharing those produced by NALC, LGA or similar.
- Face to face and online engagement events, with current councillors and / or officers offering space and time for people to ask questions, get a feel for what it means to be a councillor and sell the value of local government and the impact people can make as councillors.

There will be requests for community centres on 4th May, which will impact on other delivery – community café in Coffee Hall, youth provision in Eaglestone, etc. It is proposed that this date is 'blanked out' for polling stations and that other provision is 'on hold' for the day.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

Some officer time, but it is envisaged that this will primarily be around councillors supporting new candidates to be involved. Officer time will include that for website and social media management, but also for any events or support needed for others.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 165/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 16th January 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To provide the current proposed Service Plan items to council for consideration, agreement, or addition.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That council notes this report and the items noted for inclusion in the 2023/24 Service Plan.**
- 2. That council agrees, where appropriate, for work to start on key elements of this proposal.**
- 3. That council considers any additional elements that they would like to see included in the service plan.**
- 4. That council acknowledges the financial constraints and budgetary agreement around the level of funding for any service plan items.**
- 5. That further versions of this plan are provided at Operations Committee and Services Committee for consideration, being included in the next draft (February 2023).**
- 6. That a final Service Plan is agreed and ratified at the Full Council meeting of March 2023.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

The council develops and delivers an annual Service Plan each year, focusing on new initiatives and enhancing the operational delivery of the regular, day-to-day provision. The plan also includes developmental aspects for the council, councillors and officers as well as looking more widely at the parish and any role WCC may take.

The plan for the coming Council Year (from May 2023 – April 2024) is limited by two key aspects:

- Financial constraints
- Elections

The first is not uncommon – finances are key to sustainable service delivery and, with the current challenges that WCC faces, a realistic level of spending on new items is essential. Council will, at this meeting, be agreeing a budget (and precept) for the 2023/24 year, which will determine what can / can't be delivered within this plan (using precept income – additional grant funding can, of course, supplement any plans).

The second is more unusual, with elections only taking place every four years. However, this plan will be ratified for the new council, which may not include all current councillors and, therefore, the new council may have different priorities. With this in mind, the plan builds on existing projects, continues some delayed elements and focuses on delivering high quality services and a council that continues to lead.

The following items* have been suggested as 'moving over' or continuing from the 2022/23 Plan:

- Youth Council (delivery, following the planning stage this year)
- First Aid training (officers now compliant – councillors and community members next)
- Landscape contract (due to delays in contract announcements)
- Community Growing Space (once planning agreed)
- Estate Renewal and Regen (with the start of ERF's and the need to continue focus)
- Planning on website (building access to applications and comments on WCC site)
- Library of Things (as part of the new depot, to include Geeks in Sheds, etc.)
- Public realm (arts and heritage trails, environment, and landscape works, etc.)
- Sustainability Plan (to build upon some of the work already started)
- Community Centre improvements (finances permitting and with compliance in mind)

Most of these have had work started (or in some cases finished) but either not completed or new aspects have arisen.

Additional suggestions for new items include:

- Community Cinema (some successful sessions, so a programme of events) *
- Resident Associations – supporting sustainability, development, funding and building a communal 'resources list', detailing what is available across the parish (with potential for WCC to indemnify against damage, when lent / borrowed).*
- A suitable data management scheme for the council as a whole, covering case work, attendance numbers, service access, delivery targets, etc.
- A whole range of Community Centre elements, building on the 'improvement plan', to include areas surrounding the buildings, 'how to' guides for the buildings, smaller maintenance jobs if large plan is not possible, etc. *
- Trailer usage. Building and delivering a plan of engagement and events utilising the trailer and hooking on to existing sessions (e.g. Play Rangers, advice sessions in the community, councillor surgeries, etc.)
- Public Realm improvements, including a focus on key areas (garage ends in NF, some of the courtyard spaces in ES, back alleys in TB, former play areas in BH, etc.), junior rangers scheme, arts and heritage trail(s), etc.
- New depot and community growing space up and running. *
- Expanding the events calendar, including the return of Festival*, but more events, more often, more inclusive and across the parish.

- Consideration of wider council delivery – opening times, evening(s) and weekend sessions, expansion of some existing services (e.g. youth and advice collaboration, more ‘in person’ wellbeing post covid).

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

As with most new initiatives, there is an impact on staff – more delivery means more staffing resource OR a variation in existing work practices. One example would be weekend or evening sessions – whilst very possible, hours would then need to be found elsewhere. Staffing and managing community growing spaces / Tool Library at the depot means fewer staff available at the Hub – there is a limit to the staffing resource and this will all need careful planning, use of councillors and other volunteers and creative use of staff hours.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Any other ideas for inclusion with the Service Plan should be submitted to the Council Manager for inclusion in the next version, which can start to consider budgetary implications.

Items noted with an * are either currently ‘in progress’ or would benefit from some work prior to the start of the new council year. Council is encouraged to agree to officers starting to work towards these elements (e.g. booking equipment and resources for festival).

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Service Plan 2022/23.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 166/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 16th January 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update and encourage involvement from councillors in non-statutory groups, events and activities.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That council note this report.**
- 2. That councillors consider involvement in the various groups and activities.**
- 3. That councillors inform the relevant officers if interested, to ensure sufficient numbers.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Alongside the four regular public meetings (Full Council and the three (3) committees), there are also a range of other forums that councillors may wish to be involved in. This includes:

- The 'deep dives' into the different areas within the council.
- The 'Task and Finish' groups relating to Sustainability and the Environment, Long term planning, Neighbourhood Plan review, etc.
- Activities relating to the 'Winter Programme'

It appears that the best times for these sessions are Wednesdays, preferably prior to Services Committee – given this, future sessions will be based around this. The current dates that have been suggested for the 'Deep Dives' include ongoing discussions that started before Christmas about the youth service (this group is already in place) and the initial date for the Landscaping Service – this is set for 1st February, with a follow up booked two weeks later (15th Feb) - it is likely that each 'deep dive' will take more than one session.

It is recommended that the next sessions are:

- Environmental services (first session – 22nd Feb)
- Advice and Wellbeing (first session 22nd Mar)
- Community Food (first session 19th April)

If agreed, Community Centre provision will be arranged for early in the new council year – May 2023. Date will be agreed once the new calendar is in place.

On all the above, if additional sessions are needed, these will be agreed by participants.

In additional to these 'deep dives', 2022 saw the start of work towards a long term plan. This group met on a few occasions, but there was limited output from these sessions. These sessions have led to the 'deep dive' approach and council may wish to consider whether this process should conclude prior to any further work on long term planning. The Council Manager would recommend that there is ongoing work towards the Long Term Plan, even whilst the deep dives continue, but is aware that this is an additional time commitment which may be too much. This is especially true if work on the sustainability plan and a neighbourhood plan review also take place.

There is a need for priorities to be agreed, focusing on what is considered most pressing.

There is also a need for clear membership to be agreed, to avoid these groups becoming too unwieldy. A group of around 6 – 8 is ideal, including both councillors and officers. To this end, councillors interested in being part of any of the above groups should let the Council Manager know and membership can be confirmed.

There is also a need for Council to consider membership of the planned Estate Renewal Forum. This is an MKCC led project, focusing on how communities across Woughton can be supported to improve and develop their estates and communities. Whilst 'renewal' sits under the Planning Committee terms of reference, given the significance of this proposal, a whole council approach may be beneficial.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

The 'deep dives' mean officers from agreed service areas are needed, alongside any additional support that may be appropriate (Council Manager, finance input, etc.). For sustainability, a similar approach is felt appropriate (with environment team and other relevant officers) and long term planning requires the Council Manager (and, prior to leave, the RFO / Ops Manager). These all impact upon working weeks but should form part of the roles provided.

The Neighbourhood Plan review may enable additional funding and potentially additional hours to be provided by an officer, to help progress the review. This will need to be investigated early in the process and a decision made. If not, this falls within the remit of the Council Manager too.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 167/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 16th January 2023

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update council on a planning application (22/01877/FUL – new dwelling on Holmfield Close) and recommendation to take to Development Control Committee (DCC) or, if necessary, appeal.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That council notes this report.**
- 2. That council agrees to pursue available options relating to challenging the decision.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

There was a recent planning application to build upon the garden of 4 Holmfield Close. This was discussed at the Planning Committee and objections were submitted to MKCC Planning. Following this, the process was extended by MKCC for the applicant, allowing further submissions and additional information being provided. WCC and other relevant parties were not informed of these additions and, when challenged, the Planning Team suggested that they were not 'material' changes.

The application has been permitted.

The residents locally as well as the Chair of Planning and others have suggested that this decision is incorrect and that further steps should be taken to challenge this. The Council Manager has written to the Planning Department on several occasions asking for clarity around next steps, and has been told that there is no appeal process, other than a judicial review.

Objections remain from Fire Service, Flood Team, Anglian Water, etc. as well as a noise assessment that has been flawed by virtue of a closed Groveway.

It is recommended that, in lieu of a Planning Committee happening within the next few weeks, that this council agrees to the proposal that the Council Manager, on behalf of the Planning Committee and therefore, on behalf of WCC, pursues further avenues for appeal, including referral to Development Control or other steps necessary. If there is any financial cost for action (e.g. if a judicial review is necessary), a proposal will come back to council for agreement.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

<https://publicaccess2.milton-keynes.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=externalDocuments&keyVal=RFMMQ0KWI4N00>

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager