

Agenda item: FC 142/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 17th January 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:

- Santa Sleigh events took place and were well received, with lots of positive feedback from residents, both at the events and online following them. A huge thank you to all who were involved, be that elves, grinchies or snowmen, chocolate dispensers, cheerleaders, drum bangers, support vehicles or any other role. Some considerations for next year, but as the first year that we have done every estate, remarkably trouble free (except that pesky van curtain!).
- Hampers were prepared, wrapped and distributed in partnership with the Big Family Charity, the MK Hygiene Bank and Mears. In addition, MK Dons SET also took referrals for some of our residents and delivered hampers too.
- The Youth Service used the grant from the HAF provision to arrange a panto night at The Venue in Walnut Tree. With boxed up meals, plentiful chocolate and silliness another positive event supported by officers and members from WCC
- Christmas lunch happened, with huge kudos to Cllr Smith for managing this, alongside Mears who provided some funding toward it. For many who attended, this meant that they didn't spend Christmas Day alone and this was reflected in the emotions on the day.
- There were two online festive messages – one with many councillors wishing merry Christmas (thanks to Sean for editing that together!) and one from an elf.
- Since returning, the Council Manager has met (virtually) the new Road Safety Officer from MKC, who appears to be eager to get involved. He comes from the Fire Service and has been a safety officer for a number of years. His name is Keith Wheeler.
- The 'worst places to live in the UK' was published and with Aylesbury topping the poll (taking the crown from Peterborough), it may be time for BMKALC to consider moving offices to somewhere else....

- And finally, a number of planned events have been cancelled / postponed / moved online including the cancellation of a visit from Europe from someone involved with the Open University project we have been waiting for, various 'catch ups' moving online and discussions around the planning training booked for January also taking place (unclear at time of writing).

It feels that after a positive end to 2021, with Santa and Christmas happening, we have started 2022 in a similar place to last year, with uncertainty and restriction and anxiety. I hope that this will be short

term and that as we get boosted, as the weather improves (we are at least getting lighter again) and as we get greater clarity around the impact of the new variant, we can move positively into the new year with a sense of purpose, focus and positivity.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 143/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 17th January 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To propose changes to the Service Plan for implementation from May 2022.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That council notes this report.
2. That council agrees to the £30,000 budget allocation, inline with the budget proposal for 2022/23.
3. That the following changes are made to the document:
 - a. That items 6, 10, 20 and 28 are considered for grant funding, with expenditure limited until such time as any options are agreed. Item 20 should not proceed without grant funding to cover this.
 - b. That item 7 is reduced to fewer sessions, open to all suitable groups / individuals across the parish and is funded through the training budget.
 - c. That item 9 is considered as an investment, linked to contract delivery, and is NOT included as part of the service plan spend, but is considered as capitalised over 10 years.
 - d. That item 29 remains on the plan, but that a clear case is made prior to any external company being appointed and only with the further agreement of the Services Committee once assurances are made. However, improvements to CCTV provision on WCC buildings and the surrounding areas can take place.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

The service plan has been under discussion for a number of months and the last draft that came to council has expenditure that is at a higher level than the budget will allow. Despite some suggestions that a larger precept increase would enable all aspects to be delivered, the changes proposed in this paper enable delivery of the priorities, whilst acknowledging the limitations of the finances available.

The following items are on the plan, with indicative budgets noted:

CV1 – Advice and representation	£500
CV2 – Community Building and engagement	£0
CV3 – Training, employment, education	£0
5 – Business Forum	£300
6 – Youth Council	£1600
7 – Community First Aid	£7000
8 – Fly tipping	£0
9 – Landscaping	£48,000 ¹

10 – Community Growing Space		£10,000²
11 – Estate renewal and regeneration		£0
12 – Planning applications	£0	
13 – Geeks in Sheds/ Library of Things / etc.		£2,000³
14 – HAVS monitors		£4,000⁴
15 – Blue Light Discos	£?	
16 – Building Inclusivity	£-	
17 – Cultural events	£-	
18 – Community Choir	£200	
19 – Local Market	£1000	
20 – Arts and Heritage Trails	£5,000⁵	
21 – Sustainability Plan	£0	
22 – Community Boxing	£0	
23 – Youth provision additions	£1500	
24 – Carry over youth provision ideas	£0	
25 – Comms and Engagement improvements	£0	
26 – Library provision	£0	
27 – Community Centre development plan		£0 ⁶
28 – Jubilee Carnival	£5,000	
29 – CCTV provision		£15,000
TOTAL		£101,100

Key:

1 – This is for a large programme to bring Landscaping onto parish, providing a new depot and storage, etc. This can be considered an investment that can be ‘repaid’ through the landscaping contract over the course of the 11 years that it could run and / or through savings on rental payments on current depot, garage, etc. It will also bring wider benefits to the council in terms of storage, tool library, parking for EVIE, etc. so should be considered in this wider sense too.

2 – There are already grants in place for this provision and, if successful, will mean a much smaller (if any) contribution is needed from this budget.

3 – This is, in part, reflected in the funding within 1 above. The provision for this ‘library’ would be within the costs associated with the creation of the space at Rochfords and whilst a budget will be needed for other aspects, most of the larger costs will be met within the budget allocated within 1.

4 – HAVS monitors are essential in terms of compliance with H+S and will be necessary. If possible, this money will be recovered through the Landscape services budget, but this may not be possible.

5 – Arts and Heritage trails – only if grant funding can be found, so can be ignored from a budgetary viewpoint.

The items that are **in bold** have the potential for attracting grant funding, which is discussed below.

If the grant funded elements are removed, then the total reduces by £10 – 15,000, reducing the overall total to around £85 - £90k.

If the Landscape depot development is removed and capitalised over the life of the contract (10 years), then this reduces the overall total to around £40 – 45k. Some of this may also be included within the grants programme, if successful. NB It is essential that this is considered within the overall Landscape contract considerations, which will be discussed early in 2022.

With a proposed budget of £30,000 for service plan delivery, this means that there are some decisions that need to be made in terms of priorities.

The items in red would be the recommendation of the council manager, based upon feedback from priorities survey, previously ratified agreements and the focus of the council. This totals just over £30,000, with the extra coming from small reductions in the landscape / youth services budgets and slightly lower amount allocated (£1500 for No13, grant applications for No 28, etc).

The big exclusion is the first aid, which it is recommended is reduced to a more reasonable level (perhaps three sessions) and some of the training monies elsewhere in the budget are used to deliver this, with additional grant options to be explored to deliver some / all of this too.

It is also recommended that the CCTV provision includes both reactive and fixed options – embedding / improving CCTV within our buildings (NFMP, CHMP, TBMP and EAC, alongside No95 and the new landscape depot) should be included within this budget as these areas are also areas which currently have a lack of oversight.

This paper makes clear the need to refocus our approach to grant applications. Many of the items noted would, potentially, be eligible for funding from grant givers and this should be explored as an option where possible. Given this, the grants group will be tasked with providing options for the items noted, as well as offering a vision for the future, focusing on sustainability and applications that meet an agreed need.

The recommendation of the Council Manager is that £30,000 budget is sufficient, and that the following changes are made to the service plan:

- That items 6, 10, 20 and 28 are considered for grant funding, with expenditure limited until such time as any options are agreed. Item 20 should not proceed without grant funding to cover this.
- That item 7 is reduced to fewer sessions, open to all across the parish, and is funded through the training budget.
- That item 9 is considered as an investment, linked to contract delivery and is NOT included as part of the service plan spend, but is considered as capitalised over 10 years.

- That item 29 remains on the plan, but that a clear case is made prior to any external company being appointed and only with the further agreement of the Services Committee, once assurances are made. However, improvements to CCTV provision on WCC buildings and the surrounding areas can take place.

This proposal ensures that the priorities noted by the public consultation are provided, that the budget is sufficient and responsible and gives 'wriggle room' for additional elements that will arise through use of the 'emerging priorities' budget. The focus on grant applications MUST be included in the coming calendar year (we have seen this start over 2021 with some success which can be expanded upon).

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None noted.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

22.23 Service Plan v2 for Full Council.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 144/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 17th January 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the Council on the results from our interim audit report dated 23rd November 2021.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Council notes the report.

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

The following areas were considered and inspected:

- **Maintenance of Accounting Records and Bank Reconciliations**
- **Review of Corporate Governance**
- **Review of Expenditure**
- **Assessment and Risk Management**
- **Precept Determination and Budgetary Control**
- **Review of Income**
- **Petty Cash and Fuel Cards**
- **Review of Staff Salaries**
- **Investments and Loans**

I am pleased to report that our interim audit was returned with no recommendations or advisories, you can see as per report a 'clean' final page with no suggestions reported.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None Perceived.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None Perceived.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Interim audit report – 23.11.21.

AUTHOR

Samone Winsborough
RFO

Agenda item: FC 145/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 17th January 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To agree the final budget for financial year 2022/23.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the Committee notes the report.
2. That the budget options as circulated are considered and an agreed precept level is approved.
3. That the budget be approved with the agreed precept rise.
4. That the Committee agree to fund the new landscape depot and agree a period of 'capitalisation' that it should be paid back over.
5. To note that our Balance carried forward for the end of this year (2021/22) will be accounted differently and therefore our reserves will look to be reduced by £100,000 as our LAPF (Local Authorities Property Fund) investment will now sit in box (9) and not be included in our total reserves box (7).

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

It was requested that we provide a budget which would provide the council with options regarding precept rise, due to the fact that the costs for the new multi-purpose depot which has been planned for, will need some significant funding. Whilst we can look to capitalise this funding over a period of five (5) years and reduce the landscape services budget by circa £5,000 per annum from 2023/24 for ten (10) years (the life span of the new proposed Landscape contract) we will still need to fund the depot site from next year's budget. The costs submitted total £48,660. We have since reviewed the cost submission and reduced this down to £25,000.

This amount of money will need to be taken from our reserves and will leave us in a deficit budget for 2022/23.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

We have removed the £20,000 contingency line and utilised this towards uplift in Councillor allowances (separate paper to be discussed in February) and unexpected increase in Pension costs for next year. We have amended the multi-purpose depot to £25,000.

The financial impact of any precept decision should be looked at holistically, we were hoping to be clear of the uncertainty that Covid has created over the last two (2) years, but this does not seem to be the case.

We managed to close the year last year (during the worst of the Covid19 restrictions, and closures etc) with a surplus. With that in mind you will note from the three (3) options provided to you regarding our proposed budget for next year all run a deficit budget. With the amount of money needed to assist with the set up for the landscape depot there is no other way around this, it must be funded from reserves. The balances of our reserves will reduce by £100,000 this is because £100,000 has been moved out of reserves and now sits in a long-term investment scheme, so while the balance reduces it is not reflective of the actual situation. However, we no longer account for this as cash we have readily available (reserves)

Balances brought forward from 2021/22 have been projected at £448,540 before this reduction. Actual Balance Brought Forward is £348,540.

A 3% precept gives us a further deficit of £36,469 / Balance Carried Forward £412,071 (ACTUAL £312,071).

A 5% precept gives us a further deficit of £24,197 / Balance Carried Forward £424,343 (ACTUAL £324,343).

A 7% precept gives us a further deficit of £11,947 / Balance Carried Forward £436,593 (Actual £336,593).

The difference between the best- and worst-case scenario is £24,500. In the scheme of our whole budget for the year this is negligible.

This does mean that since V.5 was discussed we have increased councillor allowances, included unexpected pension costs to the organisation and reduced the multi-purpose depot costs. We have utilised the contingency line but we still have £10,000 sat in emerging priorities so this is not a concern (the £20,000 was put in to buffer any increase in costs and this is what we have utilised it for.) We have managed to conclude this budget £8000 ahead of where we were in V5, even with these amendments taking our worst-case deficit from £44,863 to £36,469.

Taking all into consideration and after review of the Priorities survey and the majority vote that 3% (inflation) increase for the precept was widely viewed as 'about right' and given the complications COVID19 has provided for people, I would suggest the 3% rise is the reasonable compromise to make, given that this is the first year in my employment that Woughton has seen a deficit budget and given that all of our options provide a deficit I would continue with the 3% rise and a deficit budget of £36,469.

I would, however, urge that there be formal agreement as to how we will ensure that the Landscape team pay this back over the course of the new Landscape contract from 2023/24.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

None Perceived.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None perceived.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Interim audit report – 23.11.21.

AUTHOR

Samone Winsborough
RFO

Agenda item: FC 146/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 17th January 2021

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To inform the council of the proposals for the new Depot site, alongside recommendations for funding.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That council notes this report.**
- 2. That council agrees to the funding proposal below.**
- 3. That this investment takes place once the lease for the site is confirmed and, at this point, all existing lease agreements for Fishermead / Eaglestone are terminated.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

As has been discussed previously, there has been a new site identified and work has commenced to transfer this site to WCC from MKC. This site, the old 'depot' on Rochfords, includes hard standing and sufficient space for both the landscape and environment needs, plus additional space for storage of suitable equipment (e.g. flood management, events, etc).

Some concerns have been expressed regarding the potential cost of the new site and how this might be funded. This links to previous investment into the landscaping contract when first started (2014) and concerns that this is further money that will not be returned. It is also important to note that the new landscape contract doesn't commence until 2023 and no decision or agreement with regard to WCC continuing to provide this service has been reached. However, the proposal for the new depot, whilst predominantly around the landscape contract, also includes significant other delivery, including some areas that have been needed for many years – space to repair dog waste bins, external space to wash equipment, storage for EVIE and the tool library and any new provision of the 'library of things', alongside the ever increasing need for storage space for gazebos, tables, chairs, etc. for outdoor events.

There are a range of options regarding the new site and these should all be considered against the current costs of using the Fishermead site (or, as is currently the case, NOT using that site, due to security issues).

The essential elements needed to 'get started' are fencing and security, connections to electricity and water and some suitable storage. These break down as:

Fencing/ security	£9330.00
Electricity connection	£1730.00

Water connection	£1000.00
2 x 40-foot containers	£8000.00
TOTAL	£20,860.00

All costings are approximate and subject to change.

In addition, some welfare space, a toilet and similar for the landscape team would be helpful – costs vary but start from around £5k (<https://ukcabins.com/find-a-cabin/used/6025/32x10-antivandal-office-wc-and-canteen>) for a second hand version (nearer £8k for a fully refurbished one).

There are other proposals for the site, including space for the environment team to use for dog bins, tool library, storage and charging of EVIE, etc so an additional 40-foot container would be used for this, at a cost of around £4k.

In an ideal world, a shower unit, drying room, etc. would also be included within this proposal – this would add around £1500 for the drying room and £3 – 4k for the shower (although alternatives could be explored on this, potentially within the space noted above). A shower would also provide an options for those who would like to cycle to work, whether they are based at the depot or within the Hub / No95.

£25k would be sufficient to provide something that is better than the current depot, with an additional £10 - 15k for the full range of options.

Current costs for the Fishermead depot are around £6k per year:

Rent	£3600 (plus an additional £720 for Eaglestone garage, so £4300)
Rates	£2200

The new depot will be a ‘peppercorn’ rent of £1 a year, meaning direct savings of £4300 per year. It is unclear at this time whether there will be any rates to pay, but assuming a similar level to current, this means that with the reductions in travel (due to being based on parish), the larger space available and the additional security measures reducing the risk of further losses, it is anticipated that around £5000 per year will be saved (which, if rates are also reduced, could increase to as much as £7k per year). This, over the course of the proposed contract, is equal to between £50 - £70k.

This doesn’t include the additional value of having somewhere suitable for environment work, EVIE safely storage, additional space for tool library, etc. all of which are potential additional benefits.

It should also be noted that there are currently bids in for some monies towards the above, including one for storge of flood equipment (the additional container) and contributions linked to the community garden, as the ‘welfare’ aspects of this project will now be based at the depot, rather than within that development. This is currently being assessed by BLF. If successful, these two grants would contribute significantly to the overall costs.

There have also been some additional discussions around the new landscape contract, including some maps, expectations, etc. but we are still waiting for an up to date set of expectations. Once this is in place, a further discussion will be needed for council to decide whether to continue to work towards contract delivery post March 2023.

It is recommended by the council manager that up to £40k be allocated towards this development, using less than 10% of existing reserves. This will be reflected in the landscape budget for the coming contract, with an understanding that £5k per year be 'repaid' towards the reserves from the annual

contracted budget. This would both cover the investment costs as well as supporting the wider organisation via provision of additional elements, such as storage, environmental aspects, tool library, etc. In the event that the contract doesn't continue post 2023, the sale of any remaining landscape equipment will be used to repay the costs associated with the development, with the space then being used to provide alternative services or support, including the tool library / library of things, storage, etc.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

There is a need for some 'welfare' aspects for the landscape team as there is nowhere suitable within the current set up. What this is and how expensive this might be is to be decided.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Agenda item: FC 147/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 17th January 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To propose some changes to meetings and delegated powers due to risk management of Covid 19.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That Council notes this report.**
- 2. That Council agrees to:**
 - a. Meetings held online only where possible, with delegated powers used to action**
 - b. Where necessary, a quorate number of members is in Chambers, with others attending online, where decisions are only made by those present**
 - c. That this position is reviewed on a monthly basis within the Full Council meeting**
- 3. That Council agrees to a blanket dispensation regarding the 'six month' rule during the period of difference, to ensure that no councillor falls foul due to maintaining safety precautions.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

The situation with Covid 19 has been well documented and discussed in other papers at this meeting. This paper details a suggested approach to meetings during this difficult time.

Given the current risk management assessment, holding meetings in any of our buildings currently would be in contravention of safe practices – we have 19 elected members, plus officers and this number of people cannot meet safely given the virulence of the Omnicom variant. Due to the inability of the government to change the rules to enable either online or hybrid meetings, the law remains that meetings must, legally, be held 'in person', in terms of any formal decision being made. However, this decision can be made by a 'quorate' number of members – for Full Council, this a 1/3 of members (seven (7) individuals) and for committees, it is three (3) individual members.

There are a range of options, and a paper that details these options is attached. These include:

- Returning to purely online meetings, despite the legalities of this, on the understanding that challenge is unlikely.
- Delegation of all decision making to the Clerk (with the exception of those items that can only be agreed by Council)

- A return fully to Face-to-Face meetings. If this were to be agreed, a budget would have to be allocated for additional rental of larger spaces, as there is nowhere currently large enough to be within the risk management scheme.
- A mixture of all of the above, with a quorate of members in the Chambers, other attending an 'informal' meeting via online methods where after the informality, the meeting is formally called, and decisions made are ratified.

The recommendation of the Council Manager is that where possible, meetings are held informally online, with delegated powers then used to ensure actions are taken. Where necessary, meetings are held in a hybrid setting, with a quorate number of members in Chambers (seven (7) for Full Council and three (3) for a committee) and other attending online – this meeting is informal, for discussion only until such time as it is formally called, at which point those present in Chambers ratify the decisions made in informal discussions. In all cases, infection control and reducing risk must be paramount – this means that testing is encouraged (a negative test on the day of the meeting is safest), face coverings must be worn indoors, and hand sanitisers should be used upon entry / exit.

The other issue to consider is whether attendance virtually is considered attendance. Legally, at this point, it is likely to be seen as non-attendance, whether involved in the 'informal' meeting or not. To address this and ensure that if the decision of the council is to proceed with the recommended approach is fair, that a blanket dispensation is agreed regarding the 'six month' rule, until such time as there is a return to full in person attendance.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

The advice from NALC, SLCC and the unions is that officers should attend meetings remotely – as there is no legal reason for officers to be in attendance, this is possible and should be enacted where reasonable. However, it will be essential for at least one officer to be present if any meeting is within the Chamber, to manage the technology. The Council Manager is happy to be this officer and to attend where necessary.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix Options for meetings in 2022.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager

Preparing for face-to-face meetings in the current climate

The regulations that allowed local authorities to hold meetings remotely until 06 May 2021 were not extended by the Government, and so face-to-face meetings officially resumed from 07 May.

We have since September 2021, been meeting in person, having had a period of meeting remotely in contravention of the legislation. The decisions made during this period were later ratified at a meeting of Full Council that took place outdoors.

The legislation has already been extended in Wales, so Parish and Town Councils there can continue to meet and make decisions virtually.

The Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO), Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) and Hertfordshire County Council lodged a legal challenge in the High Court that sought a continuation of local authority remote meetings beyond the 06 May 2021. *This challenge was not successful, meaning that the legal base is now clear – in person meetings are the only way that the council can make legal decisions, with the exception of those made using delegated powers.*

There is also still much uncertainty around how legislation or COVID-19 risks and restrictions may change over the coming weeks and months.

NALC guidance currently is that meetings should continue where possible, but that anyone NOT essential or who doesn't HAVE to be present (e.g. Council Clerk, officers, etc..) can attend remotely. This is far from ideal and is, frankly, unworkable from a logistics viewpoint, especially with regard to the Council Clerk).

With the new variant now moving towards being the dominant one and increases in infection rates, the R number, hospitalisations and further impacts, the council needs to consider which route it would prefer to see in January, where significant decisions must be made.

The Council has several options available to it:

1. Return to meeting virtually.

Although, technically not permitted, this route is being suggested by some other Councils. Although the risk of legal challenge is low, decisions could be challenged in the courts as ultra-vires.

The 1960 Admission to Meetings Act and the Local Government Act 1972 are understandably silent on the matter of online meetings. In the most recent correspondence from Government they have advised that public attendance at Council meetings should continue to happen online for the time being where possible. In other words, online openness to the public is neither prohibited nor enabled by the 1960 or 1972 Acts.

There is existing case law that says that "a valid meeting normally consist of people who can both see and hear each other" (Byng v London Life Association (1989) 1 All ER 560)

and back in March 2012 the government acknowledged this in their advice to charities about attendance at meetings.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-meetings-cc48/charities-and-meetings#the-definition-and-forms-of-a-meeting>

2. Temporary Scheme of Delegation to the Clerk.

This would be backed up by the meetings plan as usual. This would mean that Committee and Full Council meetings could go ahead virtually and instead of making decisions, would recommend decisions to the Council Manager ('Clerk'), who would then enact those recommendations under the temporary delegation (draft Scheme of Delegation in Annex 2.) The scheme would remain in place until Councillors decided that a return to face-to-face meetings was safe, or that the delegation should cease for any other reason.

A meeting would need to be held on 5th Jan (planned Operations) / 10th Jan (planned Full Council) for any items that cannot be delegated to the Clerk – the agreement of the precept and any agreement to changes for the scheme of delegation. We should also ensure that the Internal Auditors Report is agreed at this juncture too.

3. Hold face-to-face meetings

This would be in line with the advice from NALC, as detailed in Annex 1.

Following the return to F2F meetings in September (and the retraction of the sensible legislation from May 2021), WCC have worked within an agreed risk management programme to enable meetings to be held as safely as possible. The restrictions in place (and indeed, those that have been in place throughout the pandemic) have allowed for face-to-face meetings, even when 'work from home' orders have been enacted.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations 2021 includes an exception (exception 3) that a gathering is allowed where it is necessary for certain purposes which include "for work purposes or the provision of voluntary or charitable services." Members/officers attending a meeting would fall under this.

WCC have also ensured that the public can continue to be involved, through provision enabling the public to view the meeting on Facebook. The council has invested significantly in the technology to enable this to happen, and this has resulted in excellent engagement and transparency.

The holding of face-to-face meetings could pose a reputational risk to the Council if public perception is that these should not be held until restrictions are lifted and, given the stance previously taken by this council to NOT meet F2F, would potentially undermine the hard work undertaken to support the community in making positive health choices.

The Council will also need to take into account the fears and concerns of both Councillors and Officers over returning to face-to-face meetings whilst restrictions are still in place and / or where infection rates and transmissibility remain high. This is particularly for those who are unvaccinated, have been shielding, or have other health concerns.

4. That a mixture of options is used, where both face to face and online attendance is possible, with an 'informal' meeting in advance, where the views of the whole council / committee are considered, with a smaller, quorate number of members being in place within the chamber, who then formally ratify these decisions. This provides a safer approach, that complies with the law and minimises risk.
5. Another option that Councillors may suggest.

Recommendation:

That Full Council discusses the options and agrees a way forward.

Annex 1 – NALC advice

On 8 December 2021, the prime minister announced a move to Plan B in England following the rapid spread of the Omicron variant in the UK.

The government last night issued [guidance](#) and expects to issue more guidance and regulations in the coming days. NALC will update as and when we have the information. For member councils, we note in particular the following:

- **From 13 December 2021**, those who can, will be advised to work from home. We recommend that clerks and council staff attend council meetings remotely. The Plan B guidance does not bring back the ability to hold remote meetings. We, therefore, suggest that councils consider not meeting in December.
- The guidance says, “**From 10 December**, face coverings will become compulsory in most public indoor venues, such as cinemas, theatres and places of worship. There will be exemptions in venues where it is not practical to wear one, such as when you are eating, drinking or exercising. For that reason, face masks will not be required in hospitality settings”. We await further information on the meaning of “most public indoor venues”.
- The guidance says under “where to wear a face covering” that “there are some places where you must wear a face covering by law, unless you are exempt or have a reasonable excuse”. It goes on to set out a list of indoor settings where face coverings must be worn. The list contains “community centres (including village halls)”. The guidance also says, “you are required to wear a face covering on entering any of these settings and must keep it on until you leave unless you are exempt or have a reasonable excuse for removing it”.
- Our view of the guidance is that face coverings are required to be worn at council meetings held in indoor public places, subject to exemptions or reasonable excuse (see the guidance for further information). We also refer to our advice of yesterday that councils consider not meeting in December if possible.

From May 2021, as face-to-face council meetings resume there will still be the risk to attendees of COVID-19 exposure. Councils should conduct a risk assessment in advance of a face to face meeting which should give consideration to what the council can do to reduce risk to councillors, staff and public including:

- Providing hand sanitiser to those entering the meeting room and making sure hand sanitiser is readily available in the room itself
- Staggering arrival and exit times for staff, councillors and members of the public
- Putting a one way system in place (additional security staff will be needed)
- Placing seating at least 2-metres apart
- Ensuring everyone wears face masks
- Holding paperless meetings
- The sharing of papers should be discouraged and people should be asked to take the papers etc with them at the end of the meeting to minimise how many people handle them
- Arranging seating so people are not facing each other directly

- Choosing a venue with good ventilation, including opening windows and doors where possible (not possible in the WTC Council Chamber although the air-con system may be able to be altered to assist.)
- Choosing a large enough venue to allow distancing – this may mean choosing a different venue to what the council used before e.g. Pavilion or sports centre.
- The council (or venue owner/operator) will need to identify the venue's maximum capacity in their risk assessment, taking into account the need for social distancing. Consider how the council will ensure this capacity is not exceeded and how it will manage the situation if more people wish to attend than capacity allows. For example, could meetings be live-streamed or could members of the public submit questions via email?
- If the venue has an NHS QR code to support test and trace then all attendees should register using that app, for those without access to the app they should register attendance in line with the venue's test and trace procedure. NB all venues in hospitality, the tourism and leisure industry, close contact services, community centres and village halls must have a **test and trace procedure**
- Venues must conform with the government guidance for **multi-purpose community facilities** and for **council buildings**. If the venue is run by the council then the council must take responsibility for this, otherwise, the council can ask the venue to provide confirmation that they do conform to this guidance
- The council must understand and ensure it is acting in compliance with the latest government **safer workplaces guidance**

WCC staff will carry out a full risk assessment if and when needed, the above is to demonstrate the complexities of holding a face-to-face meeting to Councillors and is not intended to be discussed in detail at this point.

Managing staff:

- It would be advisable to inform the clerk and any other staff whose role involves supporting or attending council meetings, as soon as possible what expectations there are on officers to attend, either in person or virtually.
- The council must make the workplace (including council meetings) as safe as possible for staff, this includes undertaking a risk assessment, taking reasonable steps to reduce risks identified in the risk assessment, and ensure it is acting in compliance with the latest Government **safer workplaces guidance**
- ACAS have produced useful **guidance for employers and employees** related to COVID-19, including advice on how to support staff to **return to the workplace** and how to manage situations where staff may be worried or not wish to return.

Government advice is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-council-buildings>

Temporary Scheme of Delegation

1. Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides:
 - That a Council may delegate its powers (except those incapable of delegation) to a committee or an officer.
 - A Committee may delegate its powers to an officer.
2. Any delegation to a Committee or the Proper Officer shall be exercised in compliance with the Council's Standing Orders, any other policies or conditions imposed by the Council and within the law.
3. The Proper Officer may nominate another named Officer to carry out any powers and duties, which have been, delegated to that Officer.
5. In an emergency the Proper Officer is empowered to carry out any function of the Council
6. Where officers are contemplating any action under delegated powers, which is likely to have a significant impact in a particular area, they should also consult the Members, and must ensure that they obtain appropriate legal, financial and other specialist advice before action is taken.

Delegation to The Proper Officer

7. As a temporary measure, to allow for effective decision making whilst Covid-19 restrictions and considerations are in place, the Proper Officer may be empowered to take any and all decisions recommend to them by the relevant Committee or Full Council
8. This empowerment does not affect the delegations already in place via Standing Orders or Financial regulations.
9. The Proper Officer may not take additional decisions that would normally be taken by a Committee or Full Council unless that Committee or Full Council has met in a meeting suitably convened under the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972, and made available to the public to view (where not covered by confidentiality) and expressly agreed for that decision to be enacted via this temporary delegation.

Full Council matters

9. The following items are reserved for Full Council decision only and cannot be delegated to an Officer.
 - To appoint the Chair and Vice-Chair in May each year
 - To sign off the Governance Statement by 30 June each year
 - To set the Precept
 - To appoint the Head of Paid Service (Council Manager)
 - To make byelaws

- To borrow money
- To consider any matter required by law to be considered by Council

Agenda item: FC 148/22

WOUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Full Council

Monday 17th January 2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update on Covid 19 and risk management / operational concerns.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That Council notes this report.**
- 2. That Council agrees to:**
 - a. Continue to deliver the essential services (landscaping, fridge, larder) using existing staffing resources (i.e. continuing to reduce use of volunteers)**
 - b. Keep the community café closed until such time as the risks are sufficiently manageable to re-open safely.**
 - c. Keep the offices closed whilst the ‘work from home if possible’ advice is in place**
 - d. Monitor the situation over the coming weeks in terms of numbers, impact on health services, etc. and assess on a weekly basis.**

MAIN ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

The new variant of Covid 19, known as the Omnicom variant, is providing significant challenges nationally and locally. This has led to advice from Public Health to reduce gatherings, a new ‘work from home’ statement from government and advice from NALC / SLCC and others to reduce local council meetings where possible, using alternative options. In response to this, WCC made the decision to postpone the Christmas meal, reduce the capacity of the community café and amalgamate all December meetings into Full Council, reducing the risk of transmission.

Since these decisions were made, the situation has deteriorated further. At the beginning of December, the local infection rate stood at 551 per 100,000. At time of writing (05.01.22), the local infection rate is 1826. This is based upon a seven-day period ending on 30th December. It should also be noted that this period includes times where testing was significantly reduced and New Years Eve / Christmas / etc. were taking place. More positively, it also includes a period when people were able to get a booster jab and, in the view of some, where numbers are likely to be ‘peaking’.

The next few weeks are key. The advice from government remains get vaccinated / boosted, work from home if possible, meet outdoors where you can, wear face coverings indoors, get tested and isolate if needed. This advice is contradictory to the legal position regarding council meetings (this remains that they must be ‘in person’) and so options and creative approaches are needed. There is a further paper for this meeting that makes recommendation regarding this.

In terms of other services, it is recommended that we continue with the approach that was in place prior to Christmas, with the community fridge, larder, landscape, environment team, etc. continuing to work in a distanced and contained way. Volunteers will continue to be 'on hold' to reduce numbers of people in the vicinity and where possible, officers will work from home, being present only to ensure delivery of these essential services and / or where numbers and safeguards are sufficiently managed.

Due to the nature of the Community Café, it is recommended that this remain closed, but that the situation is assessed each week, based upon advice, infection rates, etc. and re-opened as soon as it is reasonable to do so.

Youth provision will take place outside where possible, except for the sessions that cater to the more vulnerable. Where these options are not possible, an assessment of safety will be undertaken for each setting and a decision made based upon this. Again, this is in response to the new rules around young people where face coverings are now mandatory within school settings and acknowledgement that infections amongst young people impact more widely on family units and therefore, the whole community.

The offices will remain closed, and officers / members are encouraged to avoid attending the Hub unless for a specific reason – this ensures that the fewest number of people possible are present and further manages the risk. Where people are present, the usual rules remain around ventilation, social distancing, face coverings, hand washing, etc.

It is acknowledged that this situation is one that has ebbed and flowed for the past two years and that this is all very frustrating. Balancing the delivery of services and support that is much needed with the advice from public health / government is a challenge. WCC have, consistently, been cautious throughout the pandemic whilst continuing to deliver and find alternative ways of approaching things. Ideas and discussion around how we might continue this over the coming weeks would be welcome.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS:

For most, work will continue as it has, either in the workplace or from home (dependent on role). Where this is not possible, alternative options and work will be identified and managed. The infrastructure in terms of IT and telephony remains hugely useful – online team meetings and training can continue, as can 1:1 support and similar.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

There are other concerns regarding things such as training, the planned 'away day' and similar, which will need to be addressed as and when possible.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None.

AUTHOR

Steve McNay – Council Manager