

MORAY COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Corporate Committee

Tuesday, 31 January 2023

Council Chambers, Council Office, High Street, Elgin, IV30 1BX

PRESENT

Councillor Theresa Coull, Councillor John Cowe, Councillor John Divers, Councillor Amber Dunbar, Councillor Jérémie Fernandes, Councillor Sandy Keith, Councillor Graham Leadbitter, Councillor Marc Macrae, Councillor Paul McBain, Councillor Shona Morrison, Councillor Bridget Mustard, Councillor Kathleen Robertson, Councillor Derek Ross

IN ATTENDANCE

Also in attendance at the above meeting were the Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance), Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development), Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance, Head of Financial Services, Head of Environmental and Commercial Services, Property Asset Manager, Strategy and Performance Manager, Communities Services Manager, and Lindsey Robinson, Committee Services Officer, as Clerk to the Committee.

1. Chair

Councillor Bridget Mustard, as Chair of the Corporate Committee, chaired the meeting.

2. Declaration of Group Decisions and Members Interests *

In terms of Standing Order 21 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct, Councillor Mustard declared a group decision by the Conservative Group in relation to item 8 "Charging for Services".

Councillor Leadbitter also declared a group decision relating to item 8 "Charging for Services" by the SNP Group.

There were no other declarations from Group Leaders or Spokespersons in regards to any prior decisions taken on how Members will vote on any item on the agenda or any declarations of Member's interests in respect of any item on the agenda.

3. Minute of Meeting of the Corporate Committee of 8 November 2022

The Minute of the meeting of the Corporate Committee dated 8 November 2022 was submitted and approved.

4. Notice of Motion - Councillors Morrison and Coull - Pregnancy Loss Pledge

In terms of Standing Order 35a, there was submitted a Notice of Motion by Councillor Morrison, seconded by Councillor Coull in the following terms:

Miscarriage is the most common loss of pregnancy, affecting 1 in 4 known pregnancies. Miscarriage is legally defined in the UK as the loss of a baby up to 23 weeks and 6 days of a pregnancy and a stillbirth relates to the loss of a baby from 24 weeks.

Under current UK legislation, employees who experience stillbirth are entitled to two weeks Statutory Parental Bereavement Leave. They are also entitled to Maternity or Paternity Leave in addition to any Shared Parental Leave planned prior to their loss. Employees who lose their baby before 24 weeks of pregnancy have no such entitlement instead they have to rely on annual leave, sick leave or unpaid leave if they feel unable to return to work following the loss of a baby.

The loss of a baby at any stage of pregnancy can be a major source of grief and trauma and can have a significant impact on the mental wellbeing of women and men. It is imperative that they are given time to grieve and that their loss is acknowledged by their employer in a compassionate and supportive manner without any potential financial burden or worry about their job.

The Miscarriage Association is urging employers across the UK to commit to their pregnancy loss standard to ensure employees going through what can be an incredibly traumatic time, get the support and time off they need.

The standard asks employers to understand and implement the rules around pregnancy related leave, create a supportive work environment, to have a policy or guidance in place to ensure line managers have access to resources to help them manage a difficult situation and to support people including partners back to work by showing flexibility wherever possible.

Committee therefore agrees that a report is brought to Corporate Services Committee outlining the standards advocated within the Miscarriage Association Pregnancy Loss Pledge already adopted by several Scottish Local Authorities and many organisations in the UK and that the report asks the Council to consider embedding these standards within Moray Council's employment policies.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to support the Notice of Motion as stated.

5. Written Questions **

The Committee noted that no written questions had been submitted.

6. Public Trust - Fife Park Pavilion Keith

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) invited the Committee to consider a proposal to demolish the changing pavilion in Fife Park, Keith.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:

- i. instruct the Property Asset manager to seek viable proposals from the community for suitable alternative uses for the Fife Park pavilion;
- ii. that in the event of a potentially viable proposal coming forward, to approve in principle, expenditure of up to £35,000 to undertake repairs, subject to final approval by this Committee of detailed proposals; and

- iii. that in the absence of any viable proposals coming forward within a period of 1 month of the opportunity being advertised, to proceed with the demolition of the changing pavilion in Fife Park, Keith for reasons of public safety.

7. Proposed Empty Property Relief Policy

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) sought authorisation from Elected Members for the implementation of an empty property relief policy for non-domestic properties following the devolution of responsibility for formulation of this policy to local authorities by the Scottish Government on 1 April 2023.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed:

- i. the Interim Empty Property Relief policy proposed in Appendix 1 to the report for one year (Financial Year 2023/24); and
- ii. that during 2023/24, officers undertake a reassessment as set out in the report to identify any changes which would incentivise ratepayers to bring unoccupied non-domestic properties back into use with a report back to Committee setting out revised proposals for 2024/25.

8. Charging for Services

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) asked the Committee to approve revised charges for Council services for 2023/24.

During discussion Councillor Robertson moved the recommendations with an addition to H3 Car Park Charges that charges are frozen for 2023/24. This was seconded by Councillor Dunbar.

Councillor Leadbitter sought clarification as to whether the charges were to be frozen for all of 2023/24 or for a specified period to allow for consultation.

In response Councillor Robertson agreed the charges be frozen for a period of 6 months to allow for consultation with stakeholders to take place and amended her motion accordingly.

In response the Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance) advised that 6 months would fall within recess, so officers would work to a timescale of just before or just after this.

Following further discussion Councillor Divers moved the recommendations with the amendment above and an additional recommendation that the 50p charge at A24 was not introduced. This was seconded by Councillor Ross.

Councillor Keith stated that planning application fees were a statutory charge but asked that a letter was written to COSLA and the Scottish Finance Secretary with regard to setting fees locally to help with the recoup of costs.

Councillor Robertson stated that she would change her motion to include the amendment by Councillor Divers and the request by Councillor Keith. This was agreed.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed to:

- i. approve the charges set out in appendix 1 of the report, with the following amendments:
 - a. H3 Car Park Charges – to be frozen for 6 months to allow consultation with all stakeholders and that a report be brought back on the outcome of the consultation thereafter;
 - b. A24 Post Office/Paypoint Charges – not to introduce a 50p charge.
- ii. write to COSLA and the Scottish Finance Secretary in relation to the setting of planning application fees locally; and
- iii. to grant delegated authority to officers to vary charges made for use of electricity to ensure the actual cost is recouped in the event of in-year increases in the cost of electricity.

9. Volunteering Policy Refresh

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education Communities and Organisational Development) informed the Committee of the need to review the current Volunteer Policy and sought approval of the refreshed Moray Council Volunteering Policy which recognises the different types of direct and indirect volunteering that the council engages with.

During consideration, Councillor Ross sought clarification as to why the Community Councils had not been included in the paper.

In response the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) explained that the scope of the policy had been focussed on co-ordination of volunteers, and how Moray Council engages with volunteers and volunteering. The Chief Executive added that Moray Council recognised the Community Councils and forums across Moray but this wasn't the focus of the report.

Councillor Macrae questioned why tsiMoray were featured so strongly.

In response, the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) advised that tsiMoray have a specific responsibility for the co-ordination of volunteers and linking them with third sector organisations, they also have a role in training and supporting volunteers.

Councillor Ross raised further concerns over there being no reference to the Community Councils and their role with volunteers within the paper and asked for it to be brought back to a future Committee.

In response the Chief Executive advised that if there was a lack of clarity then the report should be deferred.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed to defer the report so that there could be wider consultation, including with the Community Councils, to include the voice of volunteers and to broaden the reference in the policy to refer to key local partners and that a report come back to a future meeting of the committee.

10. Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2020-21 Results

A report by the Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development) presented the Committee with a corporate overview of benchmarking performance data for the period 2020-21.

During consideration Councillor Leadbitter sought clarification on the age of the data being used, as more recent data had been debated by the service committees.

In response the Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance advised that he recognised the limitations of the data which was due to the data collection methods used across Scotland which have a time lag before reporting, however, the report is also due to go before the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Leadbitter asked if it would be possible to make reference where this has already been reported to the service committees.

The Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance advised he would discuss the report content and format going forward with the Chief Executive.

Thereafter, the Committee agreed to note the Council's performance in terms of a corporate overview of benchmarking results.

11. Question Time ***

Under reference to paragraph 18 of the minute of the meeting of this Committee dated 8 November 2022, Councillor Keith gave an update on the status of the applications to the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund. The Lossiemouth 2-3 Group was successful in their bid and were awarded £270,000.

Councillor Cowe stated the money would be used to extend the facility in Lossiemouth and that it was very well deserved.

Under reference to paragraph 5 of the minute of the meeting of this Committee dated 8 November 2022, Councillor Fernandes sought an update on what work has been undertaken with regards to the Notice of Motion on call charges.

In response, the Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance advised that he did not have the information to hand but would update Councillor Fernandes and the Committee.