

Minutes of the Meeting of the General Services Committee held on 3 August 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Chair), Mark Coxshall, Fraser Massey, Bukky Okunade, James Halden (Substitute) (substitute for Shane Hebb), John Kent and Gary Byrne

Apologies: Councillor Shane Hebb

In attendance:
Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Anna Eastgate, Assistant Director of Lower Thames Crossing and Transport Infrastructure Projects
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager

Before the start of the meeting all present were advised that the meeting was being filmed and recorded.

40. Minutes

The Minutes of the General Services Committee held on 16 March 2020 were approved as a correct record.

41. Items of Urgent Business

There were not items of urgent business.

42. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

43. Lower Thames Crossing Supplementary Consultation Response

The Chair opened the item by giving a general summary of the proposals:

- Presence of raised noise barriers (which went against the Council's previously raised concerns about the level of the road on the landscape),
- Landscaping and ecological issues (the Chair noted there were some improvements but they did not go far enough)
- There was a proposal to move the existing traveller site.

- Changes to footpaths removing a connection between Stifford Clays Road and Long Lane which reduces connectivity.
- There are significant utilities diversions and a large working area for the development which still cause concern.

Cllr Coxshall felt that significant alterations had been made to the LTC proposal and this had in effect taken the project back to an earlier stage of development. The Council's response was right to point out that the changes were significant and previous Council input on issues had been ignored. Cllr Coxshall also felt Highways England's (HE) approach to the moving of the traveller site had been poor and they had not engaged with the community and he congratulated council officers for their work in resolving this issue.

Cllr Kent stated that the crossing would damage communities and would not improve the local road network but cause potentially further congestion. He believed the Council response was thorough and well worked.

Cllr Okunade raised the issue that many residents in her ward had received letters from HE and was causing anxiety within the community. Likewise, she felt that the health and equality impact assessments had not been properly shared by HE. The Assistant Director for the LTC replied that the health assessment would be delivered too late by HE and she further noted that the Council was concerned about the adequacy of the consultation given that HE's consultation was only virtual with residents. With regards to the letters residents had received, the Assistant Director explained that many households were historically part of larger title deeds on land and this was the reason they were being contacted. Approximately 27 properties would be compulsory purchased and compensation would be available for other affected households.

Cllr Massey felt the moving of the traveller site was a positive outcome but not much else and transport modelling had not been resolved and this was disappointing as the Council had clearly recommended this as a useful exercise.

Resolved That:

- 1. The Committee maintains its objection in principle to the Lower Thames Crossing in Thurrock.**
- 2. The Committee agrees the consultation response set out in appendix A (Local Authority Response) for submission to Highways England by 12 August 2020.**
- 3. The Committee agrees to delegate authority to the Chief Executive and Director of Place, in consultation with group leaders, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Chair of the LTC Task Force to make any final minor changes to the consultation response in Appendix A which may arise during the consideration of the consultation response by General Services Committee and the LTC Task Force.**

4. The Committee agrees to delegate authority to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance, Governance and Property, in consultation with the Portfolio holder for Regeneration to finalise the consultation response in relation to the Council's land holdings affected by the LTC scheme.

44. Lower Thames Crossing Task Force

Cllr Coxshall, as Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, introduced the report stating that as of September there would be little opportunity for the public to influence the course of the LTC scheme and it would be important for the Council to speak as one voice and it seemed appropriate that the General Services Committee (GSC), as the senior cross party executive committee, would be best placed to do this. He added that rigorous and probing meetings would be needed with HE and GSC was the committee to do this. He further explained that GSC could also create ad hoc working groups to look at specific issues and report back to the committee on its findings.

Cllr Byrne wondered whether the Task Force and GSC could work in tandem but Cllr Coxshall felt that there was a requirement to hold high level negotiations with HE after September and it was crucial there was one representative body from the Council. Cllr Coxshall stated he was happy to amend the recommendations to reflect that the Task Force would not disband until the submission had been made, which allowed the Task Force to continue at present.

Cllr Halden felt the amendment was a good one but stressed the Council must speak with one strong voice and felt GSC could put into effect decisions immediately in response to the LTC scheme whereas the Task Force had no such power.

Cllr Massey felt it important that the public had a voice in this issue and if the Task Force was to be disbanded there had to be a mechanism by which the public were kept informed.

Cllr Kent did not feel the report gave enough justification for the disbanding of the Task Force and pointed out a number of the roles of it from the Terms of Reference which could still legitimately continue after September including receiving updates on the progress of the scheme and reporting to other executive committees any findings it has made during its work. Cllr Kent continued to state that public involvement had been vital in bringing residents along with the Council and the unannounced nature of this report was discourteous to the public and the Task Force. He felt that both the GSC and Task Force could exist alongside each other and pointed out there was no detail on further working groups that GSC could establish in the report.

Cllr Halden responded by highlighting that GSC was more politically and geographically balanced than any other council committee and for the forthcoming discussions the Council needed a powerful and high level

committee to speak with one voice. He added that the public could be invited to the meetings to make comment.

Cllr Coxshall welcomed this debate and highlighted this was an open and democratic way to put the proposal to disband the Task Force forward. He reiterated that he was happy for the Task Force to continue until submission was made.

Cllr Okunade queried whether he co-opted members on the Task Force could be asked their opinion and also whether officer time would be retained after the submission had been made. Cllr Coxshall responded that officer time would be kept but the expenditure on this and on possible legal counsel could only be made at GSC and therefore it was important GSC took the lead on the project from now on. He added that the Task Force had done a great job but it was elected Members who had been elected to spend public money and it was right and proper they were responsible for those decisions and not co-opted members.

The Chair clarified amendments to the recommendations which were accepted by Cllr Coxshall as the mover of the report. Recommendation 1.1 would be amended to read:

“that the General Services Committee agrees in accordance with the terms of reference of the LTC Task Force that it be disbanded upon the submission of the Highways England Development Consent Order”

The Committee voted 3 in favour to 4 against this recommendation with Cllr Kent’s vote recorded against.

A further recommendation relating to the intent to establish working groups to support the work of the GSC subsequently was not moved due to the loss of recommendation 1.1.

Resolved:

That the Committee notes and thanks the members of the LTC Task Force for their work past and present for their contribution to shaping the proposals and consultation responses.

The meeting finished at 7.06 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**