

Full Council 22nd July 2021 – Questions from Councillors under Standing Order 30 and responses from relevant Committee Chairs

1. Question from Councillor Cooper

Under Item 5 of the S&R Meeting on 6th July, it was stated that the Committee would get a verbal update on the Northgate migration project. In fact, we were handed a paper at the start of the meeting. The paper was dated 2nd July 2021. Could I have an explanation as to why this paper was not circulated to Members prior to the meeting?

Response from Councillor Bourne (Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee)

The briefing note was provided by the officers concerned to support the verbal explanation, so Members didn't have to retain all the information being shared at the meeting and get distracted by making their own notes. The officers were asked to come back to the committee with a verbal update. They wrote the briefing note to be helpful on the night and I thank them for doing so.

2. Question from Councillor Cooper

Under Item 2 of the S&R Meeting on 6 July, concerning Minute 19 of the S&R meeting held on the 8th June, it was stated that "Information about the original budget for the NPS project was also sought." This was not provided either outside of the meeting and a request for that information was not fully provided at the meeting. It was eventually ascertained that the capital budget for the project had increased from £162K to £210K (an increase of over 29%, costing TDC an extra £47K) and it was explained that this was due to slippage. Could we now be given the original project estimate for the resources to be used on the migration project, the original completion date and the revised resource estimate to complete this project by the revised later date of 1st October.

Response from Councillor Bourne (Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee)

I did request in the committee review meeting that the information be provided to you but it seems it was overlooked. As has been explained to you on prior occasions, including by Mr. Devonshire at the June S&R meeting and by myself subsequently, the slippage in the project is down to resources being required for Covid related work. We cannot be without a Revenues & Benefits system so, under emergency powers during the Covid related shutdown, a decision was taken by officers to extend the Capita licence, so incurring the additional costs. In June, we were asked to ratify the decision our senior officers took, and we did so – unanimously I believe.

This is one of those occasions where Covid really is to blame, hence much of the increased costs being covered by central government Covid grants. Answering your question specifically:

The original project estimate is in the S&R papers from January 2020 which, if I'm not mistaken was when you were Vice Chair. It was also confirmed to you at the July meeting. It was £162K.

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The original completion date is in Mr. Devonshire's report from June ... it was March 2021.

The revised completion date is not 1st October as you state. The intended go-live date for the Northgate system is Monday, 4th October which is probably what you are referring to. However, the Capita system remains in place until 31st October. Therefore, the completion date for the first phase is 31st October. I want to make that clear now so we're not asking again in October.

You have mentioned yourself two of the three elements of the revised cost ... £162K plus £47K. There is a third element you have missed which is £32K for the additional data cut required because of the extension time for the project. This too was in Mr. Devonshire's report in June (paragraph 26). The additional data cut is required to take account of the six month extension time so, once again, is directly attributable to the Covid related resource issue on the project.

First supplementary question from Councillor Cooper

What was the original resource estimate for the Northgate migration project and what is the revised corresponding estimate?

Response from Councillor Bourne

The resource comes from within the budget which was £162K originally and is now £241K. I continue to be assured by the project team that the project is on track and, therefore, the resources are currently suitable for getting it done.

Second supplementary question from Councillor Cooper

What are the actual resource requirements in terms of staff time (both internal and external) provided for within the capital budget?

Response from Councillor Bourne

The staffing resource comes from the original capital budget of £162K. Within that are the number of hours officers are spending on the project.

3. Question from Councillor Cooper

Under Item 11, Appendix A 1st action, of the S&R Meeting on 6 July, TDC was to "Produce a Council greenhouse gas emissions report to ensure we are effectively measuring and managing our emissions." Given that the reason for doing this was clearly stated "effectively measuring and managing our emissions" it seems somewhat premature to be worrying about EV charging points when home heating is both a far greater issue for emissions and especially when TDC have direct responsibility for far more houses than we have vehicles. When will this report be available to Members to review?

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Response from Councillor Bourne (Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee)

Nothing about acting on climate change is premature. I would imagine many victims of the recent unprecedented floods, record high temperatures and other weather pattern disruption around the world are probably wishing all countries acted a lot sooner. But money talks louder, as do the voices of climate change deniers sometimes. So, we need to look at all aspects of our emissions and look to cut them wherever we can.

The reason for pursuing EV chargepoints relates to the potential for us to deliver chargepoints at very little capital cost due to the government grants and other third party investors. It is also a key part of national policy, not to mention supporting our residents and visitors with the transition to EVs – which should help to reduce wider emissions in Tandridge.

With respect to our Council owned residential houses, Will Mace has been working on this with our Lead Community Surveyor. A report went to the Housing Committee in March of this year on the scope for replacing gas boilers with low carbon heating systems in Council owned properties. Will has also been working with the Greater South East Energy Hub regarding the potential to use Government funding to retrofit some of our Council homes. With so many complexities across 2,600 very different properties, there remains no definitive date for completing the options appraisal and reporting back to committee at this time – but be assured work is on-going.

First supplementary question from Councillor Cooper

We are still awaiting that report. It would be good to know what the work is attempting to address and what impact it will have. When will we see the report?

Response from Councillor Bourne

The officers doing the work don't know yet.

Second supplementary question from Councillor Cooper

This project formed part of the original statement for tackling climate change. When will we see the report?

The Chairman ruled that a response to this question had already been given.

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4. Question from Councillor Dennis

Further to the Planning Policy Committee minutes (page 56 of the Council book, item 48) the position statement issued this week to the Planning Inspector gives a revised delivery date for the M25 Junction 6 transport modelling study of w/c 9th August.

This report will inform the Council's decisions over the future of the Local Plan. Therefore, Members will need adequate time to consider the study before it is sent to the Inspector. Bearing in mind it was originally due in May, can we be assured that any further delays will be advised promptly to Members and that, once received, there will be officer and consultant resources available to answer any questions on what is likely to be a technically detailed but crucial document?

Response from Councillor Sayer (Chair of the Planning Policy Committee)

I completely agree with the content of your question and have asked for a commitment from the management team that the points in it will be actioned. The Chief Executive has confirmed this afternoon that they will be. That, of course, would need to include having DHA Transport Planning available to answer any questions.