HULL AND GOOLE PORT HEALTH AUTHORITY

9th December 2020

(Council Chamber, the Guildhall, Kingston upon Hull)

PRESENT: -

Councillors Brady (Chair), Vickers (Deputy Chair), Briggs, Chambers, Chaytor, Fareham and Pantelakis.

IN ATTENDANCE: -

Laurence Dettman (Chief Port Health Inspector), Annemarie Hamil (Chief Administrative Officer), Alison Gill (Senior Finance Officer, Hull City Council) and Louise Hawkins (Democratic Services Officer, Hull City Council).

APOLOGIES: -

Councillor Coultish.

| Minute **No.** | Business |
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| 1756 | **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**  No declarations of interest were made in respect of the items that follow below. |
| 1757 | **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1ST OCTOBER, 2020**  **Agreed** - That, the minutes of the meeting of this Authority, held on 1st October, 2020, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and correctly recorded and be signed by the Chair. |
| 1758 | **REVENUE ESTIMATES 2021-2022**  The Chief Port Health Inspector and the Senior Finance Officer submitted a report which detailed the proposed revenue estimates and planned use of reserves for the Hull and Goole Port Health Authority for 2021-22 and proposed levy requirement from the constituent authorities. The report also shows the revised position compared to the original estimate for the current financial year which ends on 31 March 2021.  The Senior Finance Officer explained that the revised position for 2020-21 includes the new proposed staffing structure and £537,659 in government funding for EU Transition. DEFRA have stated that the funding can be carried forward into the next financial year if necessary. The on-costs for 2020-21 were fairly substantial and the income has not been as expected.  The Chief Port Health Inspector explained that 2020 had been a very challenging year. However, it was expected that the Authority would not experience any severe financial difficulties. The proposed Border Control Post fees were not yet confirmed.  The Senior Finance Officer explained that the estimates for 21-22 have been difficult to forecast due the level of uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. DEFRA have confirmed that any shortfall in anticipated imported food revenue during 2021-2022 would be adequately covered. There are still many unknowns in relation to the next financial year and a significant amount of additional work has been undertaken in producing the revenue estimates for 2021-22.  The levies charged to each Local Authority are based on the amount of work carried out. The extent of the additional work to be carried out at Killingholme is not yet known and this could require a future review of the levies.  **Agreed –**   1. That members approve the revised estimates for 2021-22; 2. That the levies required from the constituent authorities be approved, and 3. That a quarterly review of the financial position is submitted to the Board. |
| 1759 | **EU TRANSITION & UK BORDER READINESS STRATEGY**  The Chief Port Health Inspector submitted a report to inform and update  the Board on progress made in preparation for new EU food import checks to be phased-in from 1 January 2021.  The Board were informed that –   1. The position had evolved slowly and more information about the transition was now known. However, there was still a level of uncertainty. 2. The Authority submitted an original bid to DEFRA for £226,347. However, following additional information becoming available, DEFRA had agreed that the required funding had been underestimated, so the figures have been carefully reviewed and the final allocation was agreed at £537,659. 3. It had been acknowledged that the recruitment of qualified officers would be difficult. There was a small pool of individuals with the relevant skills and experience. 4. The planning applications for the new border control posts at Hull and Killingholme have been submitted. They will be substantial structures and cannot be built until the government funding is approved. 5. The Authority will need to apply flexibility to the proposed staffing structure as there is a possibility that not all the professional posts will be filled. However, the proposed structure provides a framework. There will be a need to train individuals within a very short timescale. The UK Port Health Authorities, as a group, have expressed concern in relation to the recruitment of suitable staff. 6. The proposed staff structure would double the size of the organisation and phased interviews would take place at the Authority’s offices or online. 7. The new checks would be phased in from 1 January 2021 until 1 July 2021. It had been confirmed that until July goods would not be held at ports and could be checked retrospectively. This arrangement has followed intense lobbying from UK Port Health Authorities. There are concerns about vehicles queueing at ports and that perishable goods being transported could deteriorate. The full checks would commence from 1 July 2021 and the two new border control posts would need to be ready by that date.   The Board raised the following matters –   1. Whether there was a contingency plan in place if the border control posts were not ready by 1 July 2021? The Chief Port Health Inspector had raised this issue with DEFRA, which are looking at contingency planning, however they had not yet shared any plans with the Port Health Authorities. There is now more optimism that the facilities would be ready by the deadline. 2. Whether other port health authorities had received the same level of funding as this one? The Chief Port Health Inspector explained that ports were very different, and each port had its own individual issues, against which they had submitted their funding bids. The roll-on-roll off ports such as ours had more acute issues than container only ports. The Hull and Goole Port Health Authority covered the largest geographical area outside of London and has its own distinct issues. 3. Whether it was possible to access staff working in the Fire and Rescue Services to cover the additional duties? The Chief Port Health Inspector explained that the Chief Fire Officer is the Chair of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and has been in regular contact. The LRF was aware of the issues and there has been an offer of support from partners. 4. Whether an EU/GB trade deal would impact on the Authority? The Chief Port Health Inspector explained that a trade deal would not have any impact on the new border control checks.   **Agreed -** that the Board note the contents of this report and approves the Chief Port Health Inspector’s strategy for recruitment and procurement highlighted in this report. |
| 1760 | **PROPOSED VARIATION OF POLICY FOR APPROVAL OF ADDITIONAL HOURS PAYMENTS**  The Chief Port Health Inspector submitted a report which informed the Board of a proposal for a solution to a current identified staffing problem during the coronavirus pandemic and EU Transition period.  The Board were informed that the Hull and Goole Port Health Authority consisted of a small team of staff who had been working additional hours during the coronavirus pandemic. The staff would usually take additional hours worked as lieu time; however, it had been difficult for staff to take the time off and lieu hours were building up. It was proposed that payments should be made for additional hours worked, instead of the accrual of lieu time which was unlikely to be taken.  The Chief Port Health Inspector took the opportunity to pay tribute to the staff who had worked extremely hard during what had been very challenging times.  The Board expressed support for the proposal. However, it did not want the payment of additional hours to become a permanent arrangement. The Chief Port Health Inspector explained that it was likely that the need for additional payments would decrease at the end of this financial year.  **Agreed –**   1. The Board supports the proposal to vary the Policy on Additional Hours Payments, and 2. That if the temporary arrangement is required after April 2021 a further proposal is submitted to the Board for consideration. |
| 1761 | **QUARTERLY REPORT AUGUST TO OCTOBER 2020**  The Chief Port Health Inspector submitted a report which detailed the quarterly summary of the Authority’s work in respect of inspections, notifications, and investigations undertaken during the period August to October 2020.  The Chief Port Health Inspector reported that the number of Covid-19 cases on board ships has increased significantly. The Authority has been working with Public Health England and local Directors of Public Health. There have been several difficult situations which staff have been required to deal with. The introduction of a vaccine would not resolve all the issues as the Authority dealt with foreign vessels and arrivals from around the world where the availability and roll-out of vaccines was different.  The Board was also informed that the number of stowaways on board vessels was increasing and often the health status of the individuals was unknown. The Border Control Officers sought advice from the Authority when dealing with stowaways.  A member of the Board queried whether a ship was fined if stowaways were found on board. The Chief Port Health Inspector confirmed that the captain of the vessel is liable to be fined if stowaways were found on board.  **Agreed –** that the report be noted. |