

MINUTES of the meeting of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd November 2010 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Pauline Tolson (Chair), Stephen Veryard, Mike Revell (substituting for Diane Revell; left at 9.25pm), Steve Liddiard, Mike Stone and Wendy Curtis (substituting for Sue Gray).

Apologies: Councillors Sue Gray and Diane Revell

In attendance: Councillor Val Morris-Cook – Portfolio Holder for Pride in Thurrock
L. Magill – Head of Public Protection
A. Murphy – Head of Environment
S. Clark – Head of Finance
M. Jones – Group Finance Officer
M. Boulter – Principal Democratic Services Officer

11. MINUTES

The minutes of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny meeting held on 21 September 2010 were approved as a correct record with an addition pertaining to PCSOs attending 65 community meetings in item 8.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

No interests were declared.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

13. PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2011/12

The Committee was informed about the corporate charging policy and how it aimed to make some services that charged a fee to become self financing. It was clarified that sex establishment licences and licences for street trading would be dealt with by the Licensing and Public Protection Committees. Nuisance Parking related to offences under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

14. BUDGET 2011/12 – PRIORITIES AND SAVINGS

The Head of Finance gave a brief introduction to the report setting out the requirements of the Council to save an estimated £15 million next municipal year.

SC14 – Grays Beach

A member of the public who was affected by the redundancy made in this proposal asked the Committee whether they could explore how the cook at Grays Beach was to cover the Assistant Manager role. Officers explained that a change in the menu at winter time would mean that the cook had more time in those months to undertake management duties. The Cook would be trained in aspects of the new role and following a re-evaluation of their role, there was a slim possibility they would receive an increased salary, although officers did not think this would happen.

The Committee explored the costs of keeping a part time member of staff employed throughout the year as opposed to an agency worker in the peak times and officers explained that this option would cost more money and the saving would not be made.

Officers clarified that there would be cover for the Cafe and Grays Beach area should there be sickness or holidays and that this would be resourced from the wider environment team.

Councillor Revell felt that a seasonal breakdown of the Beach's income would have helped the committee understand the demands and capacity of the service and wondered whether Gray's Beach had undergone profit maximisation. Some Members of the Committee felt that if Grays Beach was set up to generate more income, the redundancy would not need to take place.

The Portfolio Holder praised the work of the Assistant Manager and stated it was a difficult and unpleasant decision to release her.

RESOLVED: The Committee does not support this proposal, with the exception of Councillor Liddiard, as they feel it needs more work.

SC4- Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)

There was a brief discussion on whether Essex Police would fund the gap if the Council decided not to part fund PCSOs. It was responded that the Police were undergoing a similar savings measure and there was no guarantee that they would fund all or some of the PCSOs.

Councillor Liddiard stated he had spent time with one of the local inspectors who had said that he would be able to continue the work of PCSOs with only half the current compliment by employing those that were most enthusiastic and performed well. The Committee was also reminded that there were already vacancies in PCSO posts in Thurrock.

The Committee explored whether community protection officers would be able to undertake some of the PCSO role and officers stated this was possible if these officers were able to attend police training that provided them with the relevant powers. Councillor Veryard pointed out the community protection team was being reduced in a later proposal so there would be an added burden on those officers if this was undertaken.

RESOLVED: The Committee supports the proposal on the proviso that the Council stresses the importance of PCSOs and encourages Essex Police to continue funding PCSOs in line with their revised budgets.

SC15- Community Protection Team Shift Payments

The Committee suggested that it was looked into whether all teams within the Council were facing similar revisions in their terms and conditions and it was simply not just the Community Protection team. The Head of Finance stated that there was a review of terms and conditions underway.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal.

SC25- Reducing the Community Protection Team

Officers assured the Council that the reduction in one management and one administrative post would not affect frontline delivery of this service.

Following a question, the redundancy procedure was clarified whereby officers made redundant were first helped to find an alternative role in the Council. If they were not successful they would be paid a redundancy package, the cost of which would be funded through a proposed central government fund and/or spread across a period of some years for the Council to pay off.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal.

SC26- Thurrock Community Safety Partnership

All partners in the Partnership were being affected but officers were proposing to streamline the processes and support to the Partnership to save costs..

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal.

SC30- Drug and Alcohol Action Team

The size of the grant would not be known until December 2010. Following a question, officers stated that more than 10% could be taken out of the fund to cover costs but this would need to be accounted for and the Council would have to justify reasons to central government as to why they would need all that money to cover costs.

RESOLVED: The Committee notes the proposal as it is unable to make an informed decision without knowledge of whether the fund will be secured.

SC8- Reduction of Residual Waste Collection

The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that this change to collection would be introduced alongside and after a comprehensive communication strategy with residents. She hoped that all Members were supportive of the change.

There was discussion about large families that produced more residual waste than others and officers stated that there was a policy that allowed an extra bin for large families. It was added that many residents could recycle more and this change in collection would encourage them to do this. There was some disagreement over whether brown bins (garden waste) should be collected in winter time with views to support both sides of the argument being presented.

Issues regarding residents who refused to co-operate with bin collections would be mediated through community forums and other groups.

The Committee agreed that this change would take a long time to establish and was pleased to know that the Council recognised that a template for collection could not be applied to all areas in Thurrock as they all had different characteristics. Councillor Tolson added to this by stating that certain waste products would be unpleasant to keep in the bin for two weeks and therefore, the Council needed to think carefully how the change would affect all types of resident.

Councillor Revell thought that a breakdown of cost per household would help residents understand the cost they would be saving with fortnightly collections. He felt this would actually help residents understand and support the change. Officers agreed and stated that the current cost per household was around £70 per year.

The reduction of 9 to 12 staff was explained. The staff were agency workers and represented three crews. The reduction reflected the reduction in collection rounds. Councillor Revell highlighted that agency workers in this service tended to work full time for the Council.

RESOLVED: Councillors Curtis, Stone and Liddiard support the proposal. Councillors Revell, Veryard and Tolson note the proposal as they are uncertain of its beneficial impact to all residents.

SC9- Charging for Replacement Bins

Some Members of the Committee thought it would be hard to prove which residents had damaged or lost their bins by accident and which had intentionally done so. The Portfolio Holder defended the proposed system by stating that there had to be flexibility in the system to allow those who had genuinely lost or damaged their bins to receive a free one. There was a set procedure on how officers would clarify this with the resident.

Officers informed the Committee that the Council currently spent £100,000 on replacement bins so £50,000 was a reasonable estimate for income next year. The Committee was also assured that the cost of the bin would reflect market prices.

Following a question from the Chair, Officers hoped this new system would discourage the use of bins in allotments. The Portfolio Holder added that in an ideal world residents would be able to share bins but this was recognised as something not possible at present.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal with the exception of Councillor Revell, who wishes to note it.

SC10- Review Configuration of the Street Cleaning Service

The fundamental saving in this proposal was for street cleaners to exercise judgement as to whether a street needed to be cleaned, rather than cleaning it regardless because it was part of the round. It was highlighted that the redundant worker had already been re-deployed into another job.

Councillor Revell agreed with the Portfolio Holder's comments about residents taking their own responsibility for litter and recommended that all areas in Thurrock be encouraged to enter the Anglia in Bloom competition, which helped residents respect their areas more.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal.

SC11- Parks and Open Spaces Efficiency Measures

Areas for recreation would be maintained but trimming the edges of borders or trees would not be undertaken. This would promote biodiversity and save costs. Councillor Curtis stated that this could sometimes cause fire hazards. The Committee also recommended that a communication strategy was vital to ensure residents were informed about the change.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal with the exception of councillors Revell and Tolson who note it.

SC12- Commence Trade Waste Collection

It was clarified that businesses who did not pay the Council in a timely fashion would be subject to court action and there was the opportunity for the Council to further increase the debt due to this if the Members so wished. Officers added that there were legal duties on businesses to remove certain waste as well.

Councillor Revell did not think the Council had the relevant cash flow plan to provide a comprehensive service and felt the £5000 income figure was not assured.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal.

SC16- Increase Charges for Services

This related to an increase in charges above and beyond the 3% normally applied to the fees and charges this year. The proposal was to increase the charges a further 10%.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal with the exception of Councillor Revell who notes it.

SC17- Review Activities at Grays Beach Park

All high demand activities would be kept. Less popular activities such as go-karting would be stopped. Councillor Veryard asked whether the go-karting could be modernised to make it more of an attraction. Officers responded by saying that if a professional go-karting company approached them to supply the service they would be happy to do this. However, the Council did not have the funds to invest in this at present time.

RESOLVED: Councillors Curtis, Stone and Liddiard support the proposal. Councillors Revell, Veryard and Tolson note the proposal.

SC20- Suspension of St. Clements CA Site Operation

This proposal was being enacted already because of the financial situation currently facing the Council. Alternative uses for the site were being introduced with two staff members and an apprentice due to be employed for vehicle maintenance. The asset of the site had not been lost. Councillor Veryard informed officers to ensure they were allowed to undertake vehicle maintenance on the site if they were not using it as a depot because there may be laws to limit the activities there.

RESOLVED: The Committee supports the proposal though notes with regret the site will not be used. Councillors Tolson and Veryard note the proposal.

Councillor Revell leaves the meeting.

SC21- Re-configuration of Highway Maintenance

The proposal was to reduce the reliance on private contractors to undertake maintenance. The Council was currently able to undertake the same work at the same or cheaper cost to private companies.

This does not involve a contractual change to the Vertex Contract. However further options were being considered and this could involve contractual changes to the Vertex Contract and a subsequent financial penalty.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal.

SC24- Waste Treatment Contract

£70,000 of growth had been added to the waste project to pay for legal services for future contract work. This had now been removed and placed in a contingency budget although if it was found to be necessary to pay for specialist legal advice in the future, this money would be reclaimed.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal.

SC29- Outdoor Sports Service

This saving would involve the merging of two teams and reduce the need for one member of staff. The detail of the proposal was still being resolved as it involved two directorates.

RESOLVED: The Committee agrees and supports the proposal.

The meeting finished at 9.35pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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