

MINUTES of the meeting of Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 January 2013 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Garry Hague (Chair), Charles Curtis, Mike Stone (Substituting for Sue Gray), Tom Kelly and Richard Speight

Apologises Councillors Gerard Rice and Sue Gray

In attendance: David Bull – Director of Planning & Transportation
Andrew Millard - Head of Planning & Transportation
Steve Cox – Assistant Chief Executive
Matthew Essex – Head of Regeneration
Mike Jones – Management Accountant
David Freestone – Transportation Manager
Ian Rydings – Head of Asset Management
Kenna-Victoria Martin - Senior Democratic Officer
Councillor Gaywood – Portfolio Holder for Public Protection
Councillor Smith – Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Highways & Transportation

1 Minutes of the previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 06 November 2012, were approved as a correct record.

2 Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business; however the Chair informed all present that he wished to change the order of the agenda, so that Item 7 was to be taken first.

3 Declaration of Interest

a) Interests

No interests were declared.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

4 Budget 2013/2014 – 2014/2015 Savings and Capital Proposals

The Finance Officer introduced the report, which explained further budget proposals for 2013/2014, in addition to the proposals already seen by the Committee at the November meeting.

The Committee took each proposal in turn:

Restructure of Directorate

Officers explained that they were going through a restructure of the Directorate and they were hoping to make the total saving over the two years. It was further explained that the arrangements had been made for staff to take voluntary redundancy, rather than the need for compulsory redundancies.

The Committee agreed the proposal.

LDF Operating Budget Reduction

It was explained to Members that more work would be taken in house and more training would be given to employees to enable them to carry out the work.

The Committee agreed the proposal

Bus Subsidy Reduction

Officers explained to the Committee that this proposal was to use the budget on what was essential at the same time as providing a service. Officers further explained that it didn't mean that services were going to be stopped, however the frequency of a route could be looked into.

The Committee agreed that further details on the impacts of the budget reduction were required before this could be agreed by Members.

Community Transport Funding Reductions

Officers informed members that a small reduction in funding was needed this year however the service would still be provided.

The Committee agreed that further details on the impacts of the budget reduction were required before this could be agreed by Members.

Reduction in Regeneration Service

Officers explained that this was to remove the allocation for funding support to the National Skills Academy at High House. Officers further explained that they were not going to stop supporting the Academy, as this would be made with Officer time.

The Committee agreed the proposal

Reduction in Regeneration Service

Officers explained that this saving was to be achieved through the deletion of vacant posts and by transferring staffing costs from general funding to grant funding.

The Committee agreed the proposal

Introduce Low Energy Lighting

Officers explained that the saving looked at the possibility of low energy lights in the 18,000 street columns within the Borough.

The Committee agreed to note the proposal. Further work to be undertaken by Officers on feasibility and the business case.

Transfer Maintenance Responsibilities for A13 to Highways Agency

Officers explained that the saving was to transfer the maintenance responsibilities of the A13 to the Highways Agency.

The Committee agreed to note the proposal. Officers to look for opportunities to advance this with the Highways Agency recognising the potential upgrading of the A13 as part of the borough's broader regeneration strategy.

Members discussed the Capital Bids with officers and agreed to all of the proposals. During Members discussions the following points were raised:

- There would be lack of student parking with regards to the South Essex College within the Grays area,
- The Council was looking into and consulting residents in South Ockendon with the possibility of Free Parking Permits on the Flowers Estate,
- That the Council was to carry out a detailed verge review, as Members understood that parking within the Borough was difficult and wanted to find a solution for all areas with Thurrock.
- That a School Safety Working Group had been set up to look into the CCTV Enforcement Vehicle,
- That Officers had secured Funding through the Tiger Fund.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

Noted and reviewed the additional proposals for budget savings set out in Appendices 1 and 3 to the report; and

Noted and reviewed the capital bids set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

5 Grays Growth Hub and Regeneration

The Head of Regeneration introduced the report which updated Members on the work being carried out by the Council in Grays. Members were reminded that Grays was identified as one of five Growth Hubs, within the Council's Community Regeneration Strategy in February 2012.

Officers explained to the Committee that there were many projects being carried out in Grays and an example of these was the South Essex College, another was the Grays Magistrates Court. The Magistrates Court building had been transferred back to the Council following the termination of the lease. Members heard that the Magistrates Court had great potential, with a number of available uses for the site although some didn't have as great a return and other required that the building be removed and replaced. Officers informed Members that they were very reluctant to remove the building as it was a landmark at the top of the High street.

The Committee were informed that the Council had secured funding through the TIGER Fund which has a strand focussed on the creation of innovation centres, Members of the Committee informed Officers that they agreed with the option of business use for the former Magistrates Court as it was felt that a residential use was not something that Grays needed more of, as the town had already seen new developments this year.

Officers informed Members that Hogg Lane South in Gray was, currently occupied by the former Royal Mail Delivery Office and Grays Auto Centre. The site was acquired by the Development Corporation to facilitate the delivery of a proposed Community Hospital. It was further explained to Members that the Primary Care Trust (PCT) had confirmed to the Council that they believed that there was no longer an operational need for the Community Hospital.

The Committee were informed that there were many opportunities available for the use of the site, including commercial, office and residential although only residential was considered likely to generate a financial return to the Council. Officers told members that as yet no decision had been made on the possible use for the site.

It was questioned by Members whether it would be more advisable to leave the land until such time as the Council could potentially deliver a high profile use or determine whether there was another route available to secure a hospital. Officers replied to Members comments explaining that they could only make decisions based upon the information being provided to them from the PCT which indicated that a hospital was not required. Officers also told members that although it was a site with significant prominence, it was just one site within an area which was changing fast and would be expected to yield up other opportunities in the future.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

Acknowledged progress on projects being developed and delivered in Grays; and

Considered and commented upon the proposals for the reuse of the Hogg Lane South site and former Magistrates Court building to inform an anticipated report to Cabinet in February 2013.

6 Strategic Transportation Update

The Director of Planning & Transportation introduced the report to the Committee, informing Members consultation with the Department for Transport (DfT) will begin in May for the lower Thames Crossing.

Officers explained to Members that this report followed on from the report received at the November 2011 Committee and therefore provided a further update on the strategic transportation issues affecting the Borough.

The Committee were informed that the government were going to consultation between May and July with regards to the Thames Crossing and that proposals were attached, officers explained that a decision would be made in the autumn as to whether there will be a crossing and if so where it will be.

Members were notified that Officers were continuing to lobby the Government with regards to Junction 30/31, doing everything they could to make the Government bring it forward. However it was unclear as to what the Government would decide to do.

Officers explained that since the Thurrock Transport Strategy had been developed, there had been a significant number of changes surrounding the delivery of transport improvements in Thurrock. As a result, a refresh of the Strategy has been undertaken. Officers asked Members of the Committee to consider the recommendation attached to appendix 2 of the report.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

Noted the strategic transportation issues affecting the Borough together with the measures planned to tackle these,

Considered the refresh of the Thurrock Transport Strategy and endorse and recommend it to Cabinet.

7 Work Programme

The Committee discussed future items they wished to look at. The Chair informed the Committee that the Tilbury Ferry item for March had been deferred to the next municipal year.

RESOLVED:

That the following items be brought to the committee:

- **LDF Site Allocations and Core Strategy refresh (Include Lakeside) – First meeting of the municipal year,**
- **Local Highway Infrastructure – 06 March meeting,**
- **An update on DP World - 06 March meeting and;**
- **Tilbury Growth Hub – First meeting of the municipal year**

The meeting finished at 8.45pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Kenna-Victoria Martin, telephone (01375) 652403,
or alternatively e-mail kmartin@thurrock.gov.uk**