

Minutes of the meeting of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30 July 2014 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Sue Gray (Chair), Tom Kelly (Vice-Chair), Roy Jones, Martin Kerin, Gerard Rice and Simon Wootton

In attendance: Mrs A White – Member of Transvol
D. Bull –Director of Planning and Transportation
A. Osola – Head of Highways
M. Essex – Head of Regeneration
K. Martin – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 4 March 2014, were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business, however the Chair informed Members that one question from a member of the public had been received in relation to Item 5 'Budget Update and Savings Proposals' and advised that the question would be taken directly before the agenda item to which it was related.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no such declarations.

4. Budget Update and Savings Proposals

At the request of the Chair, Mrs Anne White, a Member of Transvol presented her question to the Committee, which was as follows:

"My name is Anne White and I am a local disabled resident who has lived in Thurrock for over 50 years. I have been a member of TRANSVOL since 1994. We understand that the Council has very little money; however taking all of the budget given to TRANSVOL will have a massive impact on the most vulnerable people in the Thurrock community. TRANSVOL do fifteen thousand door to door trips per year.

We have had our budget cut over the years from three hundred thousand pounds to currently one hundred thousand pounds. The service now spends two hundred thousand pounds per year. In other words, we add another pound of service for each pound the Council spends – so you get double your money's worth. Most people who use TRANSVOL cannot use the free bus pass you provide due to their impairment or even afford the limited accessible taxis. They use TRANSVOL to get shopping, visit doctors or to have a social life.

How do you justify such a harsh decision to take our service away and its negative effect on the wellbeing of your vulnerable citizens?

The Chair thanked Mrs White for her attendance at the Committee and provided the following response which had been provided by officers:

The Council recognises how important mobility is to the quality of life of Thurrock's disabled residents. In recent years, there have been changes in the way government provides support for disabled people, which has focussed more on individual choices and less on dedicated transport subsidies.

In view of these changes, Thurrock Council realised last year that the time would come when pressure on the Transportation and Highways budget would require a review of the grant to Transvol and began discussions as to how alternative ways of funding the Service could be explored.

In allocating the 2014/15 grant funding, the Director of Planning and Transportation wrote to Transvol, saying that, given shrinking budgets, grant funding was secure for 2014/15 but may not be available for 2015/16. Similar services across the country have succeeded in finding ways of operating without total reliance on local authority grants.

Transport Officers have offered to support Transvol in exploring options for following a similar path and it is hoped that arrangements could be in place by April 2015.

Mrs White then presented her supplementary question to the Committee which was:

“Have you thought about the impact on everyone; there is a greater need and support for these people. Not everyone gets mobility allowance or can use the free bus pass.

Have you looked at the impact?”

The Director of Planning and Transportation provided a response, explaining that it was up to him as Director for this department to propose suggested savings; it was the responsibility of the Members to make the final decisions. He continued to inform those present that different areas and communities impacted had been looked at and the impacts would be considered within the

decision. Officers explained that there were services that were statutory which by law are saved first then Officers had to look at funding and grants after.

It was suggested and agreed by the Committee to suspend standing orders, to enable Members to have an open discussion with members and users of Transvol, the following points were raised:

- That should funding to Transvol be cut, then the people who use it will become isolated within their own homes,
- There are no taxis on the taxi rank at Lakeside shopping centre which were equipped for disabled passengers,
- That by cutting funding to Transvol would make a change to its members lifestyles
- Transvol provided two return trips a week

Officers informed the Committee and members of Transvol that Thurrock Council had to find £37.7million worth of savings over the next three years, Transvol currently received £97,000 in funding from the council. The Director of Planning and Transportation continued to explain that he had written to Transvol and had informed them of the savings which needed to be achieved. The Committee were advised that there were other community transport charities around the country who did not receive funding from their local Council.

All Members of the Committee agreed that a Task and Finish Group be established to look at community transport. Senior Officers then provided a detailed introduction to the report which outlined the significant reductions in the money received from the Government and other pressures on services as the Council was required to make £37.7million of savings over the next three financial years.

The Director of Planning and Transportation notified the Committee that staff of the Council had currently been offered voluntary redundancy and that it was inevitable that there would also be compulsory redundancies made to assist with making the savings needed.

Members were informed by the Head of Regeneration, that there were statutory and non-statutory functions. With statutory functions largely protected, greater pressure would need to be applied to non-statutory functions to meet the savings. He continued to explain that the majority, although not all, of the functions undertaken within the Chief Executives Delivery Unit (CEDU) were non-statutory and the £700,000 reduction in funding to the Department reflected a significant cut in General Fund support. Within this the Regeneration Service accounted for £500,000 of the savings target.

The Committee queried as to whether it was possible to use section 106 monies to support Transvol, Officers responded to Members queries

explaining that Transvol was an independent charity, who had expert help and made all of the day to day decisions themselves. The Director of Planning and Transportation further explained that through writing to the charity two years ago, he had pre-warned them that saving proposals were a possibility. Members were notified that Section 106 monies had to relate to mitigating the impacts of the particular development that they were generated from.

Members were updated that implementing low energy lighting around the borough was moving forward and that income was being generated by the Planning and Transportation directorate selling and sharing services with neighbouring authorities.

It was enquired by some Members of the Committee, what was meant by selling and sharing services. Senior Officers explained that in some areas the Council had excellent systems in place whereas neighbouring Councils needed support, therefore officers were going to these Councils to help develop good practice and that through providing that support they were generating an income.

The Committee questioned as to whether there was a risk of making Lakeside Shopping Centre more attractive to the detriment of Grays should car parking charges within the borough be raised as suggested within appendix 2c. The Head of Regeneration clarified to Members that recent work within Grays, including the development of the new College, was to differentiate the roles of Grays and Lakeside and avoid competition between the two. Whilst the perception remained that there was not enough car parking places available within Grays and that the cost of the available parking was high, the Council's own research had found that there was a surfeit of parking spaces and that the car parking charges were below those of neighbouring authorities.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the comments detailed above with regard to the savings proposals within Planning & Transportation and Regeneration be noted.**
- 2. That a Task and Finish Group be established to examine Community Transport.**
- 3. That an update report on parking within Grays be taken back to Committee at a later date.**

5. Local Highways Infrastructure (including public transport)

The Director of Planning and Transportation introduced the report to Members explain that the vice-chair of Committee last year requested that a report be brought back to the Committee in relation to public transport and bus subsidies.

Members were notified that Officers were planning to invite Members of the Committee to be involved in a Local Government Association Strategic review of Highways Maintenance within Thurrock.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Committee supports ongoing work to improve value for money in relation to local highways infrastructure maintenance and support for local bus services.**
- 2. That the Committee agrees to participate in the stakeholder activities which will be organised during the autumn to agree a way forward on how we make the best use of the resources we have for the benefit of communities in Thurrock.**

6. SELEP Single Local Growth Fund Update

The Head of Regeneration introduced the report and explained that Thurrock was within the South East Local Economic Partnership (SELEP); the second largest LEP in the country which spanned East Sussex, Kent, Essex, Medway, Southend and Thurrock. Officers had been working hard to get the needs of Thurrock heard across this area in developing the SELEP Strategic Economic Plan which is the mechanism through which Government funding in support of Regeneration, Economic Development, Highways and Housing would be secured. Members were notified that Thurrock had been particularly successful in securing funding allocations in support of the widening of the A13, local cycle improvements and the creation of a public transport hub at Stanford-le-Hope to secure greater access to London Gateway. In total Thurrock's share of the £442 million funding allocated to SELEP was £92.5million, which equated to nearly 25% of all of the new funding (as opposed to those which had previously been awarded), awarded to SELEP.

In addition to the Borough's own projects, officers had taken a leading role in developing and presenting the Thames Gateway South Essex case which had also secured impressive £63.3m allocations for a range of projects including capacity enhancements to the A127 and transport investment in Basildon and Southend. It was noted that, given existing travel to work patterns, this investment was likely to have a benefit to Thurrock's residents as well as those within the neighbouring authorities.

The Committee queried the £5million allocation for the development of the A13 widening. Officers explained that the Council was given funding of £1million to complete the plan, £5million to develop the scheme and then, depending on discussions on the Lower Thames Crossing, the Council would receive the remaining £75 million to deliver the scheme.

Members congratulated the Director and his team for their hard work and the fantastic income they were bring into the Council, which demonstrated different ways of working.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report and welcome the success that Thurrock has had in attracting Government funding as part of the Growth Deal.

The Chair proposed to suspend standing ordering this was agreed by all Members.

7. Purfleet Regeneration Update

Members of the Committee were shown a short video on the Purfleet Centre Regeneration project. Following the video the Head of Regeneration took the Committee through a presentation on the project, explaining that the Council owned 55% of the land required to complete the project.

It was further explained that the idea for the project was to redevelop the of 140acre site to provide a 500,000sqft film, television and media complex and up to 2,500 new homes within a new town centre featuring a primary school, GP surgery, supermarket and retail/leisure facilities.

The Committee were informed that, following a three stage procurement exercise, Cabinet had selected Purfleet Centre Regeneration Limited as the Council's Development Partner in March 2014. Since then officers had been working with the developer to develop the detail of the proposals on from the initial bidding stage. Members were informed that the media complex would be the first purpose built studios developed in the UK for 50 years and, once complete, would boast some of the best facilities in Europe capable of hosting the largest productions in the world. The housing offer was expected to be mixed with different housing types being used in different areas. Overall it was expected that 60% of the 2,500 new homes would be houses.

Officers reported to Members that it was possible to be on site as early as next year with the school and Studio to be open in 2017.

Members enquired as to whether the Council had the money or the investors to be able to complete the project. The Head of Regeneration replied to Members questions explaining that the developers were procured for their skill and experience in attracting and securing the necessary investment to deliver the scheme and that it is not the Council's role to secure the funding itself although it is working in partnership with the developer. There are currently a number of positive discussions underway with potential funders and an announcement is expected in the coming months.

Members enquired as to whether the scheme presented was likely to be delivered or whether the developer could make their own changes. The Head of Regeneration explained that, under the terms of an agreement between the

Council and the developer, the Council had to be consulted on all amendments to the proposals and that in most cases the Council's specific approval would be required to any changes

Following further questions from Members it was identified that the primary school would ultimately have be three form entry and Education colleagues had confirmed that there was no requirement for secondary provision in the area as there is sufficient capacity in existing schools.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee welcome the progress made on the Purfleet Centre regeneration project.

8. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme for the municipal year and the following reports were agreed:

- Review on Planning Standard – 17 September 2014
- Report on funding from the European Union and other non UK Government streams

The meeting finished at 9.50pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**